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AND SAN DIEGO STATE UNIVERSITY

Squatting Historic Urban Landscapes:
Analyzing Discourse and Lived Experiences of Informal Housing in Bucharest

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
in Geography

by

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ABSTRACT

Squatting Historic Urban Landscapes:
Analyzing Discourse and Lived Experiences of Informal Housing in Bucharest
by
Jasmine Andreea Arpagian

Squatting is often interpreted as a housing practice that promotes physical decay and jeopardizes public order and safety. Existing literature about squatting in Europe is primarily focused on cases that are politically and ideologically motivated. Understudied research areas include the associations between discourse and lived experiences of these precarious housing arrangements, squatting and physical deterioration of urban historic landscapes, and squatters and neighborhood social cohesion. This dissertation further interrogates these associations by first providing an analysis of the narrative about squatting that is dominant in the public policy domain and popular opinion. The discursive context of squatting in the public policy domain shapes urban and housing policies. I challenge this dominant discourse by collecting personal accounts regarding lived experiences of squatting, thematically analyzing these qualitative data, comparing these realities to official census data, and systematically assessing observable signs of physical decay and prevention of social disorder using Google Street View images. This dissertation contributes to emerging scholarship by exploring multiple dimensions of housing insecurity, potentially positive impact of squatting on historic urban landscapes, and squatters' social relations. Findings show that squatting is a complex social process that is transformed by popular opinion and public policy discourse into an "urban problem" with negative impacts on historic landscapes and neighborhood cohesion. For some of Bucharest's socioeconomically disadvantaged and housing insecure families, the dominant discourse about squatting excludes

their voices and lived experiences from urban governance. This dissertation shares some of their experiences and perspectives about the practice of informal housing in Bucharest's historic center.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

A. *Problem Statement*

> For Bucharest, Old Town is like a postcard and the entry point for most tourists who visit the country... There are very many people who live on the streets, illegally occupy there… some of those streets are hotbeds of infection, squalor and there are uninhabitable homes in which people live. We need to give a new face to the city and to Old Town. It's a shame that for some 30 families, we have a negative image. (City Council Member; Minutes from August 2017 council meeting)

> Accessible housing must become a political priority. Otherwise, what we see today is just the beginning of the 'favelization' of Romania. (Housing rights activist in Ciobanu 2017)

"Thousands of empty houses and thousands of people living on the streets" is a motto by housing advocates that could represent the housing situation of the world's major cities. Residential vacancy and shortage of affordable housing usually occur simultaneously. An organic and spontaneous response to what seems to be a mismatch between supply and demand is informal occupation and continuous use of vacant buildings and land. Squatting is a complex social process with numerous variations. The practice occurs throughout urban space and at various extents – in city centers or peripheral areas and individual apartment units or entire neighborhoods; yet research generally focuses on urban peripheral neighborhoods that are informal settlements.

The discursive context of squatting – the way the practice is represented in discourse from, for instance, the popular media or public policy domain (e.g. city council meetings, government reports, and local ordinances) – shapes policy. Urban problems do not naturally exist; rather urban issues are socially constructed into problems. Therefore, just like any social issue, discourse transforms informality and squatting into social problems. Whether the practice of squatting is represented as either an urban problem – as the city council

member's quote demonstrates – or a response to other existing social and political problems, dominant narratives determine policy decisions and the urgency of government action. However, local council debates and policies do not always consider the city's socially marginalized households, such as squatters experiencing housing insecurity. As the opening quote from the housing rights advocate demonstrates, Romania's federal and local governments do not prioritize effective and equitable construction and allocation of social housing. To better understand why the housing needs of these families are not met, it is necessary to more fully comprehend the narrative about squatting that is dominant in the public policy domain and popular opinion; therefore, this dissertation adopts a discursive perspective and an analytic frame that interrogates a series of spatial and textual landscapes and ethnographies.

The research area of insecure housing – around the world and specifically in Romania – has received increasing attention as populations everywhere are urbanizing and many cities are struggling to meet the growing demand for housing. However, there are some salient gaps in the literature, including the common ways squatting is represented in financial reports, public policy documents, and newspaper articles (Fraser 2020). For research about squatting in Europe, the literature is mostly about political squatters. Research regarding squatting in Romania focus on informal settlements in the outskirts of major cities. Missing is field research that generates detailed qualitative analysis about household characteristics of inner-city squatters and the impact of squatting on neighborhood conditions (PACT Foundation 2018), or more specifically related to physical decay and social order.

In the dominant discourse, squatting is oftentimes represented as an urban problem in terms of disorder – referring to both physical decay and social disorder – as well as a lack of

public safety. The main goal of the research reported in this dissertation is to confront and challenge the dominant representation with squatters' personal accounts and lived experiences. This exercise contributes to a dearth in the existing literature about squatting in general, but also regarding the role of squatters in performing informal control to prevent vandalism and physical destruction (Herbert 2018; De Biasi 2019). Also largely missing from the literature are studies about the social relations of squatters, especially those who choose this housing alternative for economic (deprivation-based) rather than political reasons and who are not refugees or asylum seekers. In academic discourse, literature exists about Bucharest's inner-city squatters; however, the studies are centered upon events of eviction and housing insecurity usually solely described by processes of displacement and dispossession. Although the ever-present threat of eviction is an important aspect of the practice, it is not the only one that requires investigation.

This dissertation's primary and secondary objectives refer to representations and lived experiences of squatting. More specifically, one of the objectives of this research aims to further our understanding of household and housing characteristics of occupants, their experiences and perspectives, and motivations to squat. Even though housing insecurity is interpreted as a function of tenure status, this project contributes to scholarship that explores the nuances, complexities, and the multidimensionality of housing insecurity. A second objective is to explore the impact of squatting on the physical deterioration of urban historic landscapes. This study aims to broaden our knowledge of the relationship between squatting and the physical decay of neighborhoods. The type of informal housing examined in this study is unique because the study focuses on the practice of squatting or informally occupying (without formal documentation) abandoned and blighted buildings that are

officially recognized as historic monuments and located in central Bucharest (see Figure 1). A third objective is to describe occupants' social relations and embeddedness in their neighborhood.

Figure 1: Building officially classified as historic monument and deconstructed after remaining vacant. Data Source: Google Street View.

Ultimately, the primary goal of this dissertation is direct attention to alternative representations of squatting that, perhaps if part of the dominant public policy discourse, could contribute to local governance that more thoroughly considers the needs of Bucharest's housing insecure families. Martinez (2019) reviews some of the rhetoric and narratives that provide alternatives to hegemonic characterization of squatters (primarily politically motivated squatters in Western European cities). This dissertation contributes to emergent scholarship about alternative discourses related to deprivation-based squatting.

This introductory chapter begins with the review of relevant literature about the practice of informal housing conceptually, abroad, and in Romania, as well as property and housing within the post-socialist context. I then introduce the study's objectives and three

research questions, along with the methods used to address them. I close this chapter with an overview of the dissertation.

B. Literature Review

The literature reviewed here provides an overview of the scholarship about informal housing, both settlements and squatting individual buildings. Pertinent to this case study is knowledge regarding deprivation-based inner-city squatting and Bucharest's social, cultural, historical, and political context. Therefore, in addition to literature about informal housing, the next section provides an overview of Romania's post-socialist context and existing research about squatting in Bucharest and other major Romanian cities.

1. Informal housing and squatting

Traditionally, formal and informal housing sectors respectively represent planned or unplanned spaces, with informal housing (and other economic activities) normally interpreted as unregulated and unnormalized. While squatting and informal settlements have been characterized as a practice outside the reach of urban planning (Bhan 2013), the notion of formality – whether that pertains to formal labor or formal housing – is nonetheless socially constructed. These practices of normalizing a notion of formality are always active and consequently our understanding of formal is not fixed but dynamic and constantly reshaped. Therefore, informality has also been interpreted as a set of practices that negotiates or fixes values (McFarlane 2012), as well as a 'way of life' (Roy and AlSayyad 2004).

Researchers have identified several dichotomies related to the way squatting is practiced and perceived. The extant literature is synthesized here by considering two of these divisions: informal occupants as politically motivated or driven by material deprivation and

occupants represented as “good” versus “bad” in public policy discourse (see, for example, Bouillon 2013).

One way to synthesize extant literature about squatting is to consider the dichotomy focused on the motivation for squatting, which classifies informal occupation of space as driven by political ideology or material deprivation. The focus of squatting research, especially as it unfolds in Europe or ‘Northern’ countries (Aguilera 2016), is heavily placed on politically motivated informal occupation of buildings and the squatting movement (for example SqEK 2013 and Vasduvedan 2017). Even within this category, there is diversity. Squatted housing has been interpreted as entrepreneurial (Martinez 2016; Pruijt 2013); other scholars argue that political squatters establish a power to counter the state and the traditional governance of housing stock (Pruijt 2013). Squatted properties and land are also considered spaces of ‘occupancy urbanism’ (Benjamin 2008) that may lead to an ‘insurgent citizenship’ (Holston 2009). The practice of squatting properties in cities of developed countries has been interpreted as prospective urban social movements against neoliberal governance that offsets fair housing rights (Chatterton 2002; Pruijt 2003; Di Feliciantonio 2017).

Recognition of squatting’s internal diversity is uncommon in the public policy domain; nevertheless, there are examples. For instance, local authorities in Madrid identified squatted buildings and classified occupants as “‘social squatters’ (homeless people who occupy out of necessity or ‘deserving poor’), ‘ethnic squatters’ (Roma people), ‘foreign squatters’ (poor migrants) and ‘anti-systemic and 15M squatters’ (political squatters who help others to squat and organize social activities)” (Martinez 2019, p. 176). Despite some examples of local authorities’ nuanced understanding of squatting there is generally a homogenization of squatting in public policy discourse (Martinez 2019), in other words, a

disregard for different motivations, degrees of tenure security, and housing and household conditions.

Simultaneous with this homogenization of discourse, scholars have identified a polarization between "good" and "bad" squatters – referring to both politically and economically motivated squatting – that appears in public policy discourse (Bouillon 2013; Dee 2013). For instance, in research and observations about neighborhood change and urban decay, squatting has oftentimes been cited as an example and indicator of disorder as well as a practice that attracts and leads to more disorder (Wilson and Kelling 1982; Skogan 1990; Immergluck and Smith 2006). On the other hand, ideologically driven informal occupants have been characterized as "good squatters" when they contribute to the neighborhood's urban renewal (Mayer 2013; Pruijt 2013). Despite the common characterization of squatters as purveyors of social disorder, the link between squatting and a neighborhood's social cohesion has been inadequately explored. To my knowledge, only two studies about squatting in American cities try to demonstrate that occupants contribute to their community's revitalization and reduced levels of disorder (Herbert 2018; De Biasi 2019). My dissertation contributes to this emerging scholarship offering alternative interpretations of squatting, neighborhood change, and urban disorder.

When defining and investigating squatting, it is imperative to understand the local context (Maestri 2018), because this context shows that a one-size-fits-all definition of the practice does not exist. Research has shown that squatting in economically developed "Northern" countries is different than in developing "Southern" countries (Aguilera and Smart 2016). Compared to the rest of the continent, squatting in Eastern and Central Europe's post-socialist space has been facilitated by legislation passed during the democratic

transition period, which prompted mass privatization of public housing and return of nationalized private property (PACT Foundation 2018). Another literature gap addressed by this dissertation is to provide another case study that emphasizes deprivation-based squatting, since most of the literature about squatting in Europe focuses on ideologically motivated occupation.

2. Bucharest's post-socialist context

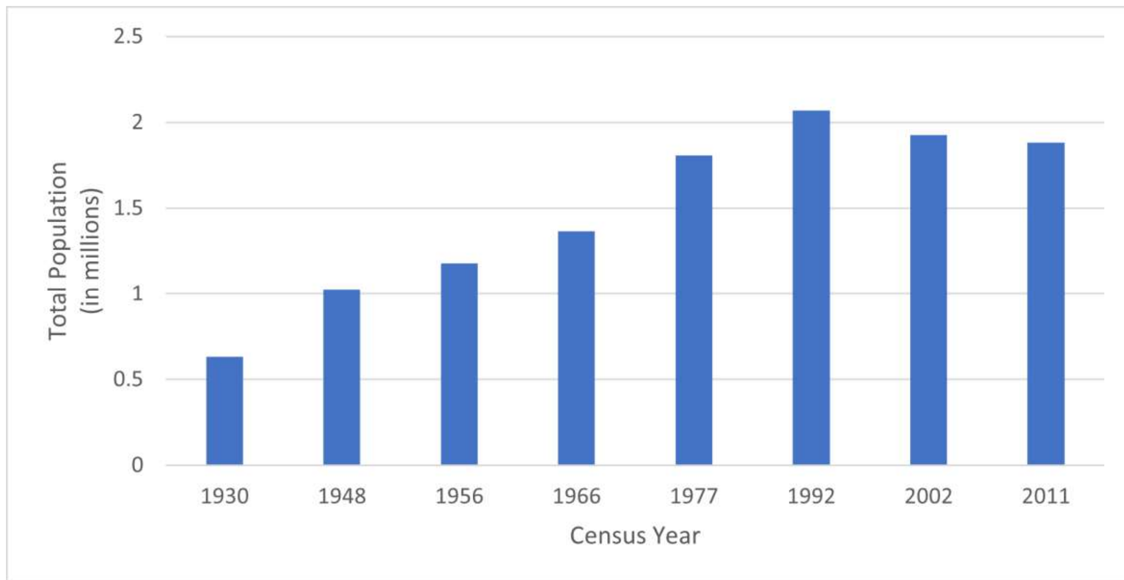
Housing scholars have argued that, along with housing characteristics, larger-scale and even place-specific characteristics – such as historical, political, and social factors – should be considered when trying to gain a more comprehensive understanding of housing insecurity. This recommendation underscores the apt positioning of the discipline of geography in housing studies. Socialist and post-socialist Romania's laws that determined the management of private property significantly influenced housing stock composition. Here, I describe this study's historical context in terms of housing and private property; I provide a breakdown of Romania's and Bucharest's housing stock based on tenure; and review existing literature about housing insecurity in these specific geographies.

a. Socialist housing policy

At the turn of the 20th century, Bucharest's residents numbered about 300,000 and lived in houses or two to three-level apartments. Despite the start of industrialization following World War I, Romania's economy was primarily agrarian. Therefore, Bucharest was surrounded by villages and rural areas in its immediate periphery. After World War II, the communist government initiated a program of rapid industrialization. Bucharest's municipal government started to annex these peripheral rural zones and expand its administrative boundaries. Attracted by new job opportunities, nearly 350,000 people

migrated to the capital city from 1950 to 1960 (UN Population Division 2014). This movement doubled Bucharest's 1950 population. The city had more than one million residents and a serious housing shortage (Chelcea 2012; see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Change in Bucharest's population size estimates (1930-2011). Data Source: Regional Statistical Division of Bucharest Municipality.



The regime of property rights was reconceptualized in 1945-1950 (Serban 2014). The new communist government privileged state and cooperative over private property (Verdery 2003). Socialist property was primarily established either through collectivization of agricultural land or confiscation of properties belonging to the "enemies of the people,' including political prisoners, wealthy landowners, and those considered war criminals" (Verdery 2003). The main legislative instrument that turned private property to state property was Decree 92, which was enacted in April 1950 (Stan 2006). This decree nationalized about a quarter of privately owned properties (120,000-140,000) in Romania and oftentimes these properties were in urban centers (Chelcea 2004, Serban 2014). Besides Decree 92, the communist government passed orders to expropriate properties that were either abandoned,

secondary to the owner's dwelling, or belonged to emigres. Romanians who emigrated legally were often compensated for their property, receiving at most a quarter of its value. Several former owners, sometimes successfully, contested the unilateral official decision to nationalize their property, while others did not even know their properties had been nationalized until requests for permits to sell their house were declined (Serban 2014).

By the 1950s, more than 20% of Bucharest's residences became state property (Chelcea 2012). The better houses were reserved for use by members of the government, communist party, and military (Stan 2006: "nomenklatura members, party apparatchiks and political police agents"; Serban 2014). Former owners were allowed to continue living in now nationalized houses, but their use was restricted to only one section of the house since new families were relocated into the rest of the property (Serban 2014). Both former owners and relocated families automatically became tenants of the state (Stan 2006).

To some extent, these nationalized properties also addressed Bucharest's housing shortage. The communist government did not construct apartments on a large enough scale until the 1970s. Therefore, before this time, nationalized homes, especially the less attractive properties, were used to house the new industrial workers moving into the city (Stan 2006). Managers of state enterprises (e.g. nationalized factories) typically submitted requests to the city's housing authority for their employee's housing allocation (Dan and Dan 2003).

Nationalization of private property helped reorder society and recreate a new privileged class, primarily composed of the state's bureaucrats. This change in social relations was recreated in the urban landscape. A considerable amount of residential space was converted into offices for this expanding bureaucracy. Former owners and aristocrats now occupied residential space characterized by overcrowding and social diversity. Multiple

families inhabited the same amount of residential space that was previously occupied by only one. In addition, households that lived in different areas of the city or were of different economic backgrounds now lived together in the same house (Chelcea 2012).

b. *Post-socialist housing and property*

Society and the urban landscape were rearranged once again after the December Revolution in 1989 and Romania's democratic transition. The post-socialist government started the process of (re)privatizing property. There were two types of privatization: 1) the privatization of property that was constructed by the socialist government, therefore property without former owners, and 2) the re-privatization of nationalized properties (Verdery 2003). The former policy of mass privatization led to many state tenants becoming owners of their apartment units at an affordable price. The latter process, also referred to by Verdery as 'the recreation of private property,' involved the restitution of ownership rights as retributive justice for the abusive confiscation of property (2003). This legal process is connected to the practice of squatting in central Bucharest because many of the informally occupied historic buildings were nationalized and restituted or in litigation pending a decision.

The first legal instrument to return nationalized properties was passed in 2001. More than a decade passed before Law 10/2001 was finally enacted to guide property restitution. Ideological positions and political stakes of various state agencies directly implicated in property restitution made policy negotiations slow and difficult (Stan 2006). To complicate matters, an earlier law passed in 1990 allowed tenants to purchase their units at prices far below market value, leading to the privatization of nearly 3 million residences (Stan 2006). Many of these properties were units in communist-constructed apartments; however, some were units in confiscated and nationalized homes. If properties could not be physically

returned – because they were legally sold to tenants or currently in public use – then owners would receive monetary reparations.

Although the process of returning property was finally established, municipal courts are now overwhelmed with pending restitution claims. The legal/judicial process is protracted, with claimants and occupants waiting years (sometimes more than ten) for a court decision. By 2012, there were 170,000 registered files for property restitution, with only nine percent of them resolved (Sultano 2012). In Bucharest, there are currently more than 42,000 restitution claims. Gabriela Firea, the municipality's mayor elected in June 2016 declared the quick resolution of all restitution cases a priority. According to Bucharest Municipality's website, in 2018, more than 24,000 cases were still unresolved.

As case files gather dust and former owners pass away waiting for a court decision, occupants – many of whom were once legal tenants of the city's housing authority – continue to live informally in these properties. Land tenure by former tenants was protected to some degree. Law 10/2001 requires reinstated owners to renew rental contracts for at least five years. Field observations during summer 2016 show that this provision is neither consistently practiced nor enforced.

Writing about nationalized properties in Bucharest, Liviu Chelcea explains property restitution as a "genealogical practice" for heirs (2003, 715), while Filippo Zerilli describes the process as a "sentimental drama" for both former owners and current occupants (2006, 77). Housing rights activists and scholars have argued that the process of property restitution is discriminatory, allowing municipal authorities to take actions that disfavor some of Bucharest's poorest families, who also happen to be Roma (Zamfirescu 2015). These studies, along with others that investigate evictions in Bucharest (Lancione 2017; Lancione 2019;

Florea et al. 2018), recount squatters' experiences of displacement and dispossession, but do not directly engage the other dimensions of informal housing arrangements (e.g. poor housing conditions, household characteristics, connections to the physical and social order). This dissertation aims to fill this gap.

3. Informal Housing in Romania

Although limited and insufficient in quantity, some research and data exist about informal housing in Romania. Suditu and Valceanu (2013) clarify the distinction between informal settlements and squatting. The former are defined as clusters of illegally occupied or constructed buildings, usually without basic infrastructure, such as paved roads, piped water, sanitation, and waste management (Tsenkova 2009; Suditu and Vâlceanu 2013). Nearly 64,000 families have been reported to live in informal settlements; more than 60,000 of these families belong to the Roma minority (PACT Foundation 2018). The majority of informal settlements (68%) are located in the periphery of cities and towns, while 19% are outside municipalities' administrative boundaries and only 9% within urban or town centers (I.N.C.D URBAN-INCERC 2013). On the other hand, squatting refers to illegal or informal use of buildings or land. Informal housing has been described to include illegal rental tenure (PACT Foundation 2018). For instance, this category of housing arrangements would include subletting of social housing units, which is not legally allowed. Each of these typologies of informal housing are characterized by insecure tenure – property owners could initiate a court-ordered eviction of occupants without providing any notice or alternate housing arrangements.

The emerging scholarship about informal settlements and squatting in Romania offers some case studies exploring the different typologies. For instance, researchers have

investigated Pata Rat, an informal settlement located near a recently closed landfill in Cluj-Napoca (Vincze 2013; Tonk, Adorjani & Lacatus 2014; Pata-Cluj 2015; Aitken and Arpagian 2018). In 2015, the community had about 300 families and 1500 individuals (Pata-Cluj 2015). Nearly half of the families settled there after three rounds of evictions and relocations (Rat 2012; Rat 2013). Some of these families were evicted from restituted properties, while others were displaced as a result of gentrification in the city center (Dohotaru 2013). Living conditions in Pata Rat are generally improvised, inconvenient and insalubrious. Tonk and her co-authors explain that half of the housing facilities are barracks assembled from plastic and timber (Tonk et al. 2014). Many households lack toilets while many others share; only 24% have electricity; 65% use a public tap as a water source; and 14% get water from a spring near the landfill (Tonk et al., 2014). Over a quarter of Pata Rat's working-age residents suffering from ill health or a disability (Tonk et al., 2014). Proximity to a large landfill contributes to these health problems, but so do unsanitary living conditions that are typical of informal settlements sheltering economically disadvantaged households. While Pata Rat represents an informal settlement, Livezilor Alley in Bucharest's Ferentari neighborhood is an example of a group of squatted buildings located outside the city center but within the municipality. These apartment buildings were constructed in the 1970s to house industrial workers (Berescu 2011). Today, these small studios or one-bedroom units are occupied by large families (leading to overcrowding) that frequently have improvised connections of running water and electricity or lack amenities (only 1 in 6 have natural gas or hot water) (Berescu 2011). Settlements and squatted buildings could be found within central areas or the peripheries of cities and towns across Romania.

Informal housing is influenced by Romania's socialist legacies and post-socialist context. One example is that the development of early settlements is related to the communist government's policy of forced sedentarization of Roma. Communities settled mostly randomly; however, the communist government did initiate a program to also register and map the recently settled population (PACT Foundation 2018). Another example refers to former tenants occupying state-owned properties. Historically, these tenants were living in multi-story buildings constructed by the socialist government or historic buildings constructed in the late 19th or early 20th century and confiscated from private owners by the state (Chelcea and Pulay 2015). Nationalized properties were an important source of housing until the mid-1960s, when the socialist government accelerated its housing construction program, especially to accommodate workers migrating from rural areas. Following the end of socialism, the state had approximately 120,000 such tenants, who either affordably purchased their unit as a result of post-socialist privatization legislation, remained as state tenants (paying subsidized rent), remained as informal occupants (oftentimes not paying rent) after properties were returned to former owners, or were evicted by owners after the latter successfully reclaimed the property. This study focuses on the last two scenarios.

The existing research related to Bucharest's informal occupants of previously nationalized properties focus on their displacement and dispossession (Zamfirescu 2015; Vrăbiescu 2016; Lancione 2017; Florea, Gagyi, & Jacobsson 2018; Lancione 2019), which, albeit important and inherent, are not the only features of informal housing and insecurity. Research about inner-city informal housing emphasize race and capital as primary factors contributing to occupants' insecurity (Zamfirescu 2015; Lancione 2019). Eviction is interpreted as a technique used by governments to spatially and socially exclude Roma

(Vrăbiescu 2016). Households displaced from restituted properties receive support from non-governmental organizations advocating for housing justice (Lancione 2017; Florea, Gagyi, & Jacobsson 2018). A few studies have reviewed social infrastructure of former state tenants (Zamfirescu and Chelcea 2020) and social relations between property owners and tenants (Zerilli 2006). This dissertation contributes to emerging scholarship by exploring multiple dimensions of housing insecurity, potentially positive impact of squatting on historic urban landscapes, and squatters' social relations.

Broadly, this dissertation is aimed at addressing the dearth of research and data about informal housing in Romania. Researchers have been called upon to investigate the different aspects of housing insecurity (Micu 2009; Briciu 2014), to perform detailed analysis of this oftentimes "hidden phenomenon" through qualitative research and fieldwork (PACT Foundation 2018, p. 63), and, on a global scale, to contribute more case studies about squatting from different regions to facilitate international comparative research (Aguilera and Smart 2016). My project's findings help develop a fuller understanding of informal housing arrangements in Bucharest's historic center. References to this practice are largely missing from public policy discourse; the popular narrative about squatting homogenizes and simplifies the practice. In order to challenge the dominant narrative and reveal nuances and complexities of squatting, this dissertation is premised on three broad questions regarding discourse, lived realities, historic urban landscape, and neighborhood social cohesion.

C. Research questions and methodology

This dissertation investigates the following three research questions:

- How do the experiences and identities of informal occupants differ from how they are represented in dominant discourse in the public policy domain?

- How and to what extent do informal housing arrangements lead to the physical deterioration of occupied and neighboring historic structures?
- How and to what extent does informal housing impact a neighborhood's social cohesion?

This work challenges the dominant representation of Bucharest's inner-city squatting in public policy discourse through qualitative research merged with multiple data sets and analytical methods.

1. Grounded theory

Grounded theory is neither theory nor method, but an inductive research approach. It involves repeated collection, coding and categorization of qualitative data (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Knigge and Cope 2006). By iterating through these processes, researchers enable new themes to emerge. The "non-linear approach" of grounded theory, with involves several rounds of data collection and analysis, allows for "more robust inductive research" (Schuurman 2002, p. 258). The purpose of this exercise is to make sure that researchers' theorizations and thinking are grounded in everyday lives of lives and experiences of their research subjects. Due to this versatility, grounded theory is not only used to develop abstract theories but also to provide rich and nuanced descriptions about everyday situations.

2. Multiple methods

Triangulation is an approach to qualitative research that uses multiple methods and/or data sources to develop a more comprehensive understanding of a social phenomenon (Patton 1999). Triangulation tests the validity of ideas by comparing information from disparate sources (Carter 2014). This approach is also used in geographic research (Heasley 2003; Jiang 2003) to validate and corroborate results or generate new insights (Cope and Elwood 2009; Elwood 2010). The practice of triangulation enhances interpretation of the research

problem through the comparison of quantitative and qualitative data and results (Kwan and Ding 2008, Elwood 2010). Using multiple methods could result in a more holistic understanding (Sui and DeLyser 2012).

This research compares data and results from discourse analysis, thematic analysis of ethnographic data, neighborhood assessment using Google Street View images, as well as information gathered from census microdata. During my exploratory trip to Bucharest, I noticed a discrepancy between popular representations of squatters and lived experiences of squatting. This observation motivated my decision to perform an analysis of public policy discourse. Findings from this analysis are compared to results from ethnographic methods and neighborhood assessment to determine how they coincide. Detailed descriptions of the different data sets (e.g. discourse; 2011 Romanian Census microdata available through the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series, International project; and Google Street View images) as well as analytical methods (e.g. discourse analysis and systematic assessment of neighborhood disorder) are described in subsequent chapters. Since ethnographic data are used for research questions driving each of the three following chapters, methods to collect and analyze these qualitative data are described next.

3. Ethnographic methods

I spent eight months conducting field research in Bucharest, during Summer 2016, Summer 2018, and Fall 2018. My major types of data collection methods in the field were in-depth and semi-structured interviews, prolonged engagement with study participants (e.g. multiple casual home visits), and observations of squatters' interactions with local authorities. I interviewed and extensively interacted with 23 families squatting properties in Bucharest's historic center.

Interview respondents were recruited through snowball sampling (Atkinson and Flint 2001), while others were selected randomly. Leaders from one of Bucharest's local branches of the Pro-Europe Roma Party – the official political association representing Romania's Roma minority – helped identify some of this study's initial respondents. In some instances, respondents connected me with acquaintances who are also informally housed. In addition to snowball sampling, I also identified respondents during my walks in the historic center. For this random sampling, I used the city's publicly accessible online database of property rights litigation in order to determine if properties were previously nationalized. Some of my earlier conversations with respondents suggested that the historic center's squatted buildings are frequently those that were previously nationalized. For instance, one respondent explained that after her eviction, she embarked on Bucharest's streets looking for "vile nationalizate" (nationalized buildings; oftentimes in a state of moderate or advanced physical deterioration), in order to find vacant space to occupy. Another respondent, who received notice of a forthcoming eviction, asked if I knew of a nationalized building where she could stay informally. In short, I found some of my interview respondents by walking past nationalized buildings and introducing my project to individuals talking outside. This approach to participant recruitment did have a seasonal element. During the autumn months when daily temperatures were lower, there were fewer occupants spending time outside, on the sidewalk, talking to neighbors. Finally, I came across some families by learning from other respondents or housing activists about evictions that were in progress, visiting the address, and meeting evicted households.

Only individuals who explicitly explained that they are occupying their home without formal documentation were interviewed. The sample includes households who illegally

entered the property, were occupying rooms with the informal and only verbal authorization of the property owner or were initially formal and legal tenants but continued to occupy after their contracts were not renewed. Other types of informal housing, such as subleasing a room from a social housing tenant, are not directly part of this study, although they are regularly referenced during interviews, sometimes as previous accommodations.

The list of questions used for the semi-structured interviews included questions that echoed variables from the Romanian 2011 Census. Variables that influenced the interview questionnaire include ethnicity, employment status, education level, school attendance, literacy, amenities (e.g. electricity, water supply, sewage, fuel for cooking, fuel for heating, hot water, and heat), dwelling characteristics (e.g. number of rooms, kitchen, toilet, bath, wall material, year of building construction, age of building structure, number of stories, living area), and dwelling ownership. Interviews were also used to collect qualitative data regarding individual experiences and perceptions of informal housing. The following were some of the questions asked: *How long have you lived here?, In what way and how often do you maintain the squatted property?, What housing options do you have if you are evicted?, Has squatting helped you save money or meet the cost of living?, How and to what extent do you interact with your neighbors (both squatters, non-squatters, Romanians, and Roma)?, Do you feel safe in this neighborhood?* and *Has the neighborhood changed since you first moved here and how?* Given my fluency in the language, interviews were conducted in Romanian, and most were recorded unless the respondent did not provide consent. I later transcribed the recordings and translated the transcriptions into English.

Field notes from prolonged engagements and participant observations were digitized. Participant observations included being present during attempted evictions, visits to local

government agencies with occupants, and interactions with local welfare and housing authorities on behalf of occupants. Transcriptions and field notes were later thematically analyzed using NVivo (qualitative data analysis software) to assign codes and generate themes.

D. Overview of Dissertation

The dissertation is structured as three research explorations that build upon and inform each other. The following chapters address the research questions in order. The analysis presented in Chapter 2 draws upon existing scholarship about public policy discourse and housing insecurity, as well as general background information about Romania's and Bucharest's housing stock and policies. This study's larger objective is to identify discrepancies between lived realities of squatting and the way squatters are represented in popular media and public policy discourse. Chapter 2 offers a more nuanced exploration of housing insecurity in Bucharest. The study reported in Chapter 3 draws on literature about neighborhood change and focuses on the physical decay of squatted and vacant properties, as well as their neighboring structures. By combining thematic analysis of ethnographic data and a systematic assessment of visual signs of physical decay, this chapter's research explores the accuracy of the dominant perception that squatting is a destructive practice. Chapter 4 elaborates upon a paper co-authored with Dr. Stuart C. Aitken (Arpagian and Aitken 2018). This study is framed by the concept of social cohesion. Findings from discourse analysis suggest that squatting is predominantly perceived as a source of social disorder and a risk to public safety. The link between squatting and neighborhood social cohesion has received limited scholarly attention. This work challenges dominant discourse by showing how squatters are embedded in their local communities and

neighborhoods (not necessarily hidden and out of sight). Finally, Chapter 5 summarizes the key conclusions from the three parts of this research project and reviews the study's limitations, as well as its scholarly contributions and broader implications.

The larger purpose of this dissertation is to show that squatting is a complex social process that is transformed by popular opinion and public policy discourse into an "urban problem", which negatively impacts historic landscapes and neighborhood cohesion. Ultimately, dominant narratives determine public policy. For some of Bucharest's socioeconomically disadvantaged and housing insecure families, the dominant discourse about squatting excludes their voices and lived experiences from urban governance. This dissertation shares some of their experiences and perspectives, in order to produce an alternative public policy discourse about the practice of informal housing in Bucharest's historic center.

Chapter 2: The representations and lived experiences of squatters

A. Introduction

> "'House of Gypsy Music'. My thoughts were interrupted by shouting a bit further along the street, where there was a group of loud minors. Realizing I should leave, I inevitably had to pass by them. Noticing their attentive stares at my photo camera, I quickened my pace towards the intersection" (*Bucurestii Vechi si Noi* 2009).

This epigram is a succinct example of how squatters are predominantly represented in popular opinion and media. The full article is published in a frequently updated online portal about Bucharest's history, culture, and art. The characterization of squatters as gypsies occupying (and destroying) the city's history while also causing social disorder is dominant in public policy discourse. But how do these representations compare with the lived experiences of squatters?

Housing research has typically focused on policy relevance and therefore studies have been largely framed by positivist and realist epistemologies (Kemeny 1992, Clapham 2018). However, social constructionist and post-structuralist theoretical frameworks urge researchers to think more critically about how urban issues are transformed into urban problems and to problematize definitions that are usually taken for granted (Hastings 2000; Marston 2002; Jacobs et al 2003). In recent years, studies have analyzed various housing policies and relevant discourses. Housing scholars have argued that a discourse approach explains housing processes in relation to or as a function of social and linguistic practices (Hastings 2000). The study reported here contributes to this effort of critical engagement with housing issues by analyzing discourse about squatting to better understand how this practice becomes an urban problem in the public policy domain.

Socialist legacies and post-socialist politics influence Romania's high homeownership rate (Eurostat 2020), and commonality of informal arrangements especially in larger cities like Bucharest (World Bank 2015), and shrinking social housing sector (Rughinis 2004). Discourse and narratives around homeownership foster a sense of an unreal social unity that masks socioeconomic inequalities that characterize cities (Martinez 2019). Housing inequalities that existed during socialist times were exacerbated after the transition to democratic governance (Gentile and Marcinczak 2014). Today, there is a lack of urgency to construct new social housing and efficiently allocate existing vacant units, both throughout Romania (Rughinis 2004) and specifically in Bucharest (Zamfirescu 2015).

Housing insecurity is multidimensional (Routhier 2019), involving more than just tenure status but also physical housing conditions, and affordability. To fully understand housing insecurity, it is not enough to focus solely on housing characteristics. Household characteristics, along with housing characteristics, are important components of insecurity, especially since certain socioeconomic factors (e.g. employment and educational attainment) significantly impact access to housing (Rughinis 2004).

This chapter reviews the first of the set of three research questions: How do the experiences and identities of squatters differ from how they are framed in the dominant discourse? Three significant representations emerged from the discourse analysis – squatters as predominantly Roma, squatting as an urban problem, and squatting as the result and reflection of other social and political problems. Comparing this dominant narrative to ethnographic data shows that the former is a superficial representation of a complex and multifaceted social practice. To further highlight the general precarity of squatters, I compare housing and household characteristics of my respondents to those of Bucharest's Romanian

and Roma populations. As demonstrated in subsequent sections of this chapter, housing prices are not the only problem. Multiple social issues make it difficult for Bucharest's squatting households to afford formal housing. In addition, the discourse analysis reported here provides a foundation for the rest of the project. Each of the next two chapters (about physical decay/disorder and social cohesion/order) bring in relevant pieces of the dominant narrative about squatting that was uncovered by the discourse analysis reported in this chapter.

B. *Literature Review*

1. Housing and Housing Policy in Romania and Bucharest

Since this dissertation is about housing insecurity, it is important to briefly explore Romania's housing stock and relevant legislation. The legacy of socialist politics and government (discussed in Chapter 1) has shaped the country's current housing sector. Inequalities that existed, albeit less common, during socialism (Smith 1989), have worsened in the post-socialist period (Gentile and Marcinczak 2014). Today's homeownership rate, private rental sector, and social housing have all been influenced by the historic political context.

Romania has a high homeownership rate, in fact the highest in Europe, which is primarily an outcome of post-socialist politics. The homeownership rate in Romania is 96% (Eurostat 2020). In Bucharest, according to census data from 2011, 90% of households live in owner-occupied housing, while 6% rent and 4% occupy for free or are in other situations. This could be explained by a series of post-socialist legislations, such as the 1990 law that allowed state tenants to purchase their apartments for low prices (see Chapter 1 for more details). Mass privatizations also enhanced already existing inequalities; despite low prices,

not all tenants, especially Roma, were able to afford to take advantage of this legislation (Florea et al. 2018). Although nearly all of Romania's housing stock is privately owned, it is not entirely occupied. 86% of residential dwellings in Romania and 91% in Bucharest are inhabited. Oftentimes, these vacant residential units are informally rented, without registering the rental arrangement with the local housing authorities, in order to avoid taxes on the additional income. This is a common practice. Therefore, although the official figure for the rental sector is 3% of Romania's housing stock, perhaps more accurate estimates including informal arrangements are 7-15% nationwide and 15-20% in larger cities like Bucharest (World Bank 2015).

The informal private rental sector is not a uniquely recent and post-socialist phenomenon; private housing rentals were also arranged in East European socialist societies. At that time, renting for profit contradicted the official political ideology and was therefore considered semi-informal (Hegedus & Tosics 1998). Governments were aware of these informal housing practices, which were permitted because they were viewed as temporary supply solutions meeting a growing demand for housing due to state-sponsored industrialization and urbanization (Hegedus & Tosics 1998). Currently, the informal rental sector is still common in Europe's post-socialist countries (Lux et al. 2018).

The right to housing is recognized in Housing Law 114, which was enacted in 1996 and since then modified several times: "Free and unrestricted access to housing is a right belonging to each citizen". As a result, the law establishes mechanisms to help families secure affordable and decent housing, for example through programs that provide government subsidies. The public rental sector, which includes social housing, officially represents 2% of Romania's housing stock, according to estimates from the 2011 census

(World Bank 2015). The Housing Law defines social housing as housing with subsidized rent allocated to a person or family whose economic situation does not allow property ownership or rental in current market conditions (Law 114/1996, Art. 2, c). The law also indicates that administration of social housing is the responsibility of local city councils. It has been found that local councils do not effectively administer social housing for a number of reasons: the high cost of constructing new social housing buildings, the lack of specificities in the law regarding the conversion of publicly owned buildings into social housing and the lack of data and information regarding the existing social housing stock and tenants (Constantinescu and Dan 2005). Another important point is that there are different kinds of public housing; in other words, not all programs are for low income or socially vulnerable households that need housing assistance. Overall, post-socialist governments have invested far less in social housing construction than their predecessors and the share of social housing among new constructions has steadily decreased after 1989 (Dol and Haffner 2010; Turcu 2017). While households evicted from restituted properties are at times assisted with social housing allocations, unhoused and squatter individuals or families are not served by local authorities with the same urgency (Rughinis 2004). The municipality's solution to the latter's housing problems usually involves relocation to shelters in the periphery (Rughinis 2004), which compromises the social inclusion of Bucharest's poorest residents (O'Neill 2010), many of whom belong to the Roma ethnic minority.

2. Roma in Romania

In terms of population size, the Roma are the second largest minority (after Hungarians) in Romania. Official figures from the 2011 Census estimate that 3.1% of the Romanian population and 1.3% of Bucharest's population self-identify as Roma. However,

these percentages are underestimates. One reason is that for official purposes, members of this group frequently identify themselves as Romanian instead of Roma (Cretan and Turnock 2008). Overall, this minority ethnic group experiences multiple interrelated socioeconomic problems, such as poverty, school abandonment and low level of educational attainment, unemployment and housing insecurity (Micu 2009).

Insufficient training and education serve as major impediments to both entrance into the formal workforce and consequently social mobility and inclusion. Data from the 2011 Census indicate that one-fifth of Romania's Roma population do not have a formal education, while 25% of Roma are unable to read or write (Dinca and Luches 2018). Options to gain training outside the formal education system are limited. In general, Romania's national government and local municipalities do not have an extensive and well-developed system of programs that provide informal training for trade skills; as a result, young Roma who abandon school struggle to access decent formal employment (Dinca and Luches 2018).

The Roma have a long history of stigmatization and discrimination in Romania (Cretan and Powell 2018). Anti-Roma attitudes are evident in results for survey questions about perceptions, attitudes, and opinions about discrimination in Romania (see Table 1; Eurobarometer 2019). Romanian political figures and decision-makers are also involved in anti-Roma rhetoric, and this was especially common in the 1990s and early 2000s (Cretan and Powell 2018). For instance, one of Romania's former presidents was convicted for making racist statements. Despite EU's Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies and Romania's anti-discrimination legislation, Roma are still ostracized especially since despite these laws, specific actions that lead to measurable results are not required for public authorities (Roma Early Childhood Inclusion 2011). Roth and Toma argue that the Romanian

government's initiatives are ineffective with poor results and authorities have failed to sufficiently recognize the advantages of reducing inequalities between Roma and non-Roma (2014).

Table 1: Questions and results about anti-Roma discrimination from 2019 Eurobarometer Survey.

	Positive	Moderate	Negative
In your opinion, how do Romanian citizens feel about their children having Roma classmates?	45% comfortable	32% moderately comfortable	17% uncomfortable
Could society benefit from better integration of Roma?	60% agree	N/A	32% disagree
Are Romania's efforts to integrate Roma effective?	31% effective	29% moderately effective	24% not effective
Do you think discrimination against Roma is widespread in Romania?	60% widespread	N/A	35% rare

3. Housing Insecurity

Two common ways to conceptualize housing insecurity are by considering the likelihood to remain in one's home or the accessibility of new housing. In scientific literature, housing insecurity has different definitions, which frequently draw on designations used by governing bodies and statistical agencies. Different dimensions of insecurity include security of tenure, affordability, physical housing conditions, and overcrowding. These multiple dimensions of housing insecurity are usually investigated separately, even though these issues are oftentimes experienced simultaneously (Routhier 2019).

Security of housing tenure has been identified as one of the main issues related to housing insecurity. Earlier housing research has been characterized by the general trend of using the concept of tenure status as a descriptive category (Kemeny 1992). In contemporary housing research, tenure is also used as an explanatory variable but done so in an uncritical

way (Hulse 2008). Some housing researchers have taken a more critical approach to studying tenure and have shown that tenure status is dependent on cultural and historical contexts (references in Hulse 2008). The study reported in this chapter was informed by Hulse's recommendation that research about housing tenure should consider historical, cultural, and larger economic factors (2008).

Through the years, housing scholars have taken different stances on the connection between housing tenure, social relations, and economic status and insecurity. In terms of social relations, some scholars have argued that housing consumers share socioeconomic characteristics and interests based on their category of tenure (e.g. owners versus renters) (Saunders 1980). This position was debated by others (e.g. Gray 1982; Barlow & Duncan 1988) who argued that shared interests and characteristics of housing consumers are more likely a reflection of their social class based on positions in the labor market, rather than their tenure status. Barlow & Duncan (1988) recognized some substantive links between tenure and other variables, such as income; but were not convinced of a strong clear link between tenure and characteristics such as housing quality. Recent literature also investigates these associations. For instance, Szabo et al. (2017) shows that tenure status may have moderating effects on quality of life and feelings of loneliness. Similarly, Hulse & Mcpherson (2014) complicates simplified categories of tenure and linkages with economic status, by focusing research on a subset of households that rent and own property.

Substandard and unsafe housing conditions also factor into housing insecurity. For instance, in the United States and according to the American Housing Survey, poor housing conditions include the absence of basic amenities (e.g. running water, electricity, heating or flush toilet), extensive and unchecked structural weakness (e.g. outside or inside water leaks,

holes in floor, peeling paint), or presence of safety hazards such as exposed electrical wiring (Eggers & Moumen 2013). In this study, I include the degree of overcrowding as a housing condition. Just as the physical adequacy of housing, crowding is also measured in multiple ways: taking the number of people in a household per room or the surface area per person. Studies have shown that crowded conditions could have negative effects on adults' life-course leading to social stratification (Evans et al. 1998) and on children's wellbeing (Solari and Mare 2012).

Housing affordability is another dimension of housing security. Affordability has been measured in many ways, for instance rent to income ratio (Newman & Holupka 2014), residual income after rent payments (Kutty 2005), hardship to make payments (Pollack et al. 2010), and rent arrears (Burgard et al. 2012). The standard measurement for affordability is housing cost burden, or the fraction of household income that covers housing costs (Newman and Holupka 2014). In other words, housing burden is the idea that if housing represents a moderate or small percentage of household income, then housing is affordable for that household. However, this ratio does not necessarily accurately represent households' hardship to afford housing. To highlight this inconsistency, critics point to households with housing overburden (in terms of rent to income ratio) but also higher household incomes that allow them to comfortably cover all living expenses. The concept of housing-induced poverty helps address this inconsistency. Kutty (2005) introduces this concept and explains it as "the situation that arises when a household, after paying for housing, cannot afford the poverty basket of nonhousing goods" (p. 119). For my study, Kutty's measurement was not used to assess housing affordability, therefore specific calculations are beyond the scope of this review. However, significant is Kutty's observation that by using this measurement, we

find that households with low housing costs are still below nationally recognized poverty thresholds (2005, p. 119). This is important because it shows that studying the characteristics of housing or even the tenure of housing is not enough. Household characteristics, along with housing characteristics, should be more often considered in housing research. Stone (2006) asserts that "affordability is not a characteristic of housing – it is a relationship between housing and people" (p. 153). Criteria to determine affordability are instrumental components of housing policies; yet these criteria and the definition of affordability are socially constructed dynamic products of discourse.

4. Housing research and discourse analysis

Scholars traditionally studied issues related to housing using positivist and realist epistemologies, because these approaches have been considered more policy relevant (Clapham 2018). A few decades ago, prominent housing scholar Jim Kemeny called for more theoretical research that draws on different epistemologies, social theory, and methods from social sciences (1992). Since then, housing research has strengthened its conceptual and theoretical basis. Although it seems two distinct research currents have emerged – empirically driven studies with a focus on influencing policy and theoretically driven studies with a focus on developing concepts – Clapham (2017) argues that the latter could also be policy relevant. A critical policy-oriented research approach could challenge institutionalized knowledge by considering the variation in impact on different populations and communities (see Culhane 2008 for an example) or understand the origins of taken for granted policy-related narratives.

Discourse is defined by Gillian Rose as the "groups of statements which structure the way a thing is thought, and the way we act on the basis of that thinking. In other words,

discourse is a particular knowledge about the world which shapes how the world is understood and how things are done in it" (2001, p. 136). Discourse involves more than just language; it also includes technologies, institutions, and practices (Rose 2001; Creswell 2012). Ultimately, Creswell (2012) explains that Foucault's discourse theory is about understanding the origins of "truth" or how certain ideas or knowledges have the "effects of truth" (p. 211). Discourse produces knowledge objects (e.g. housing insecurity and informal housing) and subject positions (e.g. squatter) (Creswell 2012). For example, in Marston's research about social welfare programs, he highlights the importance of understanding what kind of subject positions or subjectivities are constructed because the way they are "culturally framed is a central component of text legitimation that can work to make 'reform' more palatable" (2002, p. 87). In other words, the subject position of a squatter that is constructed, represented, and understood by the public influences the policies that are enacted and the degree to which these policies are considered acceptable by constituents.

A discursive perspective allows us to understand how housing problems are socially constructed and constantly reconstructed (Batten 1999). Ultimately, similar to the social construction of environmental problems (Feindt and Oels 2005), the articulation of housing problems determines the policy responses that are enacted. Housing "problems" do not exist in nature the way they are described in policy documents (Marston 2002). Therefore, the discourse around housing, which includes the events or processes that might be considered problems, determines the housing issues deemed significant and urgent, how these issues are discussed by decision-makers, how these issues are communicated to the public, and to what extent these issues are addressed with policies. Through discourse analysis, Batten (1999) demonstrates how certain ideas and knowledges become orthodoxies. Middleton (2015) also

shows the power of discourse and rhetoric to change laws. In her example, the discourse in the UK's public policy realm about squatting was homogenized to represent the practice as an illegal action that takes advantage of the city's other residents who are law-abiding and hard-working (Middleton 2015). This rhetoric contributed to policies that further criminalized squatting in England.

Unlike most of the housing research based on positivism or realism and that focus on influencing policy, studies informed by social constructionism and that use discourse analysis could explore how certain housing issues started to be conceptualized as "problems" (Kemeny 1992; Hastings 2000). Recent scholarship started to address this gap in housing research (Darcy 2010, Ruming 2015, Gurran and Ruming 2016, Munroe 2018, Flanagan 2020). The study reported here contributes to this effort, by taking a social constructionist approach to explore how representations of squatters compare to their lived experiences of squatting. This is done by first gaining a better understanding of the dominant narrative about squatting in public policy discourse. If we allow ourselves to think optimistically, epistemologies and analyses that enable us to challenge institutionalized ideas (e.g. dominant representations of squatters) and offer alternative knowledges may facilitate more democratic urban governance and inclusive cities (Hastings 2000).

C. Methodology

To explore this chapter's research question, analysis of dominant representations of squatting in public policy discourse is combined with empirical data from interviews and participant observations. As Marston explained, research informed by social constructivist and post-structuralist epistemologies could engage empirical data (2002). He continues to say that "a focus on discourse opens up new empirical terrain within housing studies, demanding

that different kinds of written and verbal communications are analyzed" (2002, p. 133). Marston uses interview data to show how public housing was framed in economic language and local authorities were using primarily this discourse to make policies about public housing. For my study, I conducted discourse analysis of public policy related documents. I compared results from this analysis with lived experiences of housing insecurity. To better understand personal experiences and perspectives, I performed a thematic analysis of ethnographic data (discussed in Chapter 1) and collected summary statistics from census microdata to understand how my interview respondents compare with Bucharest's Romanian and Roma populations. This chapter's conclusions are informed by multiple data types and analytical methods. The following questions are explored. What is the popular narrative about squatters? How are squatters and squatting most represented in public policy discourses found in the domains of public policy? How are squatters different from Bucharest's Romanian and Roma residents?

1. Discourse Analysis

In this study, the discourse analyzed is linguistic in nature, including public policy texts, minutes from council meetings, and comments written by constituents and addressed to local authorities. For practical reasons, I concentrated on using city government documents in the public domain. The purpose of this analysis is to learn how informal housing, specifically squatting, is represented in official discussions and texts. How are squatters characterized in this discourse? What is the "taken for granted" knowledge about squatting?

To answer these questions, I analyzed official documents and communication by Bucharest's City Council (i.e. decisions and minutes from meetings). Bucharest's local government publishes all council decisions and meeting minutes on the municipality's

website. One complication is that these documents are stamped, scanned and then uploaded in PDF format. Ordinances are organized by their document identification numbers and meeting minutes are organized by date. This organizational structure makes it difficult for constituents to search the full set of ordinances and meeting minutes for specific key words representing certain topics. They would need to know the date a decision was made or discussion took place about the topic represented by those key words. Fortunately, an online search tool was developed by Uniunea Salvati Romania (USR; Union to Save Romania), a political organization that supports transparent governance. This tool downloads publicly available official documents from the municipality's website, converts these files to text format by using OCR (optical character recognition) software, indexes these text files using a local search and finally uploads these files to the hcl.usr.ro website.

My search for official discourse about squatting was recursive and iterative. I first searched USR's online collection of council decisions and meeting minutes by using the following keywords: "intrare abuzivă" (illegal entrance), "ocupă abuziv" (occupies illegally), "fără contract de inchiriere" (without a rental contract), and "stau abuziv" (stay illegally). During my fieldwork, public servants used this vocabulary to reference squatting. These terms and phrases refer to legal technicalities of squatting. After reviewing search results from these initial keywords, I expanded the set to include terms that were used within the discourse about squatting to describe the squatters: for example, "persoane fără adăpost" (person without shelter) and "fără acte de identitate" (without identity documents). The set was expanded a third time to include phrases used in the search results to describe the squatted properties: "case abandonate" (abandoned houses) and "case nelocuite" (unoccupied house). After searching the database for these 8 phrases and reading the search results, a total

of 38 texts appeared with clear references to squatting. This is not a large number, given that the practice seems rather common, especially in the 1990s and early 2000s. Among these references from public policy documents, only a few mention squatter's socioeconomic vulnerability and circumstances (Fraser 2020).

These texts include resolutions and ordinances passed by Bucharest's City Council as well as transcripts of the Council's monthly public meetings. Sector 3 had an online system for reporting neighborhood complaints in Bucharest's Sector 3. This online platform allows the public to view comments and responses; six comments were made about squatters. It is quite evident from this analysis that Bucharest's General City Council and Local Councils for the six sectors are aware that both privately and publicly owned buildings are squatted.

I performed discourse analysis by creating three code categories relevant for this research (i.e. squatters, squatted properties, and squatting and neighbors), familiarizing myself with the material to develop an initial set of codes, and finally coding the discursive material (see Table 2). I also closely considered and coded the nondiscursive contexts of these representations, such as Bucharest's contemporary politics about neighborhood change. I subsequently identified three key patterns among the recurring and significant codes (see Table 3 for excerpts from some discursive material). The majority of the discursive material represented the presence of squatters and squatting as an urban problem, and at times an urgent problem requiring investigation, inventory, and prevention strategies. There were a few references to squatters belonging to the Roma ethnicity and a few references that represent squatting as a result of other social problems.

Table 2: Categories of codes for discourse analysis and some of the recurring codes.

Code Categories		
Squatters	**Squatted property**	**Squatting & neighbors**
unhoused individuals	unsanitary	public safety
social welfare cases	degradation	social order
Roma/gypsy	abandoned	evictions

Table 3: Example quotes from city council meetings that represent key themes from discourse analysis.

Key Themes			
Urban Problem requiring prevention		**Roma squatters**	**Result of social/ political problems**
"Councilmember 1: We have to do something! This will be a hotbed of infection! Councilmember 2: It already is a hotbed of infection! Councilmember 1: But who let them stay over there? Councilmember 2: Someone! We don't know!"	"My 2nd question: what is the stage of the evictions of people who illegally occupy the commercial space from the Street George Georgescu Nr. 34 and how could similar situations be prevented, so these illegal occupations are not repeated in spaces that belong to the municipality?"	In an official list of city-owned vacant and unallocated units, some addresses are described as "illegally occupied by Roma."	"What I still don't understand from you is how you could sabotage social situation of residents of Sector 3… I live there, I am even their neighbors, they are on Streets --, --, and --, streets that you don't know. You are not familiar with these social welfare cases and you sabotage in continuation the possibility of giving shelter to people staying in the street."
"For Bucharest, Old Town is like a postcard and the entry point for most tourists who visit the country and create their first impression. There are very many people who live on the streets, illegally occupy there, some people with disabilities who beg... Because some of those streets are hotbeds of infection, squalor and there are uninhabitable homes in which people live. We need to free this area, to give a new face to the city and to Old Town. It's a shame that	"Has there been a census of those who stay in the historic district? How many have legal documents, how many stay illegally? Do you have this evidence? I do not support the proposal that the city buys housing in the private real estate market because we already have a lot of housing."	"I would like you to understand that these are inherited properties that are vacant, according to the law, they need to be taken into the City Hall's patrimony. Counsel General, if we don't take them, the gypsies will enter… others will enter in them and occupy illegally. Do you understand? So, we need to take them. I will reformulate, not gypsies, but lawbreakers."	"The property located on Street --- Nr. ---, constructed in 1897, which became the state's property based on the 1950 Decreet 92, is presently in the city's administration… the building is in an advanced state of degradation, all rental contracts for residential spaces have been terminated… Police confirmed that the building is illegally occupied, both by former tenants with rental contracts and others, documents for an

for 30 families we have a negative image.”			eviction process have been filed.”

2. Empirical data and analysis

I compared the key themes identified in the discourse about squatting to qualitative data and quantitative census microdata; the purpose of this exercise was to see the extent to which dominant narratives of squatting differed from personal accounts. Qualitative data about squatters' experiences and perspectives were collected through in-depth interviews and observations of attempted evictions and squatters' efforts to receive social assistance from the local government. Content analysis was performed on interview transcriptions and field notes – this process is explained further in Chapter 1. It is important to note that some of my interview questions mirrored those asked during Romania's official 2011 census. As a result, household and housing characteristics shared by my respondents are compared to statistics from census microdata.

The 2011 Romanian Census microdata is collected from the Minnesota Population Center's Integrated Public Use Microdata Series. The IPUMS sample microdata set that was used in this study represents the latest Romanian decennial census, which was conducted in 2011. The next census was scheduled for 2021 but postponed to 2022. I used IPUMS instead of census data published online by Romania's National Institute of Statistics because the latter is not consistently disaggregated by smaller-scale geographies (e.g. city) and variables relevant to this study (e.g. ethnicity and type of housing tenure). The IPUMS sample is representative of all microdata collected from Romania's 2011 census. The sample I selected is only for Bucharest; it represents 184,016 individuals and 77,048 households. In this sample, 2,290 individuals self-identified as Roma and 597 households have at least one

member self-identified as Roma. I compared descriptive statistics from census microdata to qualitative data from interviews to highlight the multidimensional precarity experienced by squatters and to show how their vulnerability compares to Bucharest's Romanian and Roma residents. I then juxtaposed personal accounts of housing insecurity and general precarity to the dominant representation of squatters found in public policy discourse.

D. Findings: Representations and lived experiences

During my field visits, it was quite visible that the squatters in my study are clearly vulnerable in terms of housing, for example experiencing sub-par and unsafe living conditions. However, the dominant narrative about squatters does not emphasize this; instead, there is a focus on illegal occupation of space, suspected destruction to historic monuments, anti-social behavior, and rent-free living. To explore the disconnect between discourse and lived experience, first I reviewed the three key themes identified during the discourse analysis: 1) squatters characterized as belonging to the Roma minority, 2) squatting interpreted as an urban problem, and 3) squatting interpreted as the result of other social problems. Each theme was reviewed in a separate sub-section. Squatters' socioeconomic vulnerability and multidimensional housing insecurity is rarely mentioned in the dominant narrative. Therefore, I then integrated ethnographic and census data with content from discourse analysis, to compare these partial knowledges. Ultimately, I argue here that squatting is not necessarily the urban problem, as the discourse represents it to be, but a result or manifestation of larger-scale social problems that are disproportionately experienced by Roma.

1. "Gypsy" Squatters

In public policy discourse, squatters are perceived to overwhelmingly be part of Bucharest's Roma ethnic minority. The keyword search for public policy documents returned a list of vacant city-owned properties in Bucharest's Sector 1. Some listed addresses are described as "illegally occupied by Roma." During a General City Council meeting in 2015, councilmembers were asked to vote on an ordinance that would transfer ownership of a vacant private property to the city. This debated property is currently neighboring a squatted property.

> I would like you to understand that these are inherited properties that are vacant, according to the law, they need to be taken into the city hall's patrimony. Counsel General, if we don't take them, the gypsies will enter… others will enter in them and occupy illegally. Do you understand? So, we need to take them. I will reformulate, not gypsies, but lawbreakers.

For some council members, there seems to be an inherent link between gypsies and ghettoes:

> Let us not speak anymore about ghettos, because you know what happened to the ghettoes during the war, right? With the deportations of the gypsies, right? Please! Let's speak about Zabrautului and other areas as social housing. It is the best way, a more elegant word, I beseech you all! Come on, let us not speak of ghettoization, because if we speak of ghettoization we speak of gypsies. Please.

At another address, this time in Bucharest's historic Jewish neighborhood, squatters were constantly reported to the local government. The following is an excerpt from one of many complaints filed online that report this building (referred to in this study as Street A Nr. 1) to the local authorities: "The property located on Street A at Nr.1 is occupied by gypsies, without legal documents, appears abandoned, hotbed of infection for occupants (rodents, insects, etc.)....". The complaint filer continues to describe these occupants' living conditions, which is further discussed in the next sub-section.

This perception that all squatters are Roma is repeated in my interviews with neighbors and casual conversations with Romanians. One Romanian explained that all his neighbors who happen to occupy informally are Roma:

> Yes, they are all Rom. All of them are Rom. Them, over here, they took their daughter in illegally. These rooms, because there are two rooms. Then, they split it among them. So the door that is between them...he is on the other side, over there. They've been living for a long time here. Over ten years, or more. Because AFI [city's housing department administering public property and social housing] didn't come, but you don't play around with these people. It's cold, they'll kick you out, they don't look that you have children.

Here, I have shared only a few exemplary instances of squatting perceived as fundamentally practiced by Roma. Among the 23 households interviewed for this study, only one family self-identified as Romanian, while 2 families were of mixed (Romanian and Roma) ethnicity and the other 20 self-identified as Roma. Therefore, these data collected during my fieldwork demonstrate that the majority of informal occupants, at least those occupying historic monuments in the city center, belong to the Roma ethnic minority. As discussed in the introductory chapter, respondents were primarily selected randomly and some with the snowball method; therefore, the occurrence of mainly Roma respondents was not intentional. Based on the breakdown of Bucharest's population by ethnicity, the Roma minority is overrepresented among my interview respondents. The 2011 Romanian Census recorded 3.1% of Romania's population as Roma and 1.27% of Bucharest's general population as Roma. This overrepresentation of Roma among squatters (compared to the share of Bucharest's residents that are Roma) may be explained by various socioeconomic inequalities experienced by Roma (Rughinis 2004), which is discussed later in this section.

2. Squatting as an urban problem

The first identified key theme suggests that in public policy discourse, squatting is primarily conceptualized as an urban problem. There are many references and suggestions to deteriorating properties, insalubrious conditions, anti-social behavior or social disorder, and poor overall neighborhood quality. There are discursive materials with accusations that squatters damage the city's image and produce social disorder. These two characterizations of squatters from public policy discourse will be reviewed here but compared to data from other sources in Chapters 3 and 4.

a. Squatting as a housing stock management problem

Local authorities find squatting, without considering the impact on neighbors and neighborhoods, problematic, especially in cases concerning city-owned housing. From a city management point of view, the practice of illegally entering and occupying units makes it difficult for the city to manage its social housing stock, which is already inadequately managed (Rughinis 2004). This complication is referenced in the discursive material. During a City Council meeting in 2011, constituents experiencing housing insecurity were present to make public comments. More specifically, these were individuals evicted from nationalized homes that were successfully reclaimed by former owners. One constituent explained that she was evicted in 2008 and was given a social housing allocation by the city's housing authority, but her assigned apartment was informally occupied by another household. As a result, her children illegally entered a vacant unit in the same building and after informally occupying this space for a few years, they were evicted once again. She asked the City Council to issue documents so her children could legally stay in the unit they informally entered. She asked for a formal rental contract so her children could legally stay in the unit

they informally entered. The outcome of her inquiry is not available in the minutes from subsequent meetings, the City Council did promise to consult the city's housing authority regarding her situation.

The practice of illegally entering vacant social housing units also came up during my interviews with squatting households. For instance, Alex explained that his family had illegally entered and occupied a property near Old Town that was nationalized and pending a court decision for restitution to the former owners. Once his family learned that the property was successfully reclaimed, they wanted to leave to avoid an unexpected eviction. An acquaintance living in a city-owned property in the same neighborhood notified Alex about one of his recently deceased neighbors and her newly vacant apartment. Alex's family relocated into that apartment without receiving an allocation for this space from the city's housing authority. Based on field conversations, the practice of illegally entering vacant social housing units is not uncommon. Mihaela who was also pressured by an approaching eviction, explained that she learned of a vacant social housing unit that she considers to enter and later ask the city's housing authorities for a contract to that space. Mihaela continued to explain that she knows several families who have successfully received a social housing contract in this way.

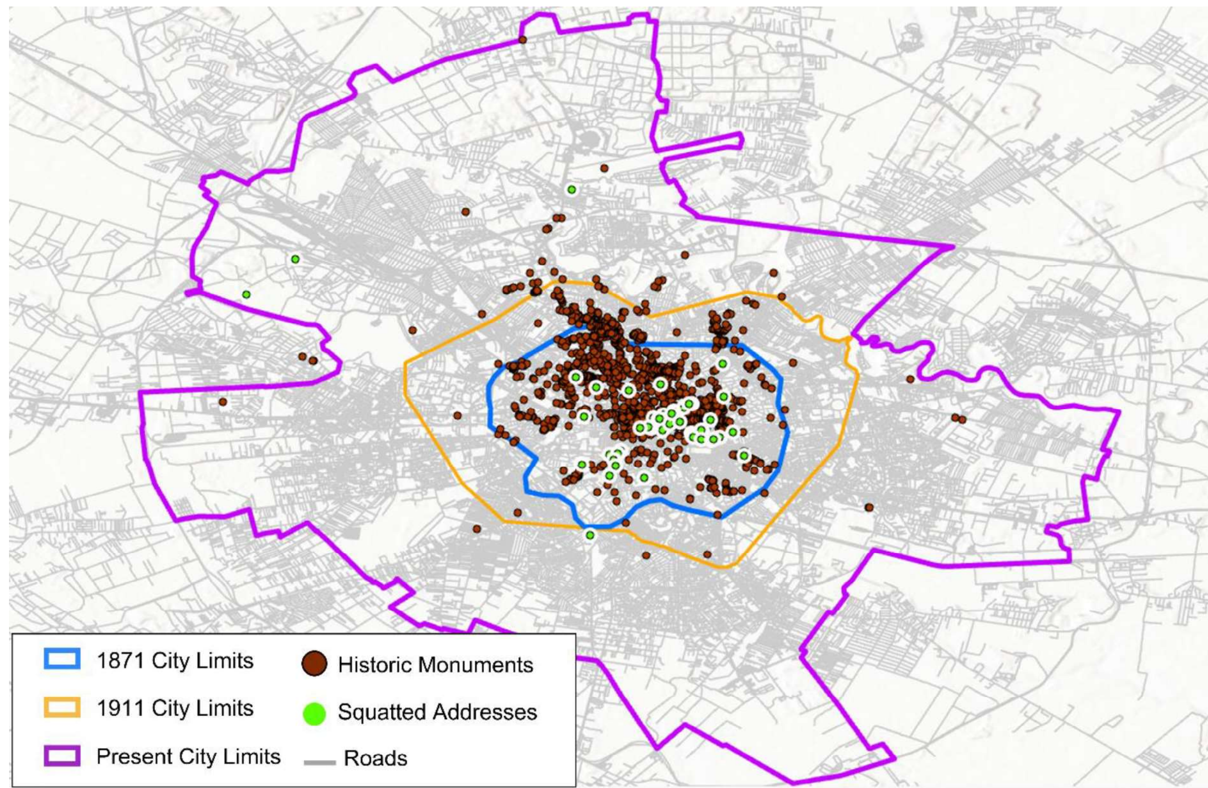
Perhaps as a result of such spontaneous and unregulated occupation of publicly owned housing (but not only for this reason, as discussed later), squatting is conceptualized in public policy discourse as an urban problem that requires investigation, inventory, and prevention strategies. During a debate about a proposal for the city to purchase housing in the private market, the following remark from a councilmember suggests that the city already has plenty of housing, but it is improperly managed: "Has there been a census of those who stay

in the historic district? How many have legal documents, how many stay illegally? Do you have this evidence? I do not support the proposal that the city buys housing in the free market because we already have a lot of housing." There also seems to be interest among councilmembers to think about strategies that could prevent squatting: "What is the stage of the evictions of people who illegally occupy the commercial space from the Street -- Nr. -- and how could similar situations be prevented, so these illegal occupations are not repeated in spaces that belong to the municipality?"

b. Damaging the city's architectural heritage

One third of this study's buildings that were squatted during my fieldwork or before are historic monuments. The vast majority of the buildings are located in the center of Bucharest, within the historic limits of the city (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Location of squatted properties relative to historic monuments and city limits. Data: addresses of historic monuments from Primaria Generala Bucuresti, openstreetmap.org, ESRI ArcGIS Pro.



During Bucharest's General City Council meetings, squatting has been blamed for the destruction of historic monuments and staining the city's image. For instance, one councilmember made the following statement arguing that squatters living in the historic district stain the city's image:

> For Bucharest, Old Town is like a postcard and the entry point for most tourists who visit the country and create their first impression. There are very many people who live on the streets, illegally occupy there, some people with disabilities who beg. These people should be taught, by the City Hall or Department of Social Assistance, to submit a request…so they could resolve their problems and so we could also resolve the city's problems. Because some of those streets are hotbeds of infection, squalor and there are uninhabitable homes in which people live. We need to free this area, to give a new face to the city and to Old Town. It is a shame that for 30 families we have a negative image.

This idea appeared in my field interviews and casual conversations. For instance, in the historic center, there is a famous squat currently occupied by artists but previously home to a Roma family. One of the artists in residence briefly explained the property's history and how he started to live there. When the former owner successfully reclaimed this historic building, which reportedly was used as the Turkish embassy in pre-socialist times, legally occupying families were removed. In the meantime, squatters entered and according to the current artists-in-residence, destroyed the house by breaking the windows and using doors as firewood. He continued to recount that a group of artists proposed to the owner that they could live there to prevent squatters from entering. They also promised to maintain the property.

Finally, in another part of the historic center, a neighbor mentions a historic monument that is physically deteriorating because of the squatters: "It's a superb house, occupied by gypsies and they brought it to collapse. Go and see how they destroyed it. They would start fires in the middle of the house. There's no roof anymore." In chapter 3, I test this narrative and explore the link between squatting and physical decay by comparing interview data with systematic observations of physical decay.

c. Squatters encourage social disorder

The connection between squatters and social disorder also appears in public policy discourse, with the former considered to encourage the latter. Action plans adopted by local councils include observations, objectives, and recommendations that imply this connection. For instance, in 2016, Sector 2 approved the Plan for Order and Public Safety. In this plan, there is a point for "property return processes and the resulting evictions, illegal occupation of housing and illegal constructions, are additional risk factors in the plan for urban

cohabitation." The Plan's recommended action to ensure public order is the eviction of people living in illegally occupied housing or the demolition of improvised housing illegally constructed on public property. In 2016, Sector 5 Council approved a Strategic Plan for Sustainable Development with an objective to ensure public safety. One of the required actions was to protect property from unauthorized access and illegal occupation. Finally, in 2018, Sector 4 approved a Strategy for Development, which also included references to squatting. One of the problem areas identified in the assessment was the illegal occupation of vacant properties. Overall, there is the idea that public safety and social order could be improved by evicting squatters and reducing the instances of informal housing.

The association between squatting and social order also appears in popular opinion. Mariana – a Roma squatter in a property that neighbors one of the most ill-famed squats in the city – explains the perceptions that her Romanian neighbors have and some of the potential reasons.

> We have to go after them, sweep after them. What, you think the people who are taking their kids to the kindergarten are making this mess? No, we are, those of us who are living here. Take a broom, clean because Romanians are passing. Romanians will say, 'oh my, beware of the gypsies'. But they're not people you can reason with dear. When the Romanians start to pass, that's when they come outside. Chaos, they scream, yell. You know what one lady told me '[expletive] your race, can't we be done with you, can't you all leave from here.' I just stayed quiet, what can you say. And this all comes from all the noise and chaos from here.

Thus, in policy discourse and public opinion, the practice of squatting is generally interpreted as a source of social disorder and risk to public safety. While there seems to be a lack of trust and social interaction among neighbors, squatters have extensive social networks and are embedded in their neighborhood communities. The latter is usually missing from the dominant representation of squatting but explored further in Chapter 4.

3. Squatting as a manifestation of other social and political problems.

The dominant narrative in public policy discourse is one that interprets this practice as an urban problem itself, instead of the result and reflection of other social and political problems. Social problems, specifically multiple dimensions of housing insecurity, are discussed later in this section. Here, the political problem is further elaborated. The following quote is from a Council decision to evict informal occupants from city-owned housing:

> "The property located on Street --- Nr. ---, constructed in 1897, which became the state's property based on the 1950 Decreet 92, presently the property is in the city's administration… the building is in an advanced state of degradation, all the rental contracts for residential spaces have been terminated… Sector -- Police confirmed that the building is illegally occupied, both by former tenants with rental contracts and other people, documents for an eviction process have been filed."

As this statement describes, some squatters were initially legal tenants. The situation described above occurs for tenants of both publicly and privately owned properties. In this case, the city did not renew rental contracts because the building was no longer structurally safe for habitation. Former tenants were not given alternative housing options; therefore, they stayed, but now as informal occupants of their homes. This also occurred with tenants of privately owned properties. Usually, the nationalized property was successfully reclaimed by a private entity, who is legally required to renew rental contracts for at least 5 years. Oftentimes, this unenforced regulation was violated. Sometimes contracts were not renewed or renewed for a fraction of the required period. Former tenants continued to occupy, despite insecure tenure. Unbridled by active rental contracts, both private and public owners could evict tenants at any time (legally with a court-issued eviction order) and without offering alternative housing.

Precarious tenure – a defining feature of squatting – is only one dimension of housing insecurity. In public policy discourse, there are a few references to squatters as vulnerable households that need social assistance. This is demonstrated in the excerpt from a 2016 City Council meeting (see Table 2). In addition to this example, there are references to the city's Agency for Social Assistance (Directia General de Asistenta Sociala) being summoned to support informal occupants. There seems to be a recognition that these are vulnerable families experiencing economic difficulties; however, the representation of squatting as a problem is predominant in public policy discourse.

Squatting respondents have a number of shared housing and household characteristics. The latter are not typically considered part of housing insecurity (Routhier 2018); however, I argue that household characteristics, such as highest level of education attained and employment status, contribute to housing insecurity. These characteristics prohibit families from solving their housing insecurity and even making do with government assistance.

a. Housing conditions

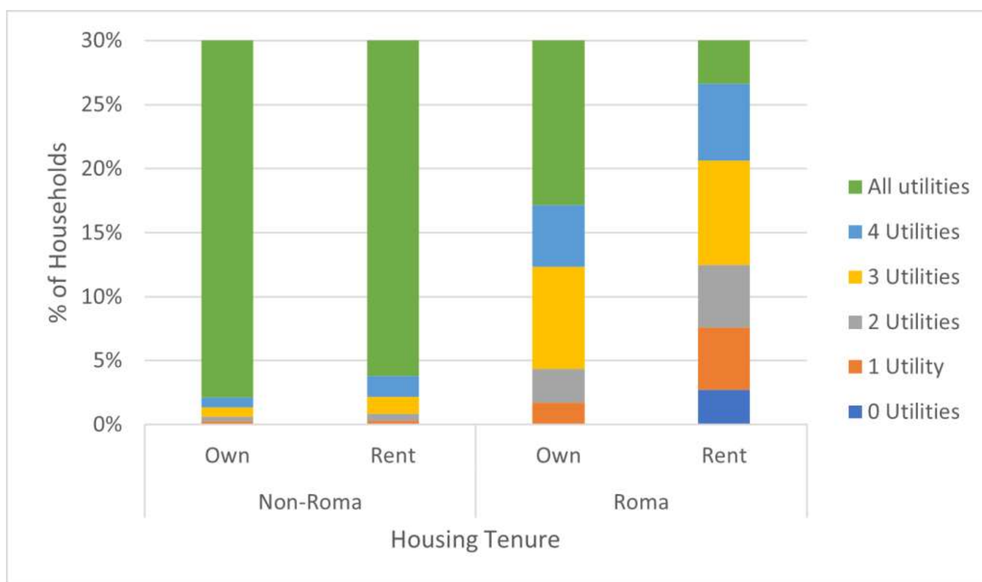
The public policy discourse references poor living conditions of squatters. Relevant excerpts from transcripts of City Council meetings mention the unsanitary conditions and inhabitability of squatted properties. My respondents provided detailed descriptions of their living conditions, which, compared to those of average Romanians and Roma living in Bucharest, are considerably more inadequate.

Poor housing conditions represent another dimension of housing insecurity. In this study, those conditions refer to inadequate access to basic utilities and lack of sufficient living space. Housing scholars have debated the degree to which tenure status is correlated

with housing conditions. Based on IPUMS data, among Bucharest's entire population, it seems the difference in average housing conditions for owners versus renters is not that considerable (Figure 4) while disparities in housing conditions are more apparent when the population is also disaggregated by ethnicity (Figure 5).

Figure 4: Percent of Bucharest's households that have access to basic utilities, by housing tenure.

Figure 5: Percent of Bucharest's households that have access to basic utilities, by ethnicity and housing tenure.



In this IPUMS sample, more than a quarter of renting households with at least one member self-identified as Roma are missing at least one basic utility, compared to just 2% of Romanian renting households. The following utilities were tallied for this statistic: electricity, running water, sewage, toilet in unit, and bath in unit. It is important to note that census data are not disaggregated by formal and informal tenure. While 27% of renting Roma households are experiencing some degree of inadequate housing conditions, more than 50% of my respondents have improvised connections to electricity and/or water, some of whom also lack a toilet and/or bath in their unit (see Table 4).

Table 4: Access to utilities for all interview respondents who are informal occupants.

House-hold	Toilet in unit	Bath in unit	Electricity	Improvised electricity	Running water	Improvised water access
1	x	x	x		x	
2	x	x	x		x	
3	x			x		x
4	x	x	x		x	
5	x	x	x		x	
6	x	x	x		x	
7	x	x	x			x
8	x	x	x		x	
9	x	x		x		x
10	x	x		x		x
11	x	x		x		x
12	x	x		x		x
13	x	x	x		x	
14	x		x			x
15	x	x		x		x
16	x	x		x		x
17	x			x		x
18				x		x
19		x	x		x	
20	x	x	x			x
21				x		x
22	x	x	x		x	
23	x		x		x	

Interview respondents have formal or improvised and informal access to electricity and water. Only one respondent, Stela, explained that she did not have access to electricity (neither formal nor improvised) at the property she used to squat with her three children. She

then elaborates the impact of these poor housing conditions on her children's education, especially her youngest son who only completed two years of school.

> "Where we were staying before, we didn't have electricity, we stayed in darkness. How could a child learn using one of those gas lamps that smelled? Many times, we wouldn't even turn it on because it would smell like gas that it would make you choke. We didn't have water, we didn't have electricity. Insalubrious houses. And I couldn't send the kids to school anymore. We didn't have water, light. You have to send them clean, washed. We didn't have the living conditions."

All other respondents improvised access to electricity. For example, Ion explains that there was already an illegal connection to the electric cables when they arrived at the property. When an employee from the electric company visited to disconnect the line, Ion offered to pay him to keep the connection. Ion explains that he regularly informally pays this employee, so his electricity is not disconnected. In another part of town, Radu and all his neighbors improvised their access to electricity. Radu and his family, along with all their neighbors, were public housing tenants. When the property was restituted by a private owner, their rental contracts, as well as their accounts for electricity and running water, were not renewed.

> Radu: Until about 2004 we paid rent to the state. But after the owner came and said, I don't want rent anymore, I don't want money, this is my personal property, I won it in court and I don't want [rent], so it was stopped. So since then, we stay like this, no more water, no more electricity.
> Jasmine: But you have electricity?
> Radu: Yes.
> Radu's Mom: We drew electricity how we could.
> Radu: So, nothing is legal over here.

Poor living conditions come up in the complaints by citizens asking the City Hall to remove informal occupants from a neighboring property:

> [At the squatted address] there is an intolerable smell because of the garbage deposited by the people who live there illegally. In the winter, they burn rubber tires and wood, great risk of fire and intoxication. Parts of the roof could collapse during a storm. Building occupants include young children who go to school and could spread

> infection because of the lack of hygiene, improper sewer drainage. Theft of electricity and illegal connections to street lighting. In this area, a residential building is being constructed near another one recently constructed and the residents wish for a clean environment without problems. We ask for the mayor's involvement in this matter.

Respondents who reported to have no running water, personal toilets and baths, are also forced to find creative solutions. Ion explains that his household does not have running water: "My wife hauls water with the big bottles from someone. We don't have water here. The water for the entire yard has been discontinued." His wife elaborates:

> We get water from a gentleman two houses down and I give him 5 lei for each cart. I don't know if you saw but we have a cart in the yard with bottles inside and I give him 5 lei. He has a well in the yard. But it's not clean, we use it more for food and for washing. But with drinking water, it's difficult, I'm a bit afraid because it's not filtered. We buy drinking water, those bottles, 2 lei each. It's enough for an entire day, sometimes even two days.

Another respondent, Cristi, squats a property in Old Town and explains that he gets "water from the restaurant/night club next door, from here from there. In those 5-liter containers." Cristi does not have a bath, but thanks to the local social capital he amassed, he has a place to wash, which he shows me on our walk around Old Town: "Look here is the water heater. This is where I come, do you see that window with the grille, down there is a bathtub, shower, I come and take a bathe, wash clothes. They let me. I have relations." Units without toilets are usually part of a larger social housing unit (assigned to specific individuals), which has been subdivided to informally create a separate living space. These additional subdivisions are units without toilets. In these cases, occupants use neighbors' toilets or public restrooms.

b. *Housing prices and unaffordability*

Unaffordability of housing for certain population segments is another dimension of housing insecurity, which does not appear in public policy discourse related to squatting.

However, as mentioned earlier, characterization of squatters as social cases does appear in the discourse, which highlights the barriers and constraints to access decent and affordable housing. Given their low incomes, my respondents are priced out of the private rental market. In Bucharest, the average advertised monthly rent for an apartment with two bedrooms was 400 Euros, about 2000 Romanian Lei, in the first quarter of 2020 (Nita 2020). Given the incomes that were reported during my fieldwork, apartments priced this high are inaccessible to my respondents. Families would not squat and initiate precarious living arrangements if they had access to affordable housing. For example, Tudor explained that he would like to stay somewhere with better living conditions, at least with electricity and water; but unless the city will help him with a social housing allocation, squatting is his only option: “With my small pension, I can't afford to pay rent, because now they are hundreds of euros. There's no way for me to pay. I'm thankful that here, regardless of the fact that I suffer [without proper connections to electricity and water], it helps that I don't pay rent.” In another case, Stela who is currently informally renting a room from a social housing tenant – and paying the tenant three times the rent the tenant pays to the city’s housing authority -- explains that although they were not paying rent when her family was squatting a privately owned building, she tried to support her family with her single minimal income:

> It was good because we didn't have to pay rent. More or less, the salary was enough, it was enough to buy your children a pair of boots from one salary for one kid. With the next salary, you would buy it for the other child, a pair of sneakers. I had three children, they were younger. And like this, you would buy for them in turns, I would dress them in turns.

Finally, Ion and his wife Miora were notified that they will be asked to leave. When we met, they were searching for another housing arrangement, but private market rentals were inaccessible. Miora explains that owners “don't accept you with two kids. And rent is

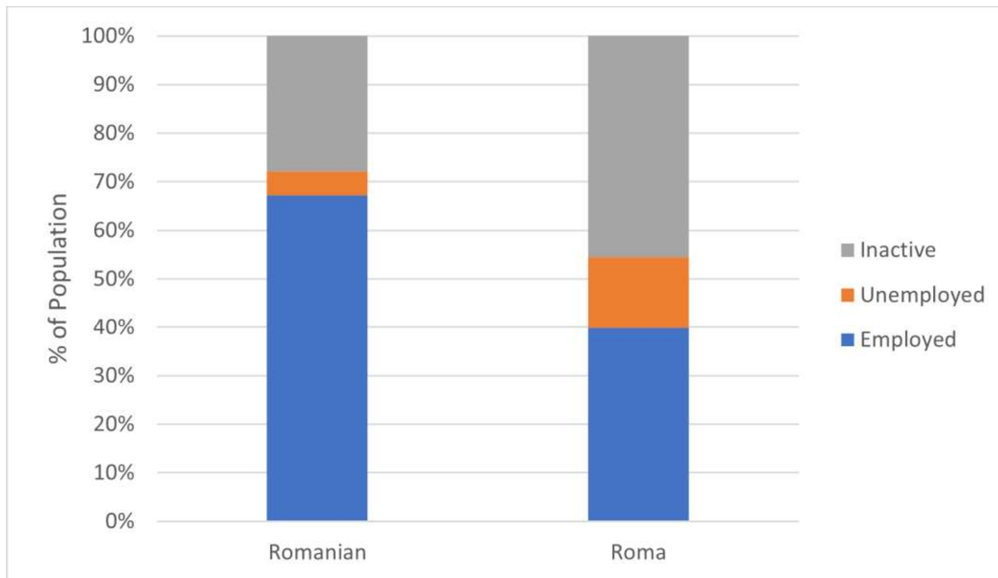
expensive, over 200 euros and with two kids… when I say two kids, they said initially I would have accepted you but in a room that is 20 square meters, you just would not have space with two kids, it's not okay." Thus, interview data demonstrate that generally this study's respondents are priced out of the private formal rental market. Families with children experience additional difficulties to secure private rental housing, especially smaller units, due to landlords' concerns of overcrowding.

c. *Socioeconomic barriers to decent affordable housing*

Finally, a third dimension of insecurity for this study's respondents is represented by socioeconomic characteristics that make it difficult for these households to access decent housing. As is suggested in the previous discussion, single and/or small monthly incomes act as a barrier to accessing affordable housing in the private rental sector. Many of my respondents collect their income from informal and irregular labor. This is partly due to their limited education.

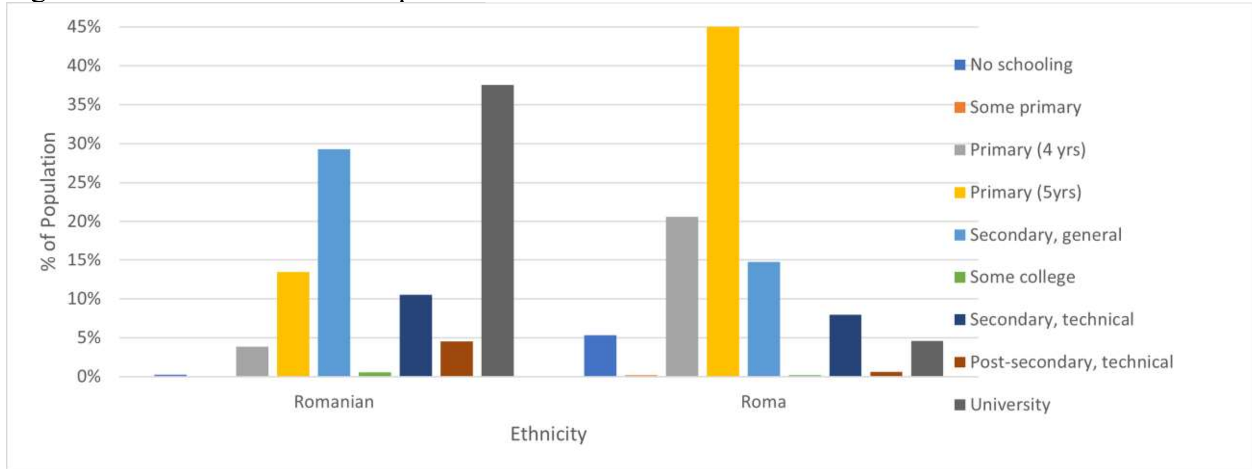
Unemployment and informal labor are more common characteristics among Roma than non-Roma Romanians. In the IPUMS sample, 5% of non-Roma reported being unemployed, while the percentage unemployed was 15% among Roma (see Figure 6). Compared to the total population, Roma in Romania have a higher unemployment rate, remain unemployed longer, and rely on informal labor (Dinca and Luches 2018). In Romania, unemployment rate among Roma is estimated to be 35.5% (Bosakova et al. 2019). In my case study, only a handful of respondents were working formally with an employment contract; the rest were either unemployed, worked regular hours but without a contract, or picked up irregular temporary jobs.

Figure 6: Percentages of Bucharest's Roma and Romanian population (ages 18-65) by employment status.



High unemployment and informal labor rates among Roma are partly related to lower levels of educational attainment. According to estimates from the IPUMS sample, while 82% of Bucharest's non-Roma Romanians completed at least secondary education, only 28% of Roma have at least that same level of educational attainment (see Figure 7). While almost all school-aged children I met were still in school (except for two who abandoned their studies), most of the adults and younger adults reportedly did not complete all primary and secondary school classes.

Figure 7: Percentages of Bucharest's Roma and Romanian population (ages 23 and over) by highest level of education completed.



Ion quipped that to sweep the streets, one needs 12 classes. He recounted his experience visiting a center set up to assist jobseekers and his difficulty finding a job following a medical leave: "I picked something I know how to do. I'm a painter. But he said you do not have qualifications. You don't have 12 classes. I need 12 classes so I could use a paint roller? Is this possible? I know how to do it. I'm more skilled than someone who has twelve classes." Ion considered the services provided by the employment center to be neither effective nor helpful. Government programs for job skills training exist, as do those hosted by various NGOs and even Partida Romilor Pro-Europa, which is the political party representing Roma interests; however, rarely were my respondents aware of these programs. In practice, recruitment was limited to Roma individuals acquainted with organizers and recommendations by these acquaintances. The main purpose of such targeted recruitment was to find committed participants who would attend all the training sessions. When asked about the practicality of these job training and non-formal education programs, many respondents were interested in attending but also concerned that for the duration of the program, they would not be able to work and provide income for their households.

E. Discussion

Three significant representations emerged from the discourse analysis – squatters as predominantly Roma, squatting as an urban problem, and squatting as the result and reflection of other social and political problems. The dominant narrative seems to homogenize squatters as criminals, a risk to public safety and social order, a nuisance jeopardizing the city's image, and vandals that destroy cultural heritage. The dominant discourse contains few references to the socioeconomic inequalities between squatters and their neighbors. The dominant discourse in Bucharest's public policy realm produces a homogenizing rhetoric about squatters (Martinez 2019). There does not seem to be much if any polarization in Bucharest's public policy discourse (Martinez 2019); informal occupants are all represented as "bad squatters" (Bouillon 2013). However, polarization between "good" and "bad" squatters was apparent in my interviews (discussed further in Chapter 4).

Information from my fieldwork contradicts this homogenization in the dominant discourse. Thematic analysis of qualitative interview data reveals the nuances, complexity, and multifaceted nature of this social practice. Housing insecurity is based on more than just tenure status and even housing prices (Routhier 2019); multidimensionality in housing insecurity is evident in this case study. By definition, squatters in this study experience insecure tenure. They know eviction is inevitable and they could be alerted to vacate premises at any time. Squatters are also excluded from the historic center's private rental market because of high rents. Housing activists argue that social housing stock is improperly managed, with vacant units that are not allocated to vulnerable and marginalized families. As a result, for my respondents, occupying their home without the legal protection of a contract – occupying at times with an informal and legally non-binding agreement with the private

property owner – is the only way they could remain in the historic center's neighborhoods that also house their place-based social networks.

To highlight the multidimensional housing insecurity and the general precarity experienced by inner-city squatters, I compared housing and household characteristics of my respondents to those of Bucharest's Romanian and Roma populations. Due to a long history of stigma and despite European and national policies to curb anti-Roma discrimination, when compared to Romania's total population, the Roma community generally experiences lower rates of homeownership, poorer housing conditions, higher rates of unemployment, more school abandonment, lower levels of completed education, and higher likelihood of housing insecurity. These national-level statistics are reflected in cities across the country as long-lasting, generational inequalities that hamper opportunities for social mobility.

Interview respondents shared several household and housing characteristics. Members of only one of my sample's 23 households self-identified as Romanian instead of Roma; all other respondents belonged to Bucharest's Roma ethnic minority. The families in my study experienced multiple dimensions of housing insecurity, including the lack of or improvised and insecure connections to basic amenities. Beside poor housing conditions, insecure and legally unprotected tenure, and rental prices that are too high for their income, my respondents were vulnerable and insecure in other ways. Their lower education was an obstacle to decent, formal, regular employment. Even though inequalities in education and employment are not directly related to housing, they serve as constant barriers to access and afford decent housing in the private rental market.

Multidimensional housing insecurity and disparities in socioeconomic household characteristics (revealed by analysis of interview data) are not part of the dominant narrative

about squatting. For instance, seldom did councilmembers refer to squatters as socially marginalized constituents that could use city services and assistance. This mismatch between discourse and lived experience has an impact on local policies and city council decisions. In the discourse, the solution for the urban problem of squatting is eviction; but this displacement is not accompanied by guaranteed alternative housing or other kinds of social assistance. The dominant discourse about squatters, and more generally socioeconomically disadvantaged constituents, determines for example whether city councils prioritize social housing, how they decide to allocate city resources, and eligibility criteria used to prioritize households served by government programs. Alternative discourses in the public policy domain, which reference multidimensional insecurity and social inequalities experienced by squatters, could lead to more inclusive urban governance. The next chapter also contributes to producing an alternative discourse through an investigation of physical deterioration in Bucharest's historic landscapes and the potential for the practice of squatting to deter decay.

Chapter 3: Squatting and decaying urban environments

A. Introduction

The discourse analysis described in the previous chapter demonstrates that in popular opinion and media, as well as in public policy debates, squatting in Bucharest is perceived as a destructive practice negatively impacting the city's housing stock, especially structures with architectural and cultural value. Informal occupants are also considered to be a source of physical disorder and anti-social behavior. For this chapter, I assessed the physical decay of squatted and vacant properties, as well as their neighboring structures, and analyze interview data to explore the accuracy of this dominant perception of squatting as a destructive practice.

Research representing a variety of disciplines has extensively investigated the causes, trajectories, effects of neighborhood change – both renewal and decline. One strand of research focuses on the development of deteriorating urban environments. Urban deterioration has been attributed to the inevitable stages of the "neighborhood life-cycle" (Babcock 1932, Downs 1981), depopulation (Haase 2008), economic restructuring that leads to economic decline (Bartelt & Leon 1986, Haase 2008), suburbanization (Smith 1996), segregation (Rothenburg et. al. 1991, Andersen 2003), lack of public investment (Alves and Ramos 2012), and globalization that exacerbates social inequalities (Sassen 2013). It has even been argued that the theories of neighborhood change themselves have led to urban decay (Metzger 2000). Although the enumerated factors could explain some of the world's decaying urban environments, it is important to study this phenomenon at a microlevel (Aitken 1990), paying close attention to specific contexts. This study does the latter by

exploring urban decay in Bucharest's inner-city neighborhoods while integrating the post-socialist context into the discussion.

There has been extensive research about urban decay and disorder. Sampson and Raudenbush explained physical disorder as "the deterioration of the urban landscape" (1999, p. 603). Conditions that are used in research to indicate physical disorder include abandoned and boarded-up buildings, broken windows, unkept exteriors, vandalized properties, and overgrown vegetation (Skogan 2015, p. 467). Wilson and Kelling's Broken Windows Theory asserts that such disorderly conditions, if left unchecked, lead to further disorder and (more aggravated) criminal activity (1982). Squatting is oftentimes cited as an example of urban disorder as well as a practice that attracts and leads to more disorder. In his seminal work about declining urban neighborhoods, William Skogan explained that abandoned buildings can "harbor decay" and are "havens for trash, rats, or other stray animals; squatters; or even criminals" (1990, p. 3). Ideas generated from this strand of research, such as the Broken Windows Theory, inform local anti-crime policies around the world (Swanson 2010, p. 100), despite growing criticism in the scientific literature (O'Brien, Farrell, & Welsh 2019). This chapter further explores the link between squatting and neighborhood disorder.

The research question driving the work reported here is the following: How and to what extent do informal housing arrangements lead to the physical deterioration of occupied and neighboring structures? To answer this question, selected properties and streets were assessed (using Google Street View images) for visual signs of physical decay. Qualitative GIS and geovisualizations were used to find spatial patterns in the distribution of observable signs of physical decay and their proximity to squatted or vacant properties. This analysis

was complemented by interviews with squatters and neighbors conducted during my fieldwork in Bucharest.

The findings reported in this chapter contribute to literature about informal housing and urban decay. As discussed in the next section, existing research typically characterizes squatting as a form of social disorder that potentially leads to more (social and physical) disorder and crime in the neighborhood. This characterization coincides with the way squatting is framed in the dominant discourse. Despite knowledge and at times even informal recognition by property owners that occupants are present, squatting is criminalized in public popular and official discourse. Common references to squatting include “ocupa abuziv” (illegal occupation), “intrat fara acte” (entered without legal documents), or “stau fara acte” (stay without legal documents). These dominant representations of squatting have been discussed in Chapter 2. Here, I show how the occupation, even informal tenure, of vacant buildings, could be linked to fewer observed signs of physical disorder. Interviews with squatters reveal recurring cases of informal occupants who practice some degree of social control in the neighborhood and maintenance of the properties despite their insecure tenure. Therefore, I argue that informal housing, especially long-term occupation, could also inhibit the vandalism and destruction of otherwise vacant properties. Despite the methodological limitation of a small sample size, this study offers interpretations that could contribute to constructing an alternative discourse about squatting – one that does not criminalize squatting but recognizes the practice’s potential benefits to both occupants, owners, and neighbors.

B. Literature Review

Urban environments evolve in a variety of ways. For instance, infrastructure ages or social compositions of neighborhoods change. Extensive research exists about change in both

Western and non-Western neighborhoods (Jackle and Wilson 1992; Harvey 2003; Fainstein 2010). In urban scholarship, these evolutions have been attributed to a number of factors including the natural life cycle of neighborhoods, population decline due to low fertility rates or economic restructuring and decline, social segregation, residential suburbanization, lack of public investment, and economic globalization. Although these factors have been used to generally explain changing (including decaying) urban environments, it is important to study changes at a microlevel, paying close attention to specific local historical, political, and social contexts (Aitken 1990). The discipline of geography is well-positioned for research about neighborhood change and urban decay that is place-based while providing holistic (Clarke 2011) and interdisciplinary perspectives (DeSilvey 2012, p. 471).

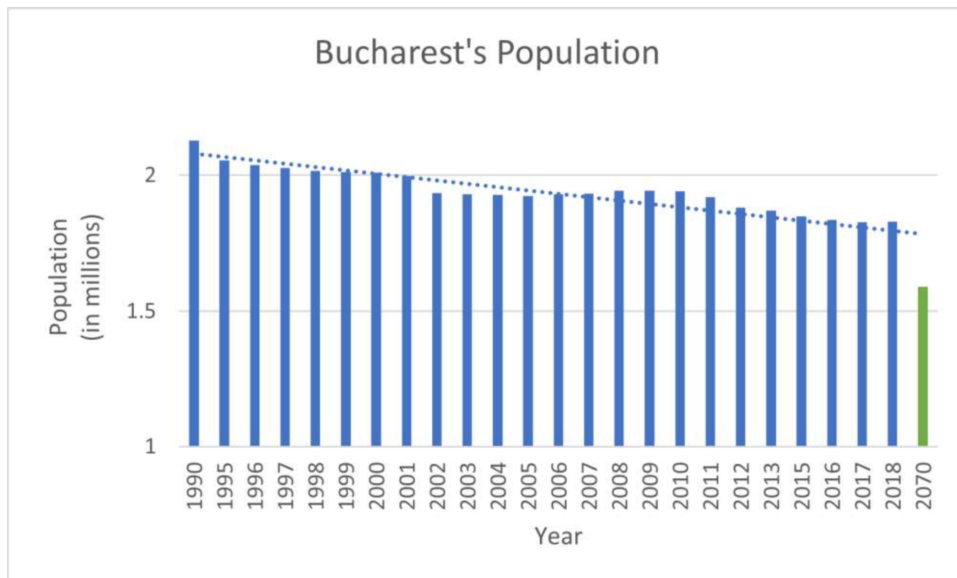
Neighborhood change, especially in American cities, has been explained as occurring in a series of phases. The theory of a "neighborhood life-cycle" (Babcock 1932) explains that over time, neighborhoods become poor and blighted areas. Therefore, neighborhood change could sometimes be considered a complex, downward spiraling process that involves different factors such as change in the social composition of neighborhood's residents, deterioration of physical infrastructure, and economic losses for property owners due to falling property values and expensive required maintenance investments.

Research about deprived areas in European cities focus on factors such as segregation and social exclusion (Andersen 2003). Spatial concentrations of poverty and social inequalities are explained as products of global and local economic restructuring and social welfare policies. One line of research argues that social and spatial exclusion, or "excluded places" (Andersen 2002), leads to urban decay (Fincher and Jacobs 1998). While other studies emphasize the complexity of this relationship, suggesting that urban decay triggers

spatial segregation. Here, I argue that Bucharest's inner-city deteriorating environments are also the product of a very specific post-socialist context.

While Bucharest is experiencing population decline (Figure 8) and its housing stock includes vacant infrastructure, the city is economically strong, especially in comparison to the rest of the country and therefore would not be categorized as a shrinking city (Banica et al. 2017). Using the neighborhood classification schema developed by Anthony Downs (1981), neighborhoods in Bucharest's historic center would probably be classified as experiencing a combination of minor (stage 2) and clear decline (stage 3). There are deteriorating structures (stage 2), a prevalence of minor physical deficiencies (stage 3), and abandoned housing (stage 3).

Figure 8: Change in Bucharest's population size estimates (1990-2017) and population projection for 2070. Data Source: Romania's National Institute of Statistics.



The inner-city neighborhoods of Bucharest are mixed in terms of sociodemographic composition. Urban decay seems to appear in pockets, affecting certain properties rather than entire neighborhoods. In popular opinion, oftentimes specific properties, instead of entire

neighborhoods or clusters of buildings, are represented as ghettoes. In other words, residents caution each other to avoid a specific address because it is *tiganie* ("gypsy" neighborhood or ghetto). On the other hand, peripheral neighborhoods such as Ferentari and Giulesti-Sarbi, are considered, in popular opinion and academic scholarship, to be socially segregated, inhabited primarily by Roma, underdeveloped, and deteriorating neighborhoods (Berescu 2011).

Urban decay with rising levels of disorder is one way urban environments change. In his research about declining inner-city neighborhoods in the United States, William Skogan explained disorder in the following way:

> "… [disorder] has a social and a physical dimension. Disorder is evident in the widespread appearance of junk and trash in vacant lots; it is evident, too, in decaying homes, boarded-up buildings, the vandalism of public and private property, graffiti, and stripped and abandoned cars in streets and alleys. It is signaled by bands of teenagers congregating on street corners, by the presence of prostitutes and panhandlers, by public drinking, the verbal harassment of women, and open gambling and drug use" (1990, p. 2).

Urban disorder has been defined in multiple ways; consistent among these definitions is the inclusion of deteriorating housing conditions, vacant infrastructure, and boarded or broken windows. Along with vacant and abandoned buildings, squatting is also associated with urban decay and considered a common characteristic of distressed neighborhoods (Andersen 2003; Skogan 2015). As explained in previous chapters, this dissertation focuses on otherwise vacant spaces that are currently squatted. More specifically, this chapter explores the link between informal occupation, vacancy, and urban physical disorder.

How has vacant land been defined in the existing literature? Unused or abandoned parcels of land are considered vacant. More specifically, Bowman elaborates that "vacant land ranges from never developed parcels to land that once had structures on it. In addition,

the definition includes land that supports structures that have been abandoned or become derelict, whether boarded up, partially destroyed, or razed" (2004, p. 7). The standard conceptualization of vacant land is that these parcels and structures represent blight and neglect in the neighborhood, they retard urban revitalization, attract illegal activities and other kinds of physical and social disorder, and negatively impacts neighborhood and community well-being (Pearsall and Lucas 2014, p. 121). For instance, Jackle and Wilson have argued that "abandoned buildings in our inner-city neighborhoods continue to erode the local social fabric. They signify the ills of neglect, communicating to people the futility of inner-city living… to invest here is to risk losing money … abandoned buildings are a sign of irreversible deterioration – a process that has attained a critical internal momentum" (1992, p. 175). On the other hand, vacant buildings have also been interpreted as spaces of resistance. Pearsall and Lucas argue that these vacant spaces "challenge the hegemonic urban order" (2014, p. 121), while Foster refers to vacant lands as "terrain vague… represent[ing] landscapes that are unregulated and may attract inhabitants and activities that fall outside the realm of mainstream urban processes" (2014, p. 121).

Existing research has assumed a variety of causal associations related to vacant buildings and physical disorder. For instance, some studies have demonstrated a positive correlation between neighborhood crime and prevalence of abandoned buildings (Spelman 1993; Immergluck and Smith 2006) or perceptions of disorder (Perkins, et al 1992). Spelman (1993) linked abandoned buildings with higher crime rates, while other studies have shown that households are willing to pay several hundred dollars extra to avoid having a neighboring property that is abandoned (Vigdor 2010) and that foreclosures lead to higher frequency of conventional crimes (Immergluck and Smith 2006).

Seminal research has theoretically linked disorder with crime (Wilson and Kelling 1982; Skogan 1990; Kelling and Coles 1996), while other studies have empirically tested this connection between disorder, fear, and crime (literature reviewed in Skogan 2015). The Broken Windows Theory offers one explanation for the link between criminal activity and indicators of physical or social disorder. With their "broken windows" analogy for neighborhood deterioration, Wilson and Kelling claim that the first broken window that is not repaired – or any other unaddressed manifestation of physical disorder – will signal a lack of interest on the part of residents to maintain order in their neighborhood and will lead to additional cases of disorder and criminal activity, which will continue to increase in amount and intensity (1982). Numerous studies have tested the Broken Windows Theory and results from social experiments support neither a positive correlation between disorder and violent crime nor the argument that arresting minor crime offenders prevents the occurrence of violent crime (Harcourt and Ludwig 2005). Although the Broken Windows Theory has been extensively criticized in scientific literature (O'Brien, Farrell, & Welsh 2019), this theory is still the basis of anti-crime policies in municipalities across the globe (Swanson 2010, p. 100). Sampson and Raudenbush (1999) offer a revision to Broken Windows, demonstrating with their systematic social observation of disorder in Chicago's neighborhoods that one type of disorder does not necessarily lead to more disorder; rather, that both lower rates of crime and physical signs of disorder could be partly explained by stronger sense of social cohesion and social control among residents (discussed further in Chapter 4).

Squatting is commonly considered an indicator of disorder. Immergluck and Smith explain that abandoned buildings can "harbor decay" and be "havens for trash, rats, or other stray animals; *squatters*; or even criminals" (emphasis added; 2006, p. 856). In existing

research, the practice of squatting abandoned buildings is considered not only a condition of urban disorder but also a contributor to more neighborhood disorder (Wilson and Kelling 1982; Skogan 1990; Kelling and Coles 1997). Informal and temporary uses of vacant spaces are seldom considered legitimate, but rather temporary measures until more profitable and long-term uses for the space are proposed (Pearsall and Lucas 2014). Drake and Lawson (2014) challenges the dominant discourse about vacant land, calling for alternative uses of vacant land to also be considered legitimate. Consulting urban residents, including informal occupants, about long-term solutions for vacant land and infrastructure, may more likely generate solutions helpful to the community (Foo et al 2014; Langegger 2013; Pearsall and Lucas 2014). In Bucharest, as will be discussed later in this chapter, it seems informal occupants provide negligent property owners a temporary stop-gap solution – inhibiting potential vandalism. Here, I compare the dominant representation of squatters as desecrators of cultural heritage to their personal accounts of squatting in order to understand the extent to which informal housing arrangements lead to the physical deterioration of occupied and neighboring structures. Unlike existing studies, the research discussed here interprets squatters as a source of informal social control slowing the progress of neighborhood disorder. This chapter seeks to explore the relationship between squatting and urban physical disorder, as well as offer a different conceptualization of squatting that is an alternative to the dominant representation. As discussed previously, this study takes a social constructionist approach to investigate housing arrangements, conditions, and policies, as well as multiple data sources and methods. In this chapter, I use qualitative GIS and geovisualizations to complement qualitative interview data about squatting with a more quantitative assessment of physical decay systematically conducted using Google Street View images.

C. Methodology

1. Qualitative GIS and geovisualization

Qualitative GIS incorporates non-quantitative data into GIS, integrates qualitative data collection and analysis with quantitative spatial analysis facilitated by GIS, and/or adopts epistemologies typically associated with qualitative research. Qualitative GIS is simultaneously represented as a spatially-oriented organizer of qualitative data, a mixed-methods research approach, and an open-ended style of knowledge-making. This approach emerged as a response to criticisms that GIS is rigidly embedded in positivist epistemologies. The work in this chapter is influenced by Qualitative GIS. To explore this chapter's research question, I use triangulation, a method used in qualitative and mixed-methods geographic research (Heasley 2003; Jiang 2003), to validate and corroborate results or generate new insights (Cope and Elwood 2009; Elwood 2010). The practice of triangulation enhances interpretation of the research problem through the comparison of quantitative and qualitative data and results (Kwan and Ding 2008, Elwood 2010). "Grounded visualization" is a mixed-methods research approach that is recursive and exploratory, merging qualitative and GIS analysis with grounded theory, visualization, and feminist epistemologies (Knigge and Cope 2006). As explained in Chapter 1, this study is informed by grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967) – an iterative, inductive, and flexible research approach. This chapter compares conclusions from the discourse analysis discussed in the previous chapter with qualitative ethnographic data and quantitative assessments of physical disorder. Geovisualizations of the quantitative assessments are integrated with qualitative interview data and compared with findings from discourse analysis discussed in the previous chapter. While discourse analysis has been combined with data from interviews, focus groups and surveys (cite example

studies from public policy…), to my knowledge, geovisualizations have yet to be integrated with discourse analysis. The goal is to see if findings from content analysis of interview data coincide with the results from the assessments, and if not, to generate insights about the disjuncture and offer different pieces of the story (Knigge and Cope 2006, p. 2028).

2. Neighborhood assessment of physical disorder

I performed systematic observations of physical disorder in select areas of Bucharest's central neighborhoods. For a long time, researchers have conducted systematic observations to understand how neighborhoods have changed. Systematic neighborhood assessments typically require researchers to walk or drive as they rate various indicators, while also describing, photographing, or videorecording block faces. In the early 1970s, David Ley and Roman Cybriwsky walked the inner-city streets of Philadelphia to assess the prevalence of graffiti and map its distribution (1974). A common method to measure urban disorder and decay is to use a checklist of indicators to rate frequency and severity of their occurrence based on observations (Skogan 2015). Documenting neighborhood change and decay is popular among photographers as well. The approach of rephotography, or reproducing a previous image as best as possible by photographing the same spatial location, allows photographers and researchers to document how places change over time (Klett 2011, p. 115). For instance, changes in New York City's landscapes were captured by photographer Douglas Levere juxtaposing his modern images with those of taken in the 1930s (Levere et al. 2005). Neighborhood level assessments of observations and perceptions of disorder are also common in geography. Several studies have combined qualitative data and methods with GIS to identify spatial patterns of fear, crime and social disorder (Doran and Lees 2005; Pain et. al. 2006; McCray and Brais 2007; Wridt 2010).

The use of Google's Street View (GSV) to perform systematic observations builds on Ley and Cybriwsky's traditional method to assess neighborhoods (1974). The Google Street View application is a free and publicly accessible online tool that allows users to explore places at street-level by moving forward and backward or turning left and right to see panoramic views of the streetscape. Images are captured by a camera-equipped vehicle, georeferenced using data from GPS devices, and juxtaposed to create a panoramic view. An additional advantage of this technique is its historical element. Images are captured at different times, which allows researchers to see how neighborhoods and urban landscapes have changed over time.

By comparing observations from virtual audits to data from neighborhood surveys and other in-person assessments, studies have shown that assessment of Google Street View images could reliably be used to audit neighborhood environments for conditions such as physical disorder and decay (Clarke 2010; Rundle et al 2011). GSV images have been analyzed to understand how neighborhood conditions affect child health (Odgers et al 2012), urban greenery (Li et al 2015; Berland and Lange 2017) and its connection to physical activity (Griew et al 2013; Lu 2019), and trajectories of gentrification (Hwang and Sampson 2014). This chapter's analysis draws upon the methodology developed by Hwang and Sampson in their investigation of visual cues of gentrification in Chicago's neighborhoods and to measure neighborhood change.

3. Data collection: Decay in Google Street View

In this study, I used GSV to take a virtual walk along Bucharest's streets at different points in time and explore the visible character of these historic neighborhoods. In different parts of Bucharest, GSV images are available for the following years: 2008, 2011, 2012,

2014, 2018, and 2019. For my assessment, I used images from 2008, 2011, 2014, and 2018 because the web application has images from these years for many of the streets relevant for this study. I assessed 18 properties that were completely or partially squatted during my fieldwork in 2018. In this study, squatting refers to land tenure that is not protected by legal title or lawful permission to use the property. In addition to squatted addresses, 16 properties that were vacant in 2018 were also assessed. These properties were informally occupied by families who were evicted. Since vehicular traffic is restricted in Bucharest's Old Town, only images from 2019 are available. Although several currently and previously squatted buildings are located in this neighborhood, these addresses are not included in the GSV assessment.

Although structures are informally occupied throughout Bucharest (Suditu and Valceanu 2013, Berescu 2019), in this chapter, I show that squatting and informal housing is also perceived to be prevalent in the city's historic center. Many of the interviewed informal occupants explained that, although not as prevalent as before, the practice of squatting formerly nationalized properties is still quite common. Most of the time, inner-city squatting is quite visible and unfolds in physically deteriorated properties. This observation is corroborated not only by interview respondents, but also references to squatting in public policy documents and online media that describe squatted properties as physically distressed. These properties also happen to be located in areas that some scholars argue are gentrifying (Chelcea 2015, Zamfirescu 2015).

Based on data from my fieldwork and discourse analysis, I collected 51 addresses of currently or previously squatted properties. Addresses are primarily located within historic city limits of Bucharest and in neighborhoods with higher densities of historic monuments.

As I demonstrate in the previous chapter, the dominant narrative about squatting suggests that squatters contribute to the physical decay of Bucharest's architectural heritage. I investigate this dominant narrative by conducting systematic observations of squatted and vacant properties, as well as their neighboring properties, using Google's Street View online tool. Interview data also complemented my GSV analysis.

The Google Street View assessment includes 19 properties that were squatted during my fieldwork in 2018; 68 properties neighboring these squatted addresses; 15 vacant properties that were vacant during my fieldwork in 2018; 46 properties neighboring these vacant addresses; 18 control properties; and 52 properties neighboring these control addresses. It is important to note that these vacant properties were previously squatted but evicted and unoccupied by 2018. In this study, control properties refer to buildings that are neither squatted nor vacant. These clusters of 3-4 properties are located immediately past the nearest intersection to the vacant and squatted buildings in this study's sample. Control properties are not adjacent to any addresses that were squatted or vacant during my fieldwork. Control properties were also assessed for physical disorder to understand to what extent other properties along these inner-city streets were physically decaying.

I developed an instrument to observe signs of structural distress and physical decay. The instrument's indicators were selected based on interview data about perceptions of physical disorder. Respondents were asked to identify signs of physical disorder and decay that they see in Bucharest. Answers included graffiti, garbage buildup, boarded and broken windows, and other forms of structural deterioration. In addition, indicators were selected from Hwang and Sampson (2014), in which researchers observe different indicators of physical disorder present in GSV images to determine the stage of gentrification in Chicago's

neighborhoods. Finally, indicators were also selected from the American Housing Survey, which has been used in research to investigate neighborhood quality (Vigdor 2010). Table 1 summarizes the indicators used in this study to measure the degree of physical disorder of squatted and vacant buildings, as well as their neighbors. Visual examples for each indicator are available in Appendix 1. The rationale (Table 5) used to rate the indicators is similar to Hwang and Sampson's (2014).

Table 5: Physical Decay: Characteristics to determine the score for each indicator.

Indicators and characteristics to determine the score for each indicator
Faded and/or peeling paint 0: absent 1: Some patches of discoloration and/or peeling paint. 2: Discoloration and peeling on at least 50% of the street-facing exterior wall.
Exposed and/or deteriorated bricks 0: absent 1: One or two areas of exposed bricks. 2: Exposed and/or deteriorated bricks along at least 25% of the street-facing exterior wall.
Evidence of graffiti 0: absent 1: A handful of less prominent graffiti markings. 2: Many prominent graffiti markings.
Garbage and litter 0: absent 1: Light garbage and litter (e.g. a few discarded bottles, broken glass) 2: Large amounts of garbage and litter (many discarded bottles, bags of garbage, broken furniture)
Structural deterioration 0: absent 1: Visible that parts of the roof, balcony, or walls for example are missing. 2: uninhabitable
Overgrown vegetation 0: absent 1: some overgrown grass and shrubs on the parcel 2: significant amounts of overgrown and unkept vegetation

4. Data analysis

Hwang and Sampson generate a summary value representing the degree of physical decay for block faces by virtually observing buildings using GSV images (2014). I use this method to compile a value summarizing the physical decay for each property (i.e. squatted, vacant, and neighboring) observed using GSV. This summary value is the sum of the scores for each of the six indicators representing physical decay. There is one summary statistic for each GSV image year and assessed property. The presence of any of these indicators is meaningful in terms of suggesting physical decay; therefore, values for all physical decay indicators are summed without adding weights.

Visualizations have been used by geographers to discern spatial patterns; for instance, Watts (2010) maps the locations referenced in publicly available eyewitness narratives to identify spatial patterns of the 1990s Los Angeles riots. Geovisualizations have also been used to evoke emotions or map data about affect (Aitken and Craine 2009). In this chapter, maps of three sample streets, with feature symbols extruded based on the summary value for each property, visualize spatial patterns of physical disorder in 2018 and changes in the degree of disorder between 2008 and 2018. Together with content analysis of interview data and analysis of quantitative scores for physical disorder, these geovisualizations are used to better understand how popular representations of squatting and its relationship with physical disorder compare to lived experiences and observations.

D. Findings

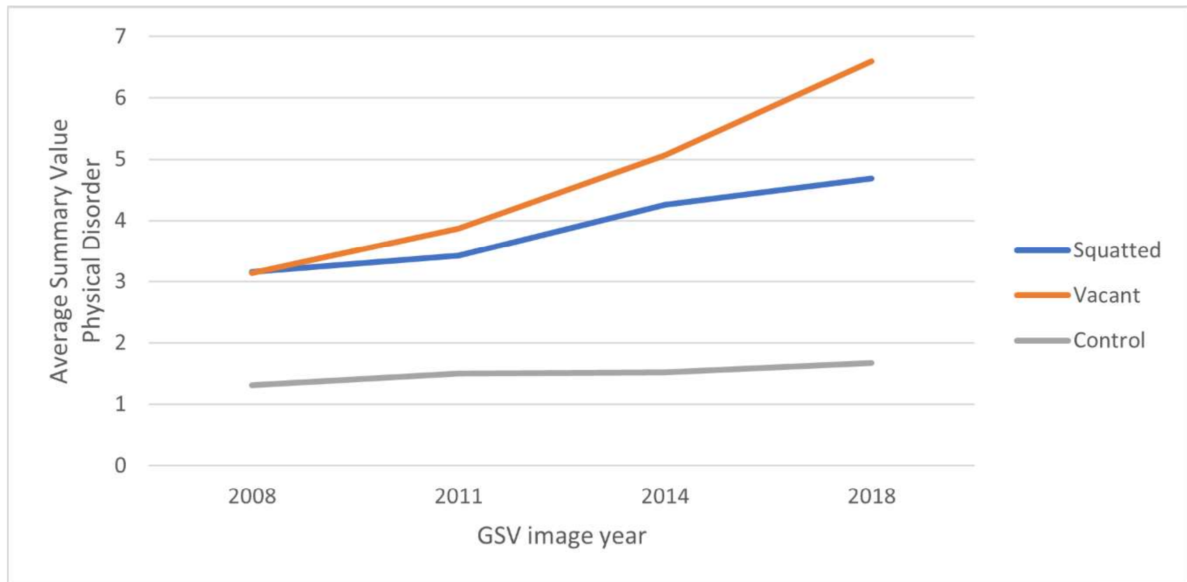
Results from systematic observations of Google Street View images suggest that there is a pattern in the relationship between squatting, vacancy, and the degree of physical

decay. GSV analysis and interview data also demonstrate that squatters sometimes financially invest in and maintain informally occupied properties. Furthermore, interview data reveal that squatters oftentimes guard occupied properties from vandals who may damage the structure. Cases of destroyed infrastructure following evictions of squatters and rapid physical decay appear in the GSV analysis.

1. Google Street View observations of physical decay

On average, more visual signs of physical decay were observed for the assessed vacant properties (N = 15) than the assessed squatted properties (N = 19). Vacant properties seem to experience a more rapid decline in physical disorder. These vacant properties were squatted at some point before or within this ten-year period (2008-2018). For some of these properties, occupants were evicted before 2008, while other properties were vacated within this 10-year period. This explains similar scores for physical decay between 2008 and 2011 for both types of tenure. While results from the GSV analysis (Figure 9) show that signs of physical disorder and decay are observed for both vacant and squatted properties, a finding which coincides with the Broken Windows Theory, there are clearly more signs of physical disorder observed for vacant than squatted properties. This GSV analysis suggests that in many of the groups of properties examined, the values for decay indicators increases more sharply following an eviction and when properties are vacant for longer periods of time. Therefore, these results suggest that the practice of occupying infrastructure, even if tenure is informal, rather than keeping it vacant, leads to less deterioration of these buildings.

Figure 9: Physical decay of vacant and squatted properties.



While analysis of observations of physical disorder for this sample suggests more rapid deterioration of vacant than squatted properties, how does tenure type affect physical disorder of neighboring properties? For this section, three streets with vacant and squatted properties were selected as sample streets. Vector data for Bucharest's buildings, streets, and house numbers were imported into ArcGIS Pro (ESRI 2020) from OpenStreetMap to create the following visualizations (Figure 10, Figure 11, and Figure 12). Features are symbolized in color by their score for physical decay in 2018. Negative and zero values for change in physical decay are symbolized by white and lighter shades. In this assessment, a property's score for physical decay decreased if there were signs of improvement from one image year to the next. Improvements include trimmed vegetation, new paint, and visible structural repairs. The height of features represents the degree of physical decay observed in the Google Street View images for 2018.

Figure 10: Squatted, vacant, and all other properties on sample street A.

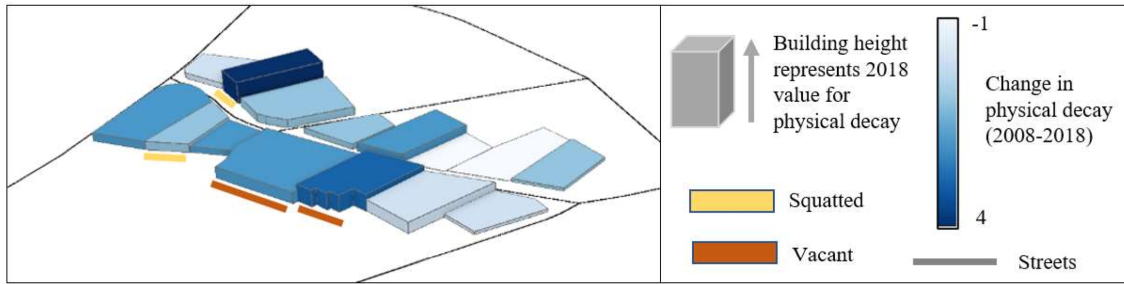


Figure 11: Squatted, vacant, and all other properties on second sample street B.

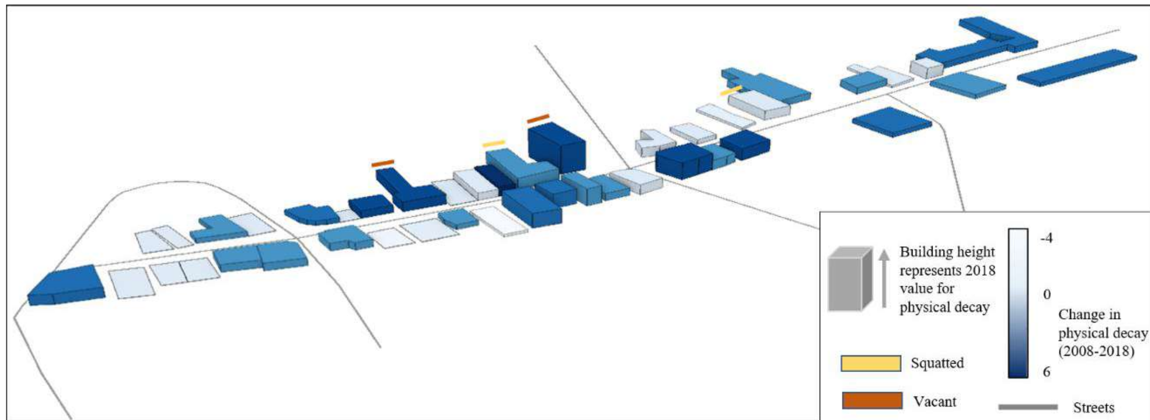
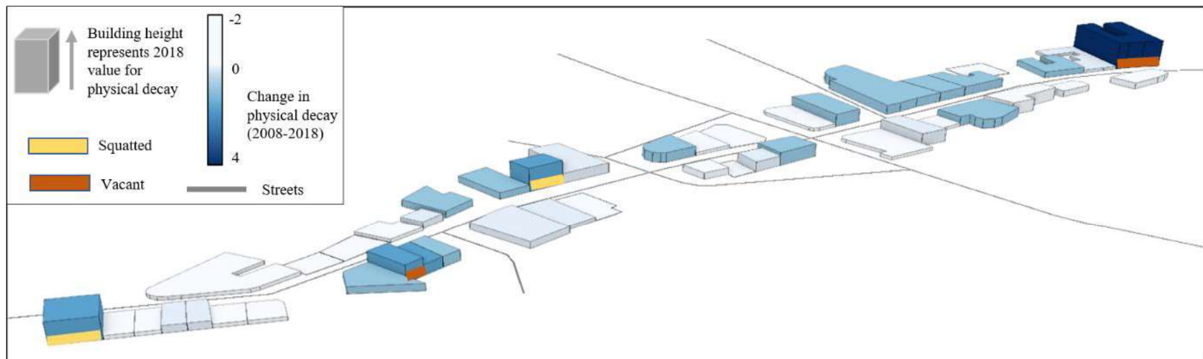


Figure 12: Squatted, vacant, and all other properties on third sample street C.

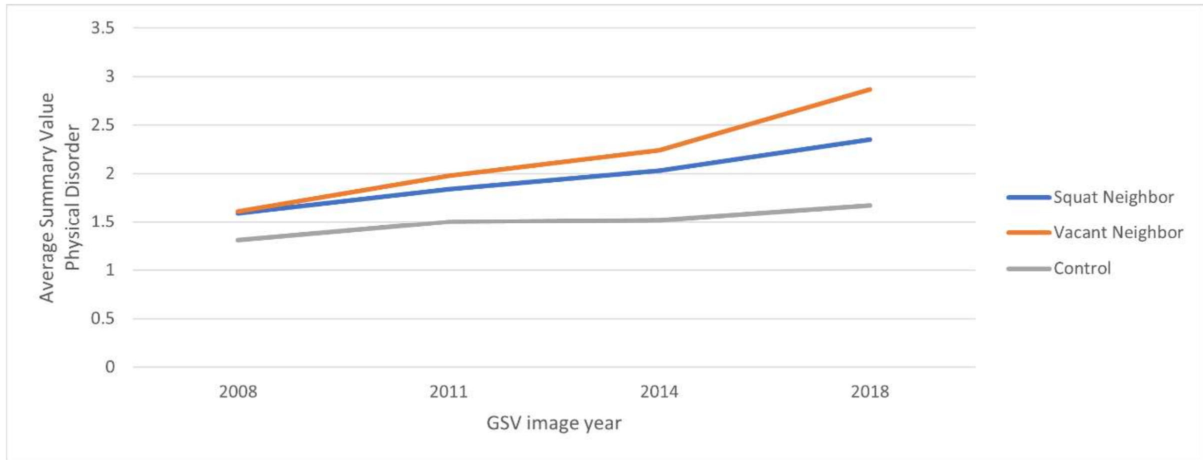


As can be seen in the maps, vacant and squatted properties are adjacent, which makes it difficult to determine the impact of each of these tenure types on neighborhood disorder. Although the relationship is not clear-cut, these visualizations do seem to suggest that properties located further from squatted or vacant buildings display fewer signs of physical

disorder and have not decayed over time to a similar extent as neighbors of vacant and squatted buildings.

Physical disorder was observed for neighboring properties of known vacant and squatted buildings on 18 streets. Each neighboring property on either side and one or two neighboring properties across the street; therefore, for each squatted and vacant building discussed previously (revisit Figure 9), I also assessed three or four of their neighbors. Since I assessed an unequal number of squatted and vacant buildings, 46 neighbors of vacant buildings and 68 neighbors of squatted buildings have been assessed. In the analysis, I consider the average summary value for all neighbors of vacant buildings and all neighbors of squatted buildings. The average scores of physical decay for control properties are also included. The results (Figure 13) from the analysis of neighboring properties show that while properties neighboring squatted buildings show signs of physical disorder and decay, which coincides with the Broken Windows Theory, properties neighboring vacant buildings have higher values for physical decay indicators. In addition, the values for neighbors of vacant buildings increased slightly more sharply than values for neighbors of squatted properties. The visualizations also show that, for the most part and within this 10-year period, the number of visible cues of physical decay increases more considerably for vacant buildings and their neighbors instead of squatted buildings and their neighbors. It is also important to repeat, that properties vacant in 2018 (included in this sample) were all previously squatted. For some of these properties, occupants were evicted before 2008, while other properties were vacated within this 10-year period. This could explain similar scores for physical decay between 2008 and 2011 for neighbors of both vacant and squatted properties.

Figure 13: Physical decay of structures neighboring vacant and squatted properties, as well as properties in control group.



2. Triangulating GSV analysis with interview data

During the analysis of interview data, several themes emerged that may explain patterns observed from GSV analysis. Some squatters maintain the informally occupied properties by painting exterior and interior walls, replastering, and repairing leaking ceilings. Interview data also suggest that squatters protect properties from vandals and practice informal social control. Finally, interview data suggest that oftentimes buildings rapidly deteriorate following an eviction and periods of vacancy. These three main themes that recur through the interview data contradict the popular representation of squatters as desecraters of the city's architectural and historic monuments.

a. Investment and maintenance by informal occupants

Most of my interview respondents explained that the spaces they informally occupy were originally uninhabitable and insalubrious when they initially entered. Squatters cleaned and performed necessary repairs so their families could safely occupy the space. For example, Stela explained that before her family moved into their first squatted home,

> it was one of those insalubrious houses. And that's why they were abandoned. More deteriorated, without doors, without door jambs, without windows, without parchet on the floor. There was garbage in the house. The neighbors from the street would go inside and throw things into those empty houses, their trash. And we took out the trash, we worked with the kids and everyone. Because there was trash this high, Jasmina. It was collecting there for years. Branches, trees, that were thrown there. And we cleaned it, removed the garbage. We worked over there. And then we put parchet on the floor, we put door jambs, windows, doors. We made improvements, more or less, so you could live in them.

Some of these squatted multi-family properties have units that are unoccupied because of garbage build-up. For example, during one of my visits, Radu explained some of his ideas to improve the unit he is squatting (e.g. removing a layer of bricks to increase living space and adding a kitchenette area). Radu would also like to annex the adjacent unoccupied room. When he opened the door to the vacant room, foul odor escaped and his mother immediately asked him to close it, saying: “It smells! It’s terrible. It needs to be cleaned and everything removed. The owner should come and pay for a truck to remove all that from here. We’re dying here from the smell.”

During their tenure, informal occupants oftentimes perform some maintenance and monetarily invest in the upkeep of these properties. Interviews reveal that most squatters regularly paint the interior (even sometimes exterior) of the spaces they occupy and fix ceilings when they are leaking. For example, after sharing his plans to improve his living space, Radu continued to explain that the owner knows his property is occupied and asked Radu to at least paint the exterior: “The owner told me this. So he’s not interested in the interior, only the exterior. And he told me this, you could stay there, you can, but I have a favor to ask, not a lot, at least paint.” Some of Radu’s improvements are even visible in the Google Street View images (Figure 14).

Figure 14: Visual example of informal occupants applying fresh paint to exterior walls; Google Street View images from 2008, 2011, 2014, and 2018 (counter-clockwise).

Despite the uncertainty of their tenure and lack of financial resources, sometimes informal occupants are left with no choice but to invest and perform repairs. According to a housing rights activist, households squatting a city-owned property "took out loans to remodel their unit after the fire, so they heavily invested in those apartments." For this specific case, these families were later evicted and the property secured for rehabilitation and earthquake retrofitting. At another address, families were also reluctant to invest but had to repair a leaky ceiling because, after all, they were living there.

> They are reluctant to invest because not sure how long they will be able to stay. Aura's mom ultimately added drywall because it was leaking in her unit and she

> didn’t want to repair because it’s expensive and what if they will be evicted, but ultimately they paid 500 lei and repaired, ultimately they are living there for the time being and it was just getting worse. (Field notes)

Ultimately, my conversations with informal occupants suggest that owners, whether it is the city or a private entity, rarely maintain these squatted properties and are not interested in improving the building’s conditions. Radu’s mother explains the precarity of their tenure and the owner’s disinterest in maintaining the property: “The owner came, they say it’s an inheritance. For us they won’t draft [ownership] documents anymore. So they wrote up a contract so we could stay like this for two years. But those two years passed and then she said you could stay here until the house falls over you.” Radu explains that as a result, he “take[s] care of the house so it won’t fall.” And Radu is optimistic that because of his labor to maintain the property, he will not be evicted:

> And I have this feeling that they’ll evict everyone. Everyone will be evicted. And I will remain here. I think, I have this feeling. Because, ‘Radu over there, Radu repair, Radu …’ So whatever you see over here is done by me [he plastered the exterior wall to reinforce] otherwise it would have fallen. So I’ve done as much as I could. … I don’t need it [pay]. But it’s not necessary. I’m grateful that I could stay there. To be able to fix that space so I could live like a normal man, a civilized man.

Thematic analysis of interviews reveals that tenure insecurity is the main reason occupants are reluctant to invest in larger renovation projects. Costel explains that if the municipality, which is the owner of the property he occupies, would legalize his family’s tenure, “if they would have left us here, we would have done something, renovate this house, but if they don't then we don't do anything, we stay like this.” Costel elaborates that although he and his neighbors renovate the inside of their units, they would repair the exterior too, if there was security of tenure: “we would repair the outside too but why should we put in

money if they will kick us out. We all talked to make the yard nice, to put a gate, but why. If the City Hall would leave us here, good, then yes."

b. Occupants guard properties

Another recuring theme in the analysis of interview data is the informal social control practiced by squatters. Respondents complained that despite the proximity of the local police office, their block is not patrolled by authorities. They complain that addicts freely consume drugs, especially heroine, in their yard and in front of their children, sometimes threatening residents with their used syringes. Interviews and field observations show that informal occupants regularly drive away drug users from their occupied space.

Monica explains that together with her husband, she guards her squatted property, making sure no one else enters and damages the building.

> We, even though we stay without paying anything, this is a fact is true. But, we took care of the house, because this isn't an area that is very okay. I don't know if you heard. I'm not being racist. There are a lot of drug addicts here. And they burn houses down and they destroy them, and they bring down the windows and we have been here for 6 years, we took care of everything, we didn't let anyone enter. Families came past us, to stay the way we stay and we fought with them, we didn't let anyone in. We didn't let them because of the owner not because of us. If it were up to me, if they are people in need, we would have let them stay, so they're not on the streets. The owner didn't even let our relatives stay.

Across town, at the address Alex and his family used to squat, he explains that although the building is empty, there is one person who lives there.

> The owner comes to see if street people entered, drug addicts. Because they enter, they see that no one says anything and they continue staying there. But now that there's that "security guard," he tells them to leave. If he doesn't want to get involved, he calls the police. There's a guard, a poor man, Mr. V. They gave him a room and said he could stay and stop people from entering. The owner gave him the keys to the building because she put locks on the door. She put a key and lock on the door. She put those bolts with locks. And he unlocks it and locks it.

Finally, located southwest of Alex's previous home, Tudor explains that he is living at his current address for 5 years, taking care of the property "like an administrator":

> There are empty apartments, yes. We don't let people move in. We don't let them enter because very many wanted to enter over there and we didn't let them. Because there were other people who stayed in this house. They tore it down... I mean, it was torn down. In other words, they did it. They took metals, whatever rods they found, this and that. When I entered there, everything stopped.

These three examples demonstrate that squatters perform informal social control in the neighborhood, inhibiting others from entering, causing social disorder, and even potentially damaging the property.

c. Decay increases after evictions

The analysis in this section shows that the occupation of buildings, even if this tenure is informal, may slow the aggravation of physical disorder. Values summarizing scores for all physical decay indicators (especially graffiti and deterioration) increased after buildings were evicted. Figures 2 and 6 show higher physical decay values for vacant properties and those neighboring vacant properties. This finding from GSV analysis coincides with the third major theme about physical decay that emerged from thematic analysis of interview transcripts. Informal occupants, as well as their neighbors, explained that once properties were forcefully vacated, often times some of the former occupants and other individuals from the neighborhood would vandalize the now vacant and prohibited property, by essentially deconstructing the structure. Although there are signs of urban decay around squatted properties, there are fewer signs of urban decay around squatted properties than vacant properties. This might suggest that occupation, even informal or illegal, slows urban decay. However, more research is needed, especially analysis that would test causation.

Representatives of a cultural organization that successfully reclaimed a large property that used to be squatted explained that their currently vacant property was vandalized even when a security guard was stationed there. Reportedly, the “baieti” [the boys] would come and take things, like iron and metals -- “baietii de vizavi” or “coloratii” (“the boys from across the street” or “the colored”; field notes from December 2018). The representative explained that the organization even hired security guards for a few years; but the security service was very expensive and the vandals (whom she referred to as gypsies) would distract the guards, enter and steal. Now, there’s nothing valuable left at that property.

Alex explained that after the building across the street from them was vacated, people came and started to vandalize the property: “Don't you see that even the sign that used to say ‘Blanarie’ isn't even there. The gypsies stole it, everything. Because after they kicked these people out of the building, the gypsies stole the metal sheets. Here, after they kicked them out, they started stealing everything from inside the building.”

Finally, Madalin from another part of town explains how one of the buildings in his neighborhood has decayed.

> That house is going to fall very soon. Do you know how dangerous it is? … It didn't look like this first of all. It used to be 'ca lumea' [proper]. So, here, after they were gone and not there anymore, we started to take things from inside. We would stay to take, to steal. So first, we took the corrugated tin sheets, the sheets from above the house. We took it to scrap metal collection center. After, we took the wood. The planks under the metal sheets. What was good, we sold and what wasn't good, we discarded. After, we took the floors. We were selling them to people who needed wood for fire. Whoever needed from this area, they would come and get it from the house also, but we wouldn't really let them come and take the wood anyway. And we wouldn't sell it to them, we would sell it farther away, in other parts. Anyway, and afterward, we would take the brick. We would take piece by piece, the bricks. Which brick was good, we would put it aside. We would bring down the entire wall down and we would put the good bricks separate, the bricks that weren't good, we would discard. Down, there are some iron rails, from the train, did you see those rails? Eh,

> those are the ones that support the house. Eh, we from there, took them out, from one end to the other, but the house was going to fall on us. We were going to die over there because if you take out those big ones, then you risk the house falling on you. Those are resistant, they resist. Eh, for example, here... They would be 4 meters, 5 meters, there were some even longer ones. And others that were smaller. And they had at the windows, look, there are still some, look, do you see? But you can't remove them anymore because if you go up there, it will fall on you. So you can't anymore.

This account is corroborated by one of Madalin's Romanian neighbors and local shopkeeper: "Over here, on the right side, there is a house, very beautiful. But gypsies went inside, and you know what they say, gypsies are like locusts, they clean everything up! Everything! So, basically, they finished it."

E. Discussion

This study combined systematic observations of physical disorder using Google Street View and thematic analysis of ethnographic data to better understand the link between informal tenure, vacancy, and physical disorder in Bucharest's inner-city historic neighborhoods. Convergence of different forms of data (i.e. quantitative scores for physical disorder, Google Street View images, interview transcriptions, and field notes) and analysis (i.e. thematic analysis of ethnographic data and basic descriptive statistical analysis of neighborhood assessments) facilitated a more comprehensive understanding of the studied phenomenon. To my knowledge, the effects of informal tenure on the physical decay of squatted buildings and neighborhoods have not been studied using this research approach of triangulation, and more specifically converging geovisualizations and systematic neighborhood assessments with ethnographic data.

The geovisualizations of three sample streets with squatted and vacant properties revealed spatial patterns that were not so apparent in the review of descriptive statistics of values for physical decay and thematic analysis of ethnographic data. Geovisualizations

revealed that properties located further away from vacant and squatted buildings exhibit fewer visible signs of physical decay in 2018 and lesser change in decay between 2008 and 2018. Systematic observations of physical decay using GSV images also revealed similar patterns. Comparison of average summary values for physical decay for vacant, squatted, and control properties for each GSV image year shows the following: 1) overall, for each of these three types of properties, the average number of observed signs of physical decay has increased between 2008 and 2018; 2) the average number of observed signs of physical decay for vacant properties is equal to or greater than the average number for squatted and control properties for each of the four GSV image years; and 3) the average number of observed signs of physical decay for neighbors of vacant properties is also equal to or greater than those for neighbors of squatted and control properties.

Interpretations drawn from geovisualizations and GSV analysis are corroborated by ethnographic data. Thematic analysis of these qualitative data revealed three main themes that may explain the difference in physical decay between vacant, squatted, and neighboring buildings. First, despite a general reluctance to invest in larger renovation projects due to tenure insecurity, squatters perform regular maintenance on these properties (e.g. interior and sometimes exterior painting, replastering walls, cleaning premises, and removing garbage in order to enter the unit). Second, squatters perform informal social control by for instance prohibiting other individuals from entering and occupying and expelling drug addicts from their yards or vicinity. Third, there are several examples of severe property destruction following an eviction. Interview data suggest that sometimes this destruction was performed by former informal occupants who were evicted; however, most of the time, this vandalism is

done by other individuals from the neighborhood or elsewhere, removing structural material to sell at scrap yards.

This study contributes an alternative interpretation of squatting to the existing literature about informal housing and urban decay. Data about Bucharest’s inner-city squatting complicate the simplistic idea that disorder leads to more disorder (Wilson and Kelling 1982). The practice of squatting vacant buildings is usually considered one of the indicators of urban disorder and decay, and therefore a magnet for other kinds of physical disorder (e.g. vandalism and unkept public/private spaces) in the neighborhood. This study shows that squatting could also be interpreted as a source of informal social control, which prohibits additional physical and social disorder. Interview data reveal that private property owners are aware of squatters and use their occupation precisely for the previous reason – to secure their property against future vandalism.

Although this study advances our understanding of Bucharest’s inner-city squatting, it has some limitations, primarily related to sample size. A larger sample of squatted and vacant properties would be needed to persuasively argue that these are general trends and could predict the state of a neighborhood’s physical decay given the presence of squatted or vacant buildings. Visualizations made apparent that sometimes vacant and squatted properties are adjacent, making it difficult to determine the impact of each of these tenure types on neighborhood disorder. A larger sample with more examples of squatted buildings that are not adjacent to vacant buildings would be useful. Finally, further mixed-methods research is needed to understand causal relationships between vacant buildings and physical disorder in Bucharest’s neighborhoods.

Chapter 4: Neighborhood social cohesion and squatters' communities

A. Introduction

Living together differently is at the heart of the research presented throughout this dissertation. Bucharest's historic center is characterized by people with different socioeconomic backgrounds and living conditions live right next to each other, sometimes within the same property. This juxtaposition is partly the outcome of Romania's post-socialist context and contemporary politics of property rights (see Chapter 1). Discourse analysis from Chapter 2 demonstrates that in public policy debates, squatting is predominantly perceived as a source of social disorder and a risk to public safety. This representation is also common in scholarly literature about neighborhood change and urban decay (Wilson and Kelling 1982; Skogan 1990; Kelling and Coles 1996; Immergluck and Smith 2006); as a research thread, this is discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

To a large degree, this chapter is framed by the concept of social cohesion. As Jane Jenson starts her report, "social cohesion is a concept with a history" (2010, p. 3) and, as such, it is important to consider its evolution as a concept and a practice. A review of the differences and relationships between social cohesion, inclusion, integration, and development goes beyond the remit of this study, but has thoroughly been done elsewhere (Larsen 2014). It is also a concept Jenson describes as "a hybrid operating within policy communities" and circulating within academia (2010, p. 3). Multinational institutions, such as the Council of Europe, the European Union, and the OECD, have declared social cohesion as a main policy goal area (Jenson 2010). As a practice, then, it is important to understand the concept's academic and policy roots and evolution.

Social cohesion has been conceptualized as “a field of forces” (Festinger 1950) that “link the micro- [individual] and macro- [group] level phenomena” (Friedkin 2004, p. 422), in other words the forces or social processes that keep individuals in their groups. Cohesion is scaled and multidimensional, encompassing “a shared sense of morality and common purpose; aspects of social control and social order; the threat to social solidarity of income and wealth inequalities between people, groups and places; the level of social interaction within communities or families; and a sense of belonging to place” (Forrest and Kearns 2001, p. 2129). Social cohesion is undermined by the lack of informal social control, greater socioeconomic inequalities (such as disparities in housing and household characteristics), minimal place-based interactions and social capital, and weak attachments to place.

Few studies have directly explored the link between squatting and a neighborhood’s social cohesion, which is surprising since this practice is oftentimes characterized as an example of social disorder. However, it has been found that squatters contribute to their community’s revitalization and reduced levels of disorder (Herbert 2018; De Biasi 2019). These case studies discuss squatting in American cities. Scant literature exists about European squatting (for survival) and social cohesion, which focus on the social interactions between squatters motivated by political agenda and migrants occupying vacant space for shelter (Bolzoni 2015; Belloni 2016; Mudu and Chattopadhyay 2016; Martinez Lopez 2017); the link between social cohesion and deprivation-based squatting in Bucharest is still unexplored. Research about squatting in Bucharest focuses on displacement and dispossession (Zamfirescu 2015; Lancione 2018), which, albeit important and inherent, are not the only features of informal tenure and squatting. Aguilera and Smart (2016) provide a case study from a European post-socialist context and could contribute to comparative

regional research about squatting. What is offered here is a connection to this work, and a broader appreciation of the complexities of local social and spatial cohesions and tensions.

B. Understanding Social Cohesion Broadly and in Context

The concept of social cohesion has been extensively researched, even at the more local scale of neighborhood and community (Kearns and Forrest 2000; Putnam 2000). Forrest and Kearns (2001) argue that social cohesion could be understood by its five components or domains: shared set of values and common civic culture; social order and control; minimal socioeconomic disparities; social capital; and place attachment or sense of belonging (see Table 6). Novy identifies three distinct perspectives in social cohesion research: socioeconomic, cultural, and political dimensions (2012). A socially cohesive city "offers a good life for all its inhabitants; they are allowed to be different and yet able to live together…. Within this context, cities can become places of belonging and territories which accommodate place-based specificities with equal opportunities for quality of life" (Novy 2012, p. 1884). In many ways this idea draws on the work of Yuval-Davies (1999), who talks about the right to be different and equal.

Table 6: Domains of social cohesion (directly from Forrest and Kearns 2001).

Domain	Description
Common values and a civic culture	Common aims and objectives; common moral principles and codes of behaviour; support for political institutions and participation in politics
Social order and social control	Absence of general conflict and threats to the existing order; absence of incivility; effective informal social control; tolerance; respect for difference; intergroup co-operation
Social solidarity and reductions wealth disparities	Harmonious economic and social development and common standards; redistribution of public finances and of opportunities; equal access to services and welfare benefits; ready acknowledgement of social obligations and willingness to assist others
Social networks and social capital	High degree of social interaction within communities and families; civic engagement and associational

	activity; easy resolution of collective action problems
Place attachment and identity	Strong attachment to place; intertwining of personal and place identity

The part of the study reported in this Chapter qualitatively explores how squatting is associated with social order and control, social capital, and place attachment. Therefore, this chapter is broadly about social relations, interactions, and sense of community between squatters and their neighbors. As mentioned earlier, visible are the differences in lifestyle and circumstance between households that live in neighboring properties or even the same property in Bucharest's historic center. In the historic center, socioeconomic disadvantage is interwoven and dispersed rather than concentrated and segregated. While social and wealth inequalities are rising in European countries (Piketty 2013; Atkinson 2015), the Roma minority's overwhelming precarity render them particularly vulnerable (Berescu 2006; Fleck & Rughinis 2008). Socioeconomic disparities and housing inequalities among Bucharest's residents are discussed in Chapter 2.

Resources (e.g. material, knowledge, and opportunities) are socially networked. Social capital allows resources to be accessible because of membership or connection to a network of social relationships (Bourdieu 1986; Putnam et al. 1993; Brisson and Usher 2007; Jenson 2010). Social capital is also not inherent or even socially natural but constituted by institutions or by mutual subjective feelings of obligations (Bourdieu 1986). Therefore, certain groups have access to social capital while others are excluded by rigid structures and institutions. Naughton (2014) suggests that Bourdieu's conceptualization of social capital does not consider certain groups and certain contexts. While social networks restrict access to certain individuals, groups normally considered marginalized and excluded benefit from other sets of social capital. For example, residential segregation could facilitate the

development of informal networks and social capital that circulate information and socioeconomic support (Phillips 2007; Bolt et al 2010). Along these lines, social capital has been conceptualized as a resource for self-help, or a convenient alternative to social welfare provisions for neoliberal governments (Naughton 2014), and an informal localization of welfare, or the devolution of this responsibility to the municipality, more local administrative unit, or the community (Andreotti et al 2012). Mistrust in traditional governing institutions is replaced by trust in formal and informal local community institutions (Forrest and Kearns 2001).

The concept of social capital has been used by economists, sociologists and geographers; for the latter, the concepts of place, sense of belonging, and context are important considerations in the study of social capital. Naughton (2014, p. 4) suggests that "context-specific and context-explicit narratives" have the opportunity to challenge the idea that any place, any economy could build up social capital from nothing and that this social capital could be considered a public good (Coleman 1988). Therefore, place attachment and belonging are ways individuals access networked social resources (Schaefer-McDaniel 2004, Naughton 2014) and are therefore important in this discussion about social cohesion.

Following Kearns and Forrest's conceptualization (2001), the absence of belonging, a sense of placelessness, or improper (temporary, provisional) citizenship would minimize social cohesiveness. Impropriety could be considered a "refusal to stay in one's proper place … [and] signals an act of radical reterritorialization, which might certainly include remaining in specific places" (Butler and Athanasiou 2013, 21). Therefore, precarity is more complex than just for instance loss of access to stable employment (Waitt 2011; Standing 2015) or different dimensions of housing insecurity (Routhier 2019); then, it is about slow

erosion and a larger swathe of dispossession that de-territorializes "… the genealogy of the proper(tied) subject." By suggesting this, Butler and Athanasiou (2013, 14) elaborate the notion of a self-contained, liberal subject with particular status ascribed to propertied citizenship. The precarious neo-liberal subject loses that status through state-prescribed exceptions (Agamben 2001), mutations (Ong 2006), and erasures (Aitken 2016). Butler and Athanasiou (2013) question how dispossession arises in conjunction with precarity, and explore theoretically how those who lose property and land also lose broader contexts of citizenship and belonging.

In Bucharest, the housing insecurity experienced by low-income Roma is etched onto their identification cards. Law 105/1996 "Population Record and Identity Cards" required applicants to provide documents verifying their location of residence, for instance a title to the property, rental agreement or signed document from the property owner indicating authorized occupancy (Monitorul Oficial Romaniei 1996). Provisional or temporary ID cards do not list an address for the individual and therefore communicate to others the vulnerability of the card holders, which may prompt discriminatory attitudes on the part of potential employers, landlords or educators (Sastipen 2015). Identity verification, either with a permanent or provisional card, is required to apply for social assistance services, including supplemental income and low-income subsidized housing. Temporary cards make it difficult to obtain formal employment (Rughinis 2004), which has the potential to further impoverish these families. These temporary cards diminish rights and are known on the streets as *fara spatiu* (literally, without space). For occupants living in this state, uncertainty becomes ordinary until the prolonged slow violence of dispossession is interrupted by the trauma of

displacement. These actions push legal liminality, spatial instability, and improper(tied) subjectivity.

Displacement is a predictable feature of informal tenure and evictions of squatters regularly occur in Bucharest (Zamfirescu 2015; Lancione 2018). Some families and individuals resist or oppose their dispossession by fighting to stay put and staying in place (Curti et al. 2013; Gillespie 2016). “Emotional geographies of belonging” (Askins 2016, 520-1) help build security and recognition in the face of confusing bureaucracies and unknown legalities. While dispossession and marginalization emanate from larger global processes (Sparke 2013), emotional citizenry and communities of care (Askins 2016) come about with ‘feeling-in-common’ through a complex assemblage of actors, materials, and places (Wright 2015). Askins extends the idea of citizenry to also consider “how individual bodies and emotions mutually co-constitute a broader body politic that exceeds any formal political sphere” (2016, 515). Here, it is shown how emotional citizenry and communities of care can lead to progressive politics (Wright 2015) and mitigated dispossession.

In the social cohesion and disorder literature, mirroring popular public opinion, squatters are generally considered contributors to social chaos and menaces to public safety. However, a few studies argue that there is a positive association between squatting and social cohesion. For instance, Herbert (2018) provides examples of squatters that contribute to their community’s revitalization and reduced levels of disorder. De Biasi (2019) elaborates on the distinction made by others between “good” and “bad” squatters (Dobbz 2012; Dee 2014), explaining that the former are committed to improving their community and inhabited property, while the latter cause problems and disorder such as selling drugs at the squatted property. Squatters’ sense of community is also insufficiently addressed. There are a few

studies about European squatting (for survival) that focus on the social interactions between squatters motivated by political agenda and migrants occupying vacant space for shelter (Belloni 2016; Mudu and Chattopadhyay 2016; Martinez Lopez 2017).

This chapter highlights difference from discourse seen in Chapter 3 because social cohesion in relation to squatters is complexly woven with local relations and emotions. Moreover, it is cohesive in the sense that there may be limited social capital beyond a particular squatter network; but nonetheless there is strong sense of community and bond limited to squatters who help each other out and share resources. This sense of community and embeddedness in the neighborhood is not that blatant or is missing from the dominant narrative which emphasizes fear and distrust between Romanians and squatters. Not only does it miss embodiment, it says little about embodiment:

> Bodies on the street are precarious -- exposed to police force, they are standing for, and opposing, their dispossession. These bodies insist upon their collective standing, organize themselves without and against hierarchy, and refuse to become disposable: they demand regard. (Butler and Athanasiou, 2013, i)

Moving beyond contexts of labor and employment, Butler (2006) deploys precarity to describe an ontological condition of vulnerability and interdependency. She elaborates how public representation determines whose lives are grievable and worthy of protection and whose are not. From this perspective, questions arise about the citizenship-rights and the subject-hood of urban Roma in a Romania increasingly defined by political, social and economic uncertainty. How are Roma lives made or unmade as ‘grievable’ and ‘livable’? What kind of political possibility is created around the conditions and concepts of precarity (Worth 2015)?

C. *Articulating a Sense of Social Cohesion.*

The research question for this chapter is the following: How and to what extent does squatting impact a neighborhood's social cohesion? Multiple data sources and analytical methods are used to answer this question, by exploring the following: 1) the extent to which squatters are embedded in their local communities and neighborhoods; 2) squatters' feelings and perceptions of their neighborhoods; 3) social relations between (mostly Roma) squatters and (non-Roma) neighbors; and 4) neighbors' perceptions of squatters and the impact of the practice on their neighborhood. Ultimately, these questions and the methodology described next allowed us to see the neighborhood from the eyes of its diverse residents. Geography has a long tradition of this kind of research, including David Ley's work portraying Philadelphia's predominantly black neighborhoods from residents' perspective (1974).

Research reported here is informed by data and methods used in the previous two chapters. Stories of Roma families were derived from field observations and interviews (detailed in Chapter 1). The interview guide included questions about interactions with neighbors (regardless of ethnicity and tenure status), sense of safety in the neighborhood, locations in Bucharest where respondents feel unsafe, and opinions about how their neighborhood has changed. These qualitative data were then thematically coded. On the other hand, visible cues of social control were observed in Google Street View images (detailed in Chapter 3). In the academic literature social disorder includes behavior such as fighting and arguing, shouting and swearing, street drug sales, and street prostitution (Skogan 2015). These activities are difficult to identify in static images; therefore, visible cues of social control and signs of measures taken to discourage disorder were assessed. More specifically, the following indicators were used for the assessment: security cameras, alarm system, barred

windows, and painted-over graffiti. These indicators were based on those used in Hwang and Sampson (2014). The same vacant, squatted, control, and neighboring properties from Chapter 3's study were assessed for this chapter's research. Properties received a value of "1" for the presence of each of these indicators representing efforts to prevent disorder. A summary value was compiled to represent the presence of observable social control for each property per GSV image year.

D. *Findings: Moving Beyond Discourse*

In public policy discourse, the practice of squatting is primarily represented as a source of social disorder. Action plans and strategies for local urban development recently approved by Bucharest's local city councils include recommendations to curb squatting to improve public safety and social order. Results from the analysis of Google Street View images do not suggest a clear difference in the frequency of observable cues discouraging disorder around squatted, vacant, or control properties. However, in my ethnographic data, there are reports of disorderly behavior in neighborhood areas with squatted properties. Interviews suggest a heightened level of mistrust and limited interactions between Roma squatters and non-Roma neighbors. These findings seem consistent with the dominant representation of squatting. Missing from this narrative is the squatters' strong sense of community and social capital, as well as tensions with neighbors. Analysis of qualitative data suggests that contrary to popular opinion, squatters are deeply embedded in and attached to their neighborhoods, despite official placelessness and displacement events.

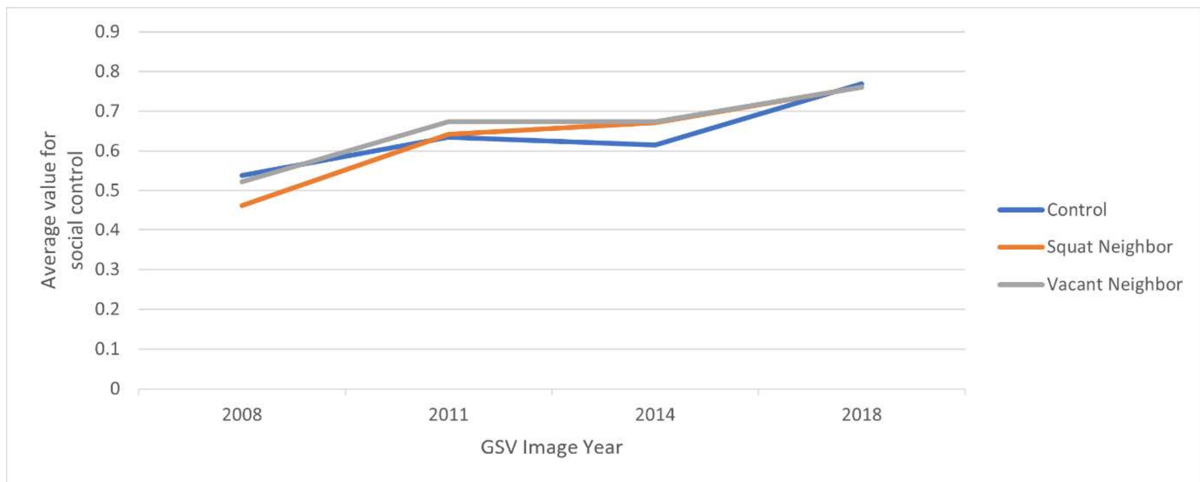
Thematic analysis of ethnographic data revealed key ideas that coincide with some of Forrest and Kearns domains for social cohesion (2001). Some of the main themes that

emerged during my analysis include feelings of social disorder and lack of public safety, limited social interactions between Roma squatters and non-Roma neighbors, strong sense of community and attachment to place but also a symbolic detachment from place, and experiences of displacement that are eased by emotional citizenries. This section is organized into the following three parts: 1) informal social control and social disorder, 2) place-based social capital and communities of care, and 3) placelessness, displacement and emotional citizenry.

1. Informal social control and social disorder

Signs discouraging disorder were observed for neighboring properties of known vacant and squatted buildings on 18 streets. Each neighboring property on either side and one or two neighboring properties across the street; therefore, for each squatted and vacant building I also assessed three or four of their neighbors. Since I assessed an unequal number of squatted and vacant buildings, 46 neighbors of vacant buildings and 68 neighbors of squatted buildings have been assessed. In the analysis, I consider the average summary value for all neighbors of vacant buildings and all neighbors of squatted buildings. The average scores of security measures for control properties are also included. Results (Figure 15) from the analysis do not suggest a significant difference in the number of observed signs of measures discouraging disorder for neighbors of vacant, squatted, and control properties. It seems that within this 10-year period, security measures to discourage disorder increased around all three categories of properties.

Figure 15: Graph shows average of the scores for social control for neighbors of squatted, vacant, and control properties.



Interview data suggest that vacant properties are used for illicit and disorderly behavior; however, GSV observations of measures to abate disorder for this, albeit small, sample of properties suggests neighbors' perceptions that social disorder and crime occur around vacant as well as squatted properties. These perceptions about disorder and lack of public safety were evident during interviews with both squatters and their neighbors.

During our interview, Ion and his wife Monica described their neighborhood as problematic, disorderly, and not a good place to raise their 6-year-old son and 3-year-old daughter:

> Monica: We heard about the neighborhood before we moved here, but we didn't think the area was quite this bad.
>
> Ion: We heard about it, but we didn't know 100%. I didn't want a place over here, but if I didn't have any other options. This neighborhood is very difficult. There are a lot of vagabonds. There are too many drug addicts, injecting in their veins, very many fights. So, there are very difficult things. And not only this neighborhood but most of Bucharest.
>
> Monica: In other words, if I were to leave the kids outside, they wouldn't see anything other than a man who injects himself on the street or others who are cursing, fighting, this is it. If we go outside, it's better if we take them to the park, or somewhere else

instead of here in front of the house. Because the child doesn't have what to learn. In fact, he knows what it means because we taught them to watch out, be careful where you walk so you don't step on a syringe because they throw them on the floor and...and they have...because the majority have AIDS, to get sick because of them. I drew their attention to this all the time and now they know. And they even saw, it's not possible not to see. Because exactly on this street, right here, is where it all happens. Not the entire neighborhood, it's more this street where we live. So what I saw here in the past six years, my entire life, I haven't seen before. They get undressed, completely because they think they have insects on them. They entered naked into the neighbor's house here.

Ion: This makes me so sad because they [his children] hear everything. This situation saddens me. When I was 10 years old, I still didn't know what these things meant. But, today's youth, even children, generally of his age –

Ion's son: Yeah.

Ion: They know everything. Because there is no more caution, people are no longer careful to, in other words, to be aware of a little child, to not speak in front of him. There are some things that children shouldn't know. Here, people talk dirty, they talk about different sorts of things. Well, I reached the conclusion to show my little one a syringe on the street. To tell him to be careful, walk with great attention to not be poked by one of this. I didn't want to, but I thought it's better for me to tell him so he knows, instead of something happening to him, God forbid, he gets pricked. Because they even threw them in our yard… Two years ago…

Ion's son: Two, yeah.

Ion: I went with him and bought a juice for him from the store, I stayed a few extra minutes to talk to someone on the phone and when I see him, he has a bullet in his hand. A bullet this big.

Ion's son: I saw it over there.

Ion: He showed me from where. And I saw that right there by my gate, there were ten bullets this big. And at that time, a police car passed and I stopped them and showed them that we found these by our gate, not me but my little one, he picked it up to play with it. I went to the station and made a report and that was it. And then, I started to warn my children. I sweep in front of the gate all the time, I sweep everything out of the way so when I go outside with them, they don't get pricked.

Andreea and Alex from another area in the historic center were terser with their response but alluded to similar concerns: "For me, for our family, for all of us, we're fed up with the neighborhood, with what happens there." A few blocks away on the same street, an

employee of a business neighboring a previously squatted property mentioned to me that for several years, informal occupants across the street would ask if he would like to pay and spend some time with one of their women. With an incredulous tone, he explained that despite his refusals, he still would be asked. Other neighbors also indicated that squatters (before their eviction) would sell drugs and prostitute women at this property.

Similar to Ion, who sweeps away used syringes to protect his family and discourage future disorder, other informal occupants shared similar concerns and commitment to guard their yard. Both Costel and Marin, living at different addresses and neighborhoods, explained how they oftentimes approach drug addicts loitering on their street and force them to leave. Illegal activities such as drug dealing and pimping are not the only types of social disorder identified by some squatters and their neighbors. Ion alluded to regular events of fighting, shouting, and profanity in the public spaces around his home, creating a chaotic environment from which he prefers to shield his children.

There seems to be mistrust and social distance between Roma squatters and their non-Roma neighbors. Andreea and Alex explain the interactions between the squatters in their yard and Romanians living in neighboring properties:

> Alex: Yes, we greet each other when we see one another. But nothing more than that.
> Jasmine: But they don't stay outside and talk?
> Alex: No, no, I haven't seen them stay.
> Andreea: Who?
> Alex: Neighbors from other buildings.
> Andreea: Ah, no, no, no. I thought our neighbors.
> Alex: In our yard, yes, neighbors stay and socialize. But neighbors from outside our yard, we don't really have any business with them.
> Andreea: I think they don't even want to see us.

In these centrally located and historic neighborhoods, especially during the summer and autumn months, I regularly observed informal occupants gathering outside in front of their building or on the sidewalk. After meeting these families and frequently joining them as they sat outside in conversation, I observed some neighbors greeting informal occupants, but seldom joining the group. Several of my respondents were even surprised that I would sit on the sidewalk as they did. During our conversations, some individuals referred to a widespread Romanian bias against Roma. For example, Andreea explained that "some Romanians… even though we are all Romanians, we are the same… but some Romanians are kind of bad. They say 'look, the gypsy' and laugh at us. They are being racist." A businessowner with a store down the street from a squatted property seemed to harbor the sentiments alluded to by Andreea. Snickering, he tells me about his squatting neighbors:

> During the summer they gather. On the corner, at the intersection, about 20 meters from this store, on the right-hand side, they take out sofas from inside their house. There's another individual who self-identifies as the king of the neighborhood. There are fights, the police comes, at the dilapidated building over there, where there are rugs hanging from the balcony. So over there, all sorts of things happen. Then, there's another building like this, suspicious, down and across the street, there's like a hole, full of garbage, feces, everything that you don't want you could find in there.

When asked about racist attitudes among neighbors, one of this shopkeeper's squatting neighbors responded that there is racism in the neighborhood and at public institutions such as schools; however, he believes these popular discriminatory opinions are not only a reaction to someone's skin color (i.e. appearing to be Roma) but also to their character and behavior.

> Yeah, it's based on color. And it also depends on your character. I also have friends that are all black. The character matters more than the color. And, after all, we're human beings so we're not all the same. One finger on a hand does not look like any of the other fingers. Think about it in the following way -- these are people who make

> noise, they don't have a single document for that house, it would bother you, no? I'm thinking that it bothers them [neighbors] too.

Therefore, squatters themselves have recognized some of their behavior, or that of neighbors who are also squatting, as disorderly. In the lengthy excerpt at the start of this section, Ion and Monica explain how they avoid interacting with their neighbors who are also squatters but unruly. In another property, Corina does not allow her 5-year-old son to play with the children of other squatters in the yard: “he prefers to stay at my mom instead of in our yard because there are those kids who are very bad. He sees that they are playing outside but because I don't let him go outside to play with them, he gets upset even more, so he prefers to stay with my mom.” These examples show that just as any other neighbor, some squatters are more committed to preserving social order in the community than others. Following an unsuccessful eviction attempt by local authorities, one respondent cleverly fused two popular Romanian sayings: “Even though we find ourselves in the same pot, please do not place us in the same pot.” In other words, local authorities were trying to evict each of the families squatting the property, regardless of their actions and behavior. They all found themselves with the same urgent and sudden dilemma; however, some of those families engaged in disorderly and criminal behavior. Corina urged us and others to resist reducing our characterization of squatting households to the stereotype that they are all unruly neighbors and criminals.

2. Place-based social capital and communities of care

The previous section shows that not all squatters interact in the same way with their neighbors, either other Roma squatters or non-Roma formal residents. Notable in the interview data is the recurring reference to social connections and relations that help

respondents locate places to squat, find informal jobs, and meet material needs (e.g. food, clothing, or furniture). Examples of squatters' social capital abound. These are instances of disadvantaged households leveraging their family and community ties to meet needs for survival and subsistence when government welfare programs, such as social housing, are beyond their reach.

Corina described the way her family found their current home:

> [We were here] since 2007. How I came here? We came here exactly like this, the owner reclaimed my parent's home. We were evicted and we came here. And from here they are evicting us again… Here, I found [this place] through acquaintances, friends. I came and they let me stay out of pity, basically. I do not have documents here. I am staying on my own count. Because I did not have anywhere to go with three children after we were evicted.

Receiving a tip from acquaintances or family about vacant space is how many families start to squat. In another corner of Bucharest's historic center, Livia explained that together with her young daughter who was a few months old at the time, she was evicted and left to sleep on the streets. Acquaintances brought her into the one room she currently informally occupies. People pitied her, she said, and allowed her to enter the vacant space.

Place-based social capital is critical for squatters' daily survival. These social resources also exemplify the extent to which squatters are embedded in their neighborhoods and local communities – a common dimension of squatting often overlooked in the dominant narrative about the practice. These long-term social processes allow squatters to develop communities of care. Environments that facilitate long-term communities of care are derived partly from everyday aid around material needs. Stela, a Roma grandmother, alludes to the strength behind this kind of formation. Stela's family were evicted after 24 years of residence; however, their community of care with neighbors persisted:

> Yes, it was very hard when we separated. We started to cry, all of us. We were like a family, all of us. Do you realize, to stay 20 years, to stay that many families in one yard. We were like a family with everyone. I want to say that if one of us didn't have something, for example, my kids and I don't have what to eat today, as an example, the other neighbors would come with a tray of food or with the pot, with bread under their arms. We would help each other, if that neighbor of mine didn't have and I had, I would help him when I could. That's how we were over there. Or if I didn't have coffee in the morning, my neighbors from the yard would come with coffee.

After squatting her space for more than ten years, Corina and her family, along with the yard's other households, waited several weeks for an update regarding the local authority's attempted eviction. Will her family and her neighbors be able to stay at the privately-owned property they were squatting? Following an NGO's intervention, the police suspended their actions, purportedly to communicate with the property owner and get the necessary legal documents to continue the eviction. During their agonizing wait, residents, slept on the floor, reluctant to bring back their furniture and risk the confiscation and destruction of their belongings (a common occurrence during evictions). During this time of heightened uncertainty, families were all sharing the last remaining stove to heat water and cook for all the neighbors in the yard. These examples demonstrate that communities of care arise from persistent and ordinary, as well as urgent and extraordinary needs.

In general, squatters prefer to remain in the city center with their community. Cristi, who still squats in Bucharest's Old Town, despite the municipality's multiple rounds of evictions within the area in the early 2000s, exclaims: "I lived here for 30 something years; how could I not know everyone! I don't know about other areas because I haven't stayed anywhere else, and I won't!" In another part of the historic center, Andreea explained that she had the opportunity to relocate to a more peripheral area, but with more secure tenure. She decided to continue squatting in the city center because of her community:

> I grew up for 16, 17 years in such chaos, with a lot of people in the house, someone says something, someone else says something else, a scream, etc. And then there, my husband goes to work, I stay home, I stay a few more hours and then I go to work, then I come home and it would seem like something is incomplete. So I said no, not anymore, I can't stay there, let's go back to our chaos because we got used to it over there, our place is over there.

Finally, even Tudor, a pensioner who struggles with everyday chores due to an amputated leg and relies on his relations for support, declined the option of living in the countryside with his sister in order to remain in the city center within his social network. This place-based social capital and strong sense of community are frequently missing from dominant representations about squatters.

3. Placelessness, displacement and emotional citizenry

Despite squatters' strong sense of community and place-based social capital, placelessness, at least formally, is also an aspect of this practice. This official detachment to place is recorded in their identification documents. Temporary ID cards represent and embody precarity. For example, Corina explains: "The temporary ID card is something normal for us. Because there are so many like this. Because there are many who don't have homes. Temporary ID cards are [for] people who don't have homes". Corina clarifies that her ID card lists "an address without space. So, the street is written but it is not written that I stay at this or that number. So [I am] without space." Given the requirement of annual renewal for provisional cards and confused by the application process, many informal occupants have neither permanent nor temporary identification documents. Others pay acquaintances to "take them in" so they could list this other person's address on a permanent identification card. For example, Alex explains: "I lived on Street -- . I live now on Street -- and I have my ID card on Street -- nr -- . So, I lived on this street, I moved over there, and I have my ID done on this other street. I did it at a lady, 800 lei, to take me in for my ID card." Private owners of

restituted properties rarely vouch for their known but informal occupants, who then are given provisional ID cards that require annual renewal. As squatters without formal authorization of tenure, occupants could be easily removed with a court order. On the other hand, in previous eviction cases, documents that formally acknowledge an occupant's tenure (e.g. expired rental contracts) were used by civil society to pressure property owners (both public and private) to provide alternative housing for evicted households. Therefore, temporary ID cards highlight squatters' housing insecurity, while limiting access to services and therefore also enhancing their overall precarity.

These *fără spaţiu* cards could be thought of as symbolic displacement – figuratively maintaining these Romanian Roma as detached from any specific place in the city. However, along with this figurative lack of belonging and place attachment, real displacement regularly occurs, with its negative effects mitigated by the support from an emotional citizenry. The following stories from Ana-Maria and Corina represent the positive and formidable impact of an emotional citizenry.

I first met Ana-Maria living on the street as she rinsed her pots and hung her freshly cleaned clothes. Nearly two years before we met, Ana-Maria watched as bulldozers demolished her home of twenty years. It was an old building subdivided during Bucharest's socialist era to provide housing for working-class families and more recently returned to its previous owner. Her rental contract was renewed for only five years, after which she became an illegitimate occupant. The property's sale was deferred until the market recovered from the global recession. Once sold, the house was razed to the ground as the land itself, centrally located in Bucharest's historic and gentrifying district, held revenue potential. Ana-Maria and several other Roma families set up camp on the street beside where their home had stood.

When we met Ana-Maria in the summer of 2016, she and her family had been living on the street for over 18 months in an improvised wooden and tarpaulin structure they had pieced together themselves. She recounted the help they received from civil society: “People from NGOs brought us camping tents with zippers, blankets, pillows. People who passed would bring us clothes, food. They helped us a lot, those people from the NGOs. And we thank them for this.”

Ana-Maria’s story is a fight to stay put (Curti et al. 2013) on the street of her demolished home. With the help of friends in charities and non-governmental organizations, her story is a provocative call on the municipality to house them as vulnerable citizens. These three actions begin to situate a grievable and livable context for Ana-Maria and open the possibility of emotional citizenry. A few years after Ana-Maria's renewed contract, her family and twenty-six others received notices to evacuate. When asked how she feels about having to leave her home of twenty years, Ana-Maria responds:

> As you can imagine, it was our life’s work. It was the childhood of my children who were raised and born there. And it’s hard …Your labor goes and you don’t have anywhere else to go, after a life of living in that house, and you invested money. But it is not only about investment, because you make investments in any house. It is a matter of where the children grew up, there are memories there, moments you lived over there. And it is hard, very hard. (Ana-Maria, 21 July, 2016)

When asked about the emotional impact of eviction, Ana-Maria’s teenage son was especially aware of the effects on his family’s social network:

> Well, that is where we stayed since we were little. We were used to staying there. We were accustomed to everyone around us. We got along well with everyone. That is it. After they kicked us out, some went to one place, others went somewhere else, and we were separated, us friends. (Andrei, 4 August, 2016)

Bodies on the street are precarious and demand regard (Butler and Athanasiou, 2013, i). The bodies of Andrei and Ana-Maria, and those of several neighbors, occupied their home's street for a year and half in constant worry of removal without reasonable alternatives. Their vulnerability enabled Ana-Maria and friends to create "emotional geographies of belonging" (Askins 2016, 520-1). A sense of that which is possible (Butler 2006) empowers Ana-Maria to engage over time with friends in place-based encounters that promulgate inter-scale belonging through lines of connection and disconnection and fluid, hybrid identities and political allegiances.

In another corner of Bucharest's historic center, Corina and her neighbors were also stripped of their right to formally and legally reside where they had lived for decades. The property was returned to the former owner who did not draft a new rental contract, but visited every few years reassuring more than twenty families they would not be evicted, and advising them to collect firewood for the winter. On a summer morning, the local police visited and demanded entry into the units, insisting that all families wait outside in the yard as rooms were searched for drugs. Without a court order, the police acted on the pretext of complaints from neighbors and reports of drug use and trafficking on the premises. Men and women were asked to stand separately while entry doors and storage shacks were knocked down. Families were given 48 hours to remove their belongings and themselves, but intervention from experienced local volunteer activists enabled them to continue living there. A month after the eviction attempt, families were still uselessly asking local police for updates on their situation. They continued to wait with fear of becoming homeless in the winter. Despite this numbing uncertainty, Corina is tearfully grateful for the volunteers' unassuming and crucial support:

> Thanks to that [volunteer], and I've said this many times, because if he didn't come then, we would have been abusively removed, the way they wanted. When that boy came and asked, 'on what grounds are you evicting them? You came here to clean up, not to remove them.' And no one said another word.

Emotional citizenry enabled Corina and the other occupants to stay put, but with heightened feelings of precariousness.

While Corina and Mariana stayed put, Ana-Maria and her family were forcefully removed; but, as we mention earlier, they did not move very far. Having no housing alternative and refusing to accept displacement, Ana-Maria and her family resisted by staying connected to a place directly adjacent to where the children were raised. Her decision was motivated by a perceived right to housing, and she felt that staying close elaborated that right:

> We were not owners either, but we previously had documents [a rental agreement with the city's housing administration] ... That's why we stayed in place. And because we stayed in place, we protested … Fine, it was also a matter of principle, but it was my right. To stay, for them to give me housing … I paid the state for years.

Support from local and international volunteers created for Ana-Maria the kind of emotional citizenry that Askins argues is inter-scaled and affective. Even with this support, living on the street was not easy:

> I felt like a *boschetar* (street person). And a lot of clothes caught on fire because the embers [from cooking and heating fires] would jump on us. Do you understand? It was suffering. I think this is a story that will remain engraved in our minds, like a trauma. Like a trauma, what we suffered.

When their shacks were bulldozed in July 2016, Ana-Maria's family received affordable housing in a new city-owned apartment in the periphery of Bucharest. When asked how he feels about their new home, Andrei responds: "The new house is a new life. We started a new

life in it. We arranged it with what is needed. With what God was able to give us. And we are grateful we have someplace to rest our head."

When we last met with Ana-Maria's family, it was hard not to conclude that the outcome of all their struggles was positive. They were happy with the newness of the subsidized apartment, but they were nonetheless displaced from the social networks and place-based attachments of their previous neighborhood. Corina and Mariana, as with other squatters we interviewed, were certain that it is only a matter of time before their families would also be moved away from the gentrifying core of Bucharest. As Mariana said, "you have to wait and be prepared that, right when you don't expect it, when you say 'I am happy', that's when the police come."

E. Conclusion

This study's findings about the social dimension of squatting reveal three aspects that are usually absent from dominant representations of the practice. To my knowledge, only a few studies have used social cohesion and similar concepts to frame an analysis of squatting in Europe, many of which are about refugee migrants that occupy vacant space for shelter (Bolt et al 2010; Bolzoni 2015, Belloni 2016, Mudu and Chattopadhyay 2016; Martinez Lopez 2017). My qualitative interview data are replete with references to social order maintained by formal or informal control, social capital, and attachment to place. These three sets of references represent some of the social cohesion domains identified by Forrest and Kearns (2001).

Research about urban decay and physical disorder links squatting with neighborhood decline (reviewed in Chapter 3). In this literature, squatters are commonly considered one of

the signs of disorder as well as a cause of more disorder. Few studies have investigated the association between squatting, informal control, and social order (Herbert 2018; De Biasi 2019). With their case studies representing American cities, De Biasi argues that some squatters, more specifically the “good squatters” (Dobbz 2012), are committed to neighborhood improvement and discouraging social disorder. The work reported in this chapter contributes a case study from a European post-socialist context to the literature. Results from the analysis of Google Street View images did not show a considerable difference in the number of observed signs discouraging disorder around vacant, squatted, or control properties; however, qualitative interview data suggest that some squatters as well as neighbors perceive the presence of social disorder at and around squatted addresses. Similar to residents formally owning or renting property, there is a wide range of behaviors and social relations for informal occupants in Bucharest’s historic center. This diversity is represented by the differentiation Dobbz (2012) makes between “good” and “bad” squatters, the latter engaging in disorderly and even criminal behavior such as drug dealing and pimping. Some interview respondents cautioned against reification and reduction, insisting that not all squatters are the same. Despite popular representation of squatters as miscreants, qualitative interview data suggest that some squatters practice informal social control, oftentimes to protect their families from drug addicts, used syringes, and street fights.

Literature about squatters does not thoroughly address their attachment to place (despite their insecure tenure), sense of community, and social capital. Regarding squatting in the European context, the literature that reviews social dimensions generally focus on migrant refugees, their social integration, and their interactions with resident political squatters. Thematic analysis of ethnographic data revealed squatters’ strong place attachment

and extensive place-based social capital. Social relations connected to their neighborhood helped respondents locate places to squat, find informal jobs, and meet material needs. The examples discussed in the previous section suggest that social capital serves as a local informal welfare system (Andreotti et al 2012). The strong sense of community among many squatters is missing from dominant narrative both in public policy discourse and in popular opinion and media.

Provisional ID cards are related to feelings of belonging. While squatters' feel attachments to place, they also experience symbolic and real displacement. These precarious families are supported by citizenship in a different body politic – one coalesced around "feelings-in-common", emotions, and common values. The study provides empirical evidence to support Butler and Athanasiou's (2013) assertion that those who lose property and land also lose broader contexts of citizenship and belonging. *Fără spaţiu* cards highlight pointedly that being 'without space' is also about a loss of status. We demonstrate that although this administrative taxonomy suggests placelessness, these informal occupants feel attached to their neighborhood. Family members elaborated an emotional citizenry through heightened feelings of strength in the face of more precarity, and gratitude for the social connections and support that were part of their lives.

This study suggests there are ways that citizenship and belonging emotionally engage against the exclusions of a propertied nation-statehood. Our case study provides some understanding of the possibility of a place-based and emotional citizenship from which the dispossessed can act through their precariousness to establish socially cohesive neighborhoods where they live together differently.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

This dissertation sprang from the observation that neighboring residents in Bucharest's historic center lived very different lives, for instance and in particular, in terms of housing conditions. Bucharest's housing justice activists advocated on behalf of squatters experiencing evictions from buildings that were historically nationalized, currently reclaimed by former owners, and officially recognized as historic monuments by the municipality. Simultaneously, there were constant calls to preserve the city's cultural heritage, which some advocates believed was threatened by squatters.

I began my research excursion by performing a discourse analysis of the Bucharest municipality's public policy documents, in order to problematize the dominant discourse around squatting and the main narrative that informal housing is an urban problem (rather than a manifestation of other problems). I challenged this dominant discourse by collecting personal accounts regarding lived experiences of squatting, thematically analyzing these ethnographic data, comparing these realities to official census data, and systematically assessing observable signs of physical decay and prevention of social disorder using Google Street View images. I explored some of the common associations that emerged from the discourse analysis: for instance, that squatting promotes physical decay and jeopardizes public order and safety. Thus, I started this research with one broad: *how does the dominant discourse about squatters differ from their lived realities?* In this concluding chapter, I synthesize the study's findings and then review limitations that could lead to further research.

A. Synthesis of findings

1. Lived experiences

One of this dissertation's research objectives was to develop a broader understanding of the heterogeneity in the characteristics of squatting households and their experiences of housing insecurity. In Chapter 2, I asked: *How do the experiences and identities of informal occupants differ from how they are represented in dominant discourse in the public policy domain?* To explore this question, I first performed discourse analysis and then compared the results with ethnographic data. Thematic analysis of qualitative interview data revealed heterogeneity and multidimensionality of squatting. Housing insecurity is a function of more than just tenure status and housing prices (Routhier 2019); multidimensional insecurity experienced by squatters is evident in this case study.

Compared to the general population, Bucharest's Roma minority generally experiences lower rates of homeownership, fewer household amenities, higher rates of unemployment, and lower levels of completed education. These factors increase their likelihood of housing insecurity. To highlight the severe general precarity experienced by inner-city squatters, I compared my respondents' housing and household characteristics to those of Bucharest's Romanian and Roma populations. Among the 23 interview respondents, 22 belonged to households that were fully Roma or mixed Roma and Romanian. While 27% of renting Roma households are experiencing some degree of inadequate housing conditions, more than 50% of my respondents have improvised connections to electricity and/or water, some of whom also lack a toilet and/or bath in their unit. Many of my respondents collect their income from informal and irregular labor; only 5 respondents reported formal part-time or full-time employment. Given their low and inconsistent incomes, all respondents reported

to be priced out of the private rental market. Many of my respondents explained that they currently are or in the past were on the waiting list to receive social housing. None of my respondents were hopeful that their request for social housing will be granted. Therefore, informal housing was the only feasible housing option that would allow them to remain in the city center.

2. Impact on urban landscape

The second research objective was to explore the relationship between squatting and neighborhood decay, specifically the impact of squatting on the physical deterioration of urban historic landscapes. In Chapter 3, I asked: *How and to what extent does informal housing arrangements lead to the physical deterioration of occupied and neighboring historic structures?* To answer this question, I combined systematic observations of physical disorder using Google Street View and thematic analysis of ethnographic data. This approach enabled a more comprehensive understanding of the link between informal tenure, vacancy, and physical disorder in Bucharest's inner-city historic neighborhoods.

Geovisualizations revealed that properties located further away from vacant and squatted buildings exhibit fewer visible signs of physical decay in 2018 and lesser change in decay between 2008 and 2018; however, the difference between physical decay of squatted and vacant properties, as well as their neighbors, is not very apparent in the geovisualizations. Systematic observations of physical decay using GSV images also revealed the following patterns: 1) between 2008 and 2018, observable signs of physical decay for vacant, squatted and control properties increased; 2) for each of the four GSV image years, observable signs of physical decay for vacant properties is equal to or greater than those for squatted and control properties; and 3) observable signs of physical decay for

neighbors of vacant properties is also equal to or greater than the average number for those of squatted and control properties.

Ethnographic data corroborated the patterns observed from geovisualizations and GSV analysis. Three main themes emerged from analysis of ethnographic data: 1) squatters perform regular maintenance (e.g. interior and sometimes exterior painting, replastering walls, cleaning premises, and removing garbage in order to enter the unit); 2) squatters perform informal social control; 3) there are several examples of severe property destruction following evictions of squatters. My argument is that squatting historic monuments rather than leaving them vacant, slows their deterioration by preventing their vandalism and deconstruction (by individuals looking for scrap material).

3. Social cohesion

The third research objective was to describe occupants' social relations and embeddedness in their neighborhood. In Chapter 4, I asked: *How and to what extent does informal housing impact a neighborhood's social cohesion?* The study reported in this chapter was framed by the concept of social cohesion, which could be understood by its five components or domains: shared set of values and common civic culture; social order and control; minimal socioeconomic disparities; social capital; and place attachment or sense of belonging (Forrest and Kearns 2001). This investigation into the link between squatting and neighborhood social cohesion relied mainly on thematic analysis of ethnographic data; however, I also used Google Street View images to observe signs of disorder. Results from the analysis of GSV images did not show a considerable difference in the number of observed signs discouraging disorder around vacant, squatted, or control properties.

Types of behaviors and social relations of informal occupants in Bucharest's historic center span a wide range. Some interview respondents cautioned against homogenization of squatters, insisting that not all are the same. While some respondents explained that they practice informal social control in their neighborhoods, forcing drug addicts to leave or cleaning up used syringes from the street, qualitative interview data suggest that some squatters as well as neighbors perceive the presence of social disorder at and around squatted addresses. Thematic analysis of ethnographic data also revealed squatters' strong attachment to place (despite their insecure tenure), sense of community, and extensive place-based social capital. Social relations connected to their neighborhood helped respondents locate places to squat, find informal jobs, and meet material needs. Conversely, while squatters' felt attachments to place, they also experienced symbolic and real displacement. Informal occupants were regularly evicted from centers of Romania's major cities (see for instance Dohotaru 2013; Zamfirescu 2015; Lancione 2018). Evictions were also a significant aspect of my respondents' experiences of squatting. Symbolic displacement is represented by provisional identification cards, which are related to feelings of belonging but also citizenship and a loss of status. These precarious families felt attached to their neighborhood and were supported by citizenship in a different body politic – one that comes together around "feelings-in-common", emotions, and common values.

4. Discourse

The primary goal of this dissertation was to understand how squatting is popularly represented in public policy discourse and then direct attention to alternative – more nuanced and complex – representations. The analysis discussed in Chapter 2 uncovered three significant representations that appeared in the discourse (with varying frequencies): 1)

squatters as predominantly Roma, 2) squatting as an urban problem, and 3) squatting as the result and reflection of other social and political problems. The second representation was the most frequent and dominant in the discursive material analyzed, followed by the first and the third representations. The dominant discourse in Bucharest's public policy realm homogenized squatters as criminals, a risk to public safety and social order, a nuisance jeopardizing the city's image, and vandals that destroy cultural heritage. The discourse contained few references to the socioeconomic inequalities between squatters and their neighbors and produced a homogenizing rhetoric about squatters. There did not seem to be much if any polarization in Bucharest's public policy discourse (Martinez 2019); informal occupants were all represented as "bad squatters" (Bouillon 2013). Personal accounts from occupants and analyses in Chapters 2, 3, and 4 provide knowledge that could diversify this homogenized narrative that dominates popular opinion but also public policy discourse.

Findings reported in Chapter 2 start to contradict the dominant representation that squatting is the problem (and not the manifestation of other social and political problems). The multidimensional housing insecurity of squatters and disparities in socioeconomic household characteristics are not part of the dominant narrative.

In the dominant narrative that circulates in public policy discourse, squatters vandalize and destroy the city's cultural heritage. These informal occupants stain the good image of Bucharest. Findings from Chapter 3 contribute an alternative interpretation of the relationship between squatting and urban decay. Squatting could also be a source of informal social control, which prohibits additional physical and social disorder. Interview data reveal that private property owners are aware of squatters and use their occupation precisely for the

previous reason – to secure their property against future vandalism. This aspect of squatting is missing from the dominant narrative.

When it comes to social relations, the only references in dominant representations are about public order and safety. Squatters are portrayed as a source of social disorder. This dominant representation is challenged by findings described in Chapter 4. Results from the analysis of Google Street View images do not suggest a clear difference in the frequency of observable cues discouraging disorder around squatted, vacant, or control properties. Ethnographic data include reports of disorderly behavior in neighborhood areas with squatted properties, as well as heightened levels of mistrust and limited interactions between Roma squatters and non-Roma neighbors. While these findings seem consistent with the dominant discourse, missing are squatters' strong sense of community and social capital. The dominant narrative rarely if ever referred to their embeddedness in their neighborhoods, as well as the emotional citizenry and communities of care that arise especially during urgent events of displacement.

B. Contributions

This dissertation shows that squatting is a nuanced and diverse social process and manifestation of other social problems (e.g. inequalities in employment, education, and income among Roma and non-Roma). Squatting is much more complex than the way it is described by city councilmembers in public policy discourse. It is also more complex than the way much of academic literature suggests – that housing insecurity is primarily tied to tenure status because of the emphasis on evictions and displacement. This dissertation contributes to literature that highlights the distinctions in squatter's motivations, circumstances, and experiences (see Martinez 2019 for an example). Existing literature about

European squatting usually focuses on politically motivated occupation. This dissertation contributes a case study about squatting in Europe that is drive by socioeconomic insecurity, or deprivation-based squatting.

This study contributes to the housing research strand that considers the multidimensionality of housing insecurity (for example, Routhier 2019). Variables that are usually considered in studies about housing insecurity include tenure status, housing conditions, and housing prices and affordability. Other contributing factors such as low levels of education, unemployment, and low income, are not considered a component of housing insecurity; however, these socioeconomic characteristics make it difficult for families to access and retain decent housing. In this study, I show that household characteristics are important components of housing insecurity.

Research about urban decay and physical disorder links squatting with neighborhood decline (for example Wilson and Kelling 1982). The practice of squatting vacant buildings is usually considered one of the indicators of urban disorder and decay, and therefore a magnet for other kinds of physical disorder (e.g. vandalism and unkept public/private spaces) in the neighborhood. Data about Bucharest's inner-city squatting complicate the simplistic idea that disorder leads to more disorder (Wilson and Kelling 1982). Conversely, this study shows that squatting could also be interpreted as a source of informal social control, which prohibits additional physical and social disorder. To my knowledge, the effects of informal tenure on the physical decay of squatted buildings and neighborhoods have not been studied, especially using this research approach that converged geovisualizations and systematic neighborhood assessments with ethnographic data.

In existing literature, squatters are commonly considered indicators of neighborhood social disorder as well as a cause of more disorder. Few studies have investigated the association between squatting, informal control, and social order (Herbert 2018; De Biasi 2019). With their case studies representing American cities, De Biasi argues that some squatters are committed to neighborhood improvement and prevention of social disorder. The work reported in this chapter contributes a case study from a European post-socialist context to this body of literature.

Findings about the social dimension of squatting reveal three aspects that are usually absent from dominant representations of the practice, as well as the academic literature. Literature about squatters does not thoroughly address their attachment to place (despite their insecure tenure), sense of community, and social capital. To my knowledge, only a few studies have used social cohesion and similar concepts to frame an analysis of squatting in Europe, many of which are about migrant refugees, their social integration, and their interactions with resident political squatters. The strong sense of community among many socioeconomically motivated squatters is not only missing from dominant narrative, but it is also only tangentially examined in most of the literature. This case study provides some understanding of squatters' place-based and emotional citizenship.

Ultimately, alternative discourses are important because they could lead to changed priorities in policy-making and new urgency to the needs of housing insecure families. The mismatch between discourse and lived experience has an impact on local policies and city council decisions. In the discourse, the solution for the urban problem of squatting is eviction; but this displacement is not accompanied by guaranteed alternative housing or other kinds of social assistance, possibly because squatters' general precarity and vulnerability are

ignored. Alternative discourses in the public policy domain, which emphasize multidimensional insecurity and social inequalities, could lead to more inclusive urban governance. Martinez (2019) reviews some of these rhetoric and narratives that provide alternatives to hegemonic characterization of squatters (primarily politically motivated squatters in Western European cities). This dissertation contributes to emergent scholarship about alternative discourses related to deprivation-based squatting.

C. Limitations and future research

The research presented above regarding the impact of squatting on the physical disorder of urban landscapes and neighborhood social cohesion is preliminary and has limitations to acknowledge. The latter could help guide future research in this area. First, ethnographic data were collected from a small sample of 23 participant households. Although these were in-depth interviews with multiple visits, which allowed me to get to know the families well, the sample size could be increased in future studies. Some constraints that contributed to this small sample size included unanticipated seasonality of data collection. During the autumn months, I was unable to recruit many new respondents because daily temperatures dropped and fewer occupants were spending time on the sidewalk, where I felt more comfortable intervening, engaging, and introducing this project. Additionally, there were prospective respondents who refused to participate. I learned from some respondents that even they were suspicious of my professional role. Some families thought I was sent by the city's child protection services or that I was connected with the city government. Finally, due to the delicate nature of this research topic (i.e. an illegal action with a real risk of eviction), other households denied their informal tenure, even though other family members or neighbors recognized them as squatters. I did not include these families in the study.

Second, although this study advances understanding of Bucharest's inner-city squatting, the small sample size of properties for the Google Street View analysis is another limitation. A larger sample of squatted and vacant properties would be needed to persuasively argue that the patterns described earlier represent general trends in Bucharest's historic neighborhoods and could be used to predict the state of a neighborhood's physical decay given the presence of squatted or vacant buildings. The geovisualizations made apparent that sometimes vacant and squatted properties are adjacent, which makes it difficult to determine the impact of each of these tenure types on neighborhood disorder. A larger sample with more squatted buildings that are not adjacent to vacant buildings could potentially remedy this limitation. Additionally, further mixed-methods research is needed to investigate causal relationship between squatting and physical disorder.

Finally, Aguilera and Smart (2016) called upon investigators to perform more international comparative research that examines the way squatting is practiced in different regions. This dissertation contributes a case study about squatting in a post-socialist context. Further research could test this study's findings, such as the positive impact of squatting on the deceleration of physical decay and social disorder, in different cities and sociopolitical contexts. Ultimately, more knowledge about informal housing and squatting may lead to the decriminalization of the practice in dominant discourse and perhaps lead to local policies that promote more inclusive urban governance.

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