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## Integrating communities: how *spatial patterns* matter?

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### Abstract

Social exclusion is a key issue in the European Cohesion Policy 2014-2020. Despite the magnitude of the problem and the importance recognized by the literature to the spatial component of the city in supporting effective inclusion, policy documents still lack of attention on *spatial patterns* and their influence on integration. This paper discusses how *spatial patterns* may influence the outcomes of urban policies addressed to social inclusion, with a particular focus on Roma minorities. Recommendations will be supported by the findings from two case studies located in a Southern European metropolitan area, Reggio Calabria, and include: 1) Avoiding concentration of minorities through appropriate displacement, planned on case-by-case approach and discussed with the interested community; 2) Supporting flexible displacement through appropriate rules and planning regulations; 3) Avoiding displacement of minorities in areas lacking physical and social connectivity.

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## 1. Inclusive urban policies and spatial patterns

Social Exclusion is a key issue of the European Cohesion Policy in the current programming period 2014-2020, which considers *inclusive growth* one of its three main *pillars*. A major target of the Europe 2020 strategy is to lift at least 20 millions of people out of poverty and social exclusion (EC 2016 a). The *European platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion* is an instrument foreseen to support the fight to social exclusion, which covers a wide range of policies aimed at reaching the targets set out by the Europe 2020 strategy (EC 2016 b). Despite the magnitude of the problem and the importance recognized by the literature to the spatial component of the city in supporting effective integration (Madanipour 2006 and 2011, Bollens 2002 and 2009), policy documents lack of attention on *spatial patterns* and their influence on social inclusion. This paper discusses how *spatial patterns* may influence the outcomes of urban policies addressed to social inclusion, with a particular focus on Roma minorities. The discussion is supported by findings from direct survey and field work, conducted in a Southern European city, Reggio Calabria.

Amongst the broad range of groups plagued by social exclusion, Roma population is gaining growing interest in the European 2014-2020 policies because of the difficult conditions that characterize the majority of this population. According to the European Union Agency for the Fundamental Rights, the living conditions of Roma across Europe are associated to poverty and marginalization (FRA 2009). In the literature, Roma integration as it is pursued by the European Commission is a controversial topic. Goodwin & Buijs (2014) highlight that although the Europe 2020 strategy seems to enact a shift from an economic and financial – centred Union towards a more inclusive and socially sensitive one, in reality, what the European Commission is seeking to achieve, is to turn Roma into *good European* citizens. Some authors (McGarry 2012, Tremlett and McGarry 2013) provides us with an overall understanding of the rationale behind the European approach to the Roma situation. Regardless the genuine reasons for which European Commission seeks to address the Roma situation, several authors highlight the new centrality of this issue in the current European policy (Chorianopoulos et al. 2014, Uzunova 2010, Sobotka and Vermeer 2012). A few authors consider the spatial feature in Roma integration (Bessone et al. 2014) and in the integration of ethnic minorities more in general (Arbaci 2008). In the following section, the Roma integration will be discussed by drawing insights, as anticipated, from two case studies located in Reggio Calabria, more specifically, Arghillà and Rione Marconi - Sbarre. The paper includes recommendations on *how space matters* in inclusive urban policies, that are applicable to the larger European context.

## 2. Research methodology

The research question of this paper stems from the unexpected findings of a previous project, BESECURE (7<sup>th</sup> Framework Program), aimed at investigating key- indicators for an early warning on urban safety and security. In this sense, the research methodology reflects a typical path determined by a phenomenological theory- oriented inquiry strategy, suitable to produce unexpected new research questions. In particular, during the BESECURE project, the researchers analysed an exploratory case, the neighbourhood of Arghillà in Reggio Calabria that, from a preliminary skim of secondary data, resulted to be challenged by unsafety issues. Following the analysis, the researchers realised that social issues were perceived by some local community as related to the presence of a close knitted Roma group, which the city of Reggio Calabria had displaced there in the late 1990s. By discussing this issue with key informants (interviews with city planners at the City of Reggio Calabria, 2014), the researchers discovered that in another area, Rione Marconi - Sbarre, a similar displacement process had produced very different results. In this latter, no relationship seemed to emerge between social issues and displacement of the same ethnic minority, the Roma. On the contrary, Rione Marconi - Sbarre seemed a good practice case for integration policies, as Roma groups are still very well integrated in the existing community. The researchers decided to start from a new research question in order to unveil the reasons for such a difference. Arghillà was then re-casted as critical case study for understanding what may happen in an extreme situation, where a high number of Roma families were displaced altogether. Rione Marconi - Sbarre, on the other side, seemed to be different in terms of *spatial pattern* both for the displacement rationale and for the urban structure. The researchers decided to investigate how *spatial pattern* matters in achieving different outcomes on integration. Stemming from the new research question, the researchers decided to apply a qualitative methodology, based on visual survey -field work- and on direct data collection -informal interviews and semi-structured interviews with key informants-. These latter were selected in both neighbourhoods, in order to gather opinions from the community workers with a close knowledge of the areas,

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