

## Gated Communities versus Large Housing Estates

*“Everything you need for a quality life”<sup>1</sup>*

### Abstract

The post-modern city is slowly losing its traditional structure and is becoming an aggregate of thematically specialized parks. Malls and industrial parks can be regarded as such, as can gated communities, the subject of this paper. Gated communities enjoy great success on every continent, and their popularity is constantly rising. In Eastern Europe, there are visible signs of how the structure of cities developed during the communist era will be significantly transformed by residential parks: squares and roads which formerly anyone could freely access cease to exist, as the fences around gated communities block passage and exclude former users. Central-Eastern-European gated communities are very heterogeneous, with different designs and with resident populations that can differ greatly in terms of social status. Most of the gated communities do not possess the “classical” features. These housing projects instead tend to resemble the housing estates built during major housing investments of the communist era, rather than their own archetype. (We will call these projects residential parks to distinguish them from gated communities.) With increasing numbers of buildings and floors in such developments, the classical features of gated communities into the background by the turn of the millennium faded.

Keywords: Gated Community, Large Housing Estates, Segregation

Modern urban sociological thinking of the early 21st century holds the post-modern city in the focus of its attention. That city is slowly losing its traditional structure and is becoming an aggregate of thematically specialized parks. Malls and industrial parks can be regarded as such, as can gated communities, the subject of this discussion. (Lukovich, 1997) According to the classical definition, a gated community is a group of houses, surrounded by fences or walls, from which the adjacent streets are closed off by gates, which may be either electronic or guarded. In between the houses, there is an inner network of streets as well as dead-end streets, the latter in order to prevent through-traffic. Residents have access to various services (such as security guards, maintenance, a school, playground, leisure facilities, etc), which facilitate their complete isolation from the surrounding environment. People living here often go to work by car, hence their lives are basically confined to two locations: the workplace and the residential park (disregarding the car in between).

The first gated communities were built for wealthy foreigners who travelled to distant countries (mostly in the Far East) “on duty.” The design of the buildings provided them with their accustomed milieu on the one hand, while affording them a safe haven in a foreign environment on the other. In this function, gated developments were so efficient and became so popular that they gradually appeared in almost every country in the world. Over the past fifty years, gated neighbourhoods have been built in great numbers mostly in major cities and seaside settlements in the United States, Mexico, Brazil, and China, but by the end of the 20th century, the wave also reached Eastern Europe, where with the boom in private housing, this solution is slowly starting to dominate the sphere of major residential development.

Gated communities therefore enjoy great success on every continent, and their popularity is constantly rising. Let us then look around the world and see at what pace construction is taking place and what types of development are being offered. One of the most dynamically developing markets is the United States: here, while in the 1970s some 2,000 gated communities were built, this number reached over 50,000 by the turn of the millennium and is still rising. In South America, this architectural form started to become more and more popular and widespread from the mid-1970s; however, the privilege of isolation is not something that

has been granted to everyone, since it is only members of the upper classes that have been able to afford to live in it. In South Africa, the spread of gated communities in large part due to the urban policies of the past forty years. At the time of apartheid, white people, using the tools of urban planning, consciously formed their own gated communities around the centres of towns.<sup>2</sup> The “apartheid town” was thus born, as a form of centrally established and maintained segregation: it provided white residents with pleasant surroundings while at the same time excluding the black population. By the 21st century, however, with the former restrictions having ceased to exist, the well-off feel less safe in their previous residential areas and, as a consequence, the transformation of towns has begun. More and more fortress-like neighbourhoods have appeared, and those who can afford it shut themselves off behind walls and fences. What is more, there are an increasing number of neighbourhoods (already prospering in the US) with complete infrastructure and service networks (schools, shops, etc) of their own, which could develop at any time into autonomous settlements. Among the countries of the Asian continent, China is seeing the greatest boom in gated communities. All these newly built neighbourhoods – designed for both foreigners and residential populations of high status – show the traits of classical type: they are surrounded by walls and have their own supply facilities.

Although in Europe the number of gated communities does not anywhere near approach their number on the American continent, the “ideology” is spreading and, as we have seen in the case of America, the tendency towards self-isolation of the high-status members of the populace is becoming “contagious.” Gated communities began to spread at a faster pace in Western Europe than in Central and Eastern Europe. In tandem with the growth of slums,<sup>3</sup> as early as the beginning of the 1990s both high-end and middle-class gated communities appeared, where self-isolation (segregation) is not forced from the outside (as in the case of the lower strata of society) but is voluntary. At the same time, gated communities in Europe are not enclosed to the same extent and in the same way as is typical in South America or South Africa; although there are small-town gated community prototypes<sup>4</sup> which are self-sufficient and could be governed independently, their thoroughfares are still the property of local governments. Moreover, public areas have not been closed off in all cases either. Authorities often succeed in keeping parks, playgrounds and waterfronts on the premises of gated communities accessible to local residents living nearby (although their accessibility has not remained as easy and obvious as it used to be). In comparison to Western Europe, the situation in Central and Eastern Europe is also slightly paradoxical in this respect. Here, gated communities emerged relatively late and the classical version could not take root. Instead, the proportion of higher-quality gated communities quickly decreased, to be soon replaced by mass investments built for the middle and lower-middle classes reminiscent of the better type of prefab housing estates built in the grand investments of the communist era, and these were no longer classical even in name (We will call these projects residential parks to distinguish them from the classical type of gated community). There are essentially three partners behind the growing success of these housing projects: first, real estate development companies, supported by Western European and Israeli capital, have exploited the market niche appearing after the termination of massive state-financed housing projects. Second, due to the strong proprietary spirit emerging after the regime change, large numbers of home-buyers are waiting for the opportunity to buy safe, comfortable new homes in an orderly environment. And third, local governments and other city offices gladly assist in these developments, since the depreciated housing stock and their constant financial problems prompt them to strike deals with investors as fast as possible, thus also freeing themselves from their obligation to renovate neighbourhoods.

### **Problems in isolation**

*“Live above the city”<sup>5</sup>*

Forms of housing which significantly transform the structure of towns have always been a focal point of interest for researchers dealing with urban problems, among them urban sociologists in particular. In the 1960s to 1980s, it was the fast spread of housing estates and their potential in transforming the urban

structure, as well as the segregation and other social problems they caused, which topped the research agenda. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, these concerns were supplemented by the examination of gated communities and the related topic of segregation of the elite in society. Similarly to the investigation of most problems in urban sociology, research on gated communities also started in the United States. In the 1990s, American sociologists regarded gated communities as the privileged dwellings of the rich, and thus initially devoted their inquiries to an examination and critique of elite segregation. At the turn of the millennium, however, it was not only the wealthy but also the less well-to-do that began to surround themselves with walls, hence the privileged status of gated communities seemed to disappear, and researchers had to create a different theoretical framework to understand the phenomenon. In contrast to the spontaneous formation of segregated communities of earlier times, the new trend brought about the evolution of pre-planned communities. The former precondition for the “healthy functioning” of a community, that residents living in the same area but belonging to different income and ethnic groups should have the opportunity to “make contact” with each other, no longer seemed to hold; even those who belonged to lower income groups started to separate themselves with walls from the very poorest. As a consequence, the evolution of slums visibly accelerated: due to their isolation, surrounding areas whose residents remained excluded fell behind and physically declined even further, which is how “islands of stability in the sea of decay” (Sanchez–Robert, 2002) appeared.

Almost every researcher agrees that the primary reason behind self-isolation is the search for security and a local community: gated communities in a certain sense can (also) be interpreted as a second response to the trends of urban development that were marked by the decline of local communities. The first response, from the 1980s onwards, was the process of suburbanization and the search for a better and more pleasant home environment. Home seekers hoped that by moving away from the amorphous city they would find themselves in the small local communities of villages. However, they found it very hard or impossible to build up social relationships in their new environment and, at the same time, they lost touch with the city, making less and less use of it. Although their work still tied them to the city, their urban “stay” became limited to their workplace and its surroundings, and to their journey home. Suburbanization gained a new sense, meaning nothing more than tedious commuting between home and workplace; in this sense, the residence became nothing more than a faceless housing estate – albeit in better physical shape. For many, even for those who remained in the city, this phenomenon resulted in disillusionment concerning suburbanization, and thus today they hope to find security and new relationships in a new form of residence, that of the gated community. (Donzelot, 1999)

For the inhabitants of gated communities, a safe environment is just as important as living together with people who are similar and who cherish the same values. Furthermore, they tend to search for a lifestyle and community that resembles the suburban communities and small-town intimacy of the 1950s. (Low, 2004) Also, it is important for owners to know that their “investment,” i.e. their home and their assets, is as safe as possible. (Blakely-Snyder, 1997a) Isolation might mean different things to different people: for some it means safety, for some exclusiveness, and then there are those who find privacy in it. Experience shows that walls in effect “conjure up” the feeling of safety and intimacy of a small town. Gated communities embody the desires of a well-definable population, and hence provide a glimmer of hope for escape: escape from the terror of violence, which in certain countries can be linked to immigrant-inhabited agglomerations and run-down neighbourhoods. (Donzelot, 1999)

The reasons leading to the creation of gated communities are thus more or less well known, and the motivations behind them can also be reasonably explained. At the same time, an increasing amount of research is being conducted into the consequences of the spread of gated communities on cities and their inhabitants. According to the most extreme viewpoints, gated communities are a curse of urban life as they isolate neighbourhoods from the city, from the environment and from each other, thus eliminating the ancient form of the city. They disrupt the urban fabric and force inhabitants living inside or outside to move along roundabout routes instead of rational direct paths, thus reducing the traffic permeability of the neighbourhood. (Burke, 2001)

In the capital of South Africa, the increasing number of isolated areas is demonstrably destroying the fabric of the city by cancelling former transit routes and connections, thus rendering public transport, road maintenance and so forth more difficult and obstructing the use of urban spaces. (McKenzie, 1994) Isolation, besides destroying former spatial relationships, has a negative effect on the time management of residents as well as on their commuting habits. What is more, it might lead to a complete lack of solidarity in the long term: in the cities of South Africa there are gated communities that hire companies set up solely for the purpose of maintaining their environment, and there are signs that in the long term these communities will not be willing to pay communal taxes, as they will not want to be burdened with the costs of areas whose services they do not use. (McKenzie, 1994)

Security has always been seen as one of the most significant advantages of gated communities – especially by those who live there. In cities or neighbourhoods with a high crime rate, residents see no other solution than self-isolation of this kind. Nevertheless, it is questionable whether this has a purely positive effect: there have been cases where criminal activity decreased after the closing of roads but in other cases, after a short period of improvement, the number of certain crimes started to increase again. (Blakely-Snyder, 1997b)

There are more and more indications that a gated community has the further effect on its environment of increasing the likelihood that a new such gated community will be built. As crime and the fear of crime is often “transferred” and thus increases the urge for self-isolation, residents living in areas adjacent to gated communities begin to feel after a while that they, too, must fence themselves in to be protected from criminals who, having no access to the gated communities next to them, flood their areas. The number of isolated areas will thus inevitably increase with time, as will the conflict of interests between those who want to safeguard the free use of urban spaces and their democratic rights, and those who claim their right to self-protection. (Landman, 2000a)

There are few initiatives that specifically attempt to reduce and in the long term eliminate these negative consequences. Perhaps South Africa is the first country where not only researchers but also city leaders have tried to deal with the situation. So far they have brought forward only one solution, namely the elimination of gated communities or at least their main feature, the wall or fence that provides security. These would be replaced, for instance, by civilian guards, in the hope that the function of providing security could be kept while the “side-effects” – such as the dissolution of the urban fabric – would be eliminated. (However, these are still only scattered attempts, and we are not yet aware of any comprehensive plans.) (Landman 2000b)

The factors identified by various foreign and Hungarian authors are shown in Table 1. They are not simply advantages and disadvantages of gated communities, however, to be regarded merely as weights to be balanced on a scale.

**Table 1: Advantages and disadvantages of a gated community**

<b>Advantages</b>	<b>Disadvantages</b>
No through traffic, so children can live in a safer environment	Disrupts the urban structure and fragments the city
Only homeowners can access the area	Public and private areas are visibly separated (by walls)
Real estate prices are more resistant to the fluctuation of the market than house prices in other areas of the town	Facilitates the rise of segregation and increases exclusion
Has its own infrastructure and service network, sometimes independent of the city	If a gated community uses only the infrastructure within its own area, the community cannot access these services after gates are closed (in the evenings)
Attracts affluent taxpayers to the settlement	The poorest classes feel that, compared to the

(without major expenditures)	past, they have less access to the public spaces of the city
Reliving the small town idyll of the 1970s	May cause social paranoia due to the accent on a security-oriented lifestyle
Excludes crime to the maximum extent	Crime is driven outside the walls, and “floods” the adjacent areas
Conducive to the revaluation of neglected downtown areas and brownfield sites (as long as it is built near them)	Has a negative effect on the prices of adjacent real estate, hence fences are built in the surrounding area as well (clustering typical of America)

It is obvious that the fear of crime is not a “privilege” of the middle classes, and even for them it is not exclusively – and perhaps not even primarily – related to the phenomenon of gated communities. Nevertheless, it is beyond doubt that publicity for gated communities effectively plays upon these existing fears, and thus contributes to the increase of the market share of gated communities. Similarly, high-status homebuyers who move into gated communities are less likely to object to community costs, as long as they benefit from settlement management, road construction and infrastructural investments in return. At the same time, they consider it an unalienable part of their real estate property that they can exclude the outside world from the use of their infrastructure. To sum up, it is clear that advantages and disadvantages cannot be separated in this sense: each factor may have advantages for some and disadvantages for others.

### **Types of gated community in Eastern Europe**

*“Live the way that is best for you”<sup>6</sup>*

In Eastern Europe, there are visible signs of how the structure of cities developed during the communist era will be significantly transformed by gated communities: squares and roads which formerly anyone could freely access cease to exist, as the fences around gated communities block passage and exclude former users. As the example of major cities around the world shows, the more gated community-like entities are formed, the more fragmented the city becomes. There are two main groups of players that contribute to this transformation: foreign investors and local government authorities.

In the former communist countries, it was generally in the mid-1990s that the state completely withdrew from housing construction and now gated communities can only be built from private funds. A private investor in Eastern Europe usually means foreign capital, but there are exceptions: while in Budapest, Sofia and Prague foreign investors and domestic architects rule this segment of the market, in East Berlin this is less typical; instead, the plans of internationally acclaimed architects are realized, commissioned by German investors (e.g. the Arcadia and Tiergarten Dreieck gated communities). Therefore, foreign investors play a significant role in the transformation of cities, building copies of American or Western European luxury dream homes by the dozen, adapted to Eastern Europe. City leaders and chief architects are to a certain extent also cooperating partners. In some cases, city leaders openly embrace these investments as offering security and serving two potential goals. First, they can help in some form to renew the urban environment, as there are numerous cities or districts which cannot afford to restore or renovate old, derelict apartment blocks. What is more, they often cannot even afford to demolish derelict houses (and provide new homes for their inhabitants) and build new houses in place of the old ones. On the other hand, it seems that with the help of investors, migration away from the city, which has significantly accelerated in the past decade, can be stopped or perhaps reversed (as for instance occurred in the 13th district in Budapest). In Eastern Europe a large proportion of the population of capital cities has migrated from the centre to the surrounding agglomeration, and thus the aforementioned “decline” of these inner districts has begun.

At the turn of the millennium, gated community investments burst into a stagnant environment, where the market was characterized by an absence of regulations and a lack of capital, and where it was obvious to

everyone that change and progress could only come from the outside (which also opened the way for corruption). It was clear to city leaders, therefore, that their only chance was to serve the interests of the investor, thus in the first years favourable conditions were offered. In capital cities where the number of gated community (and residential parks) has significantly increased the situation has since somewhat changed, as city officials realized that the appearance of this housing projects has consequences placing new and additional burdens on them, and often very high costs, for instance. Some obvious consequences they had foreseen, such as the fact that new housing projects would generate increased traffic and residents would need new parking places. But what they had not reckoned with was that the high number of newcomers would place a burden on the town's or district's healthcare and education systems. Given that local governments usually have obligations in this area, what they gained on the roundabouts was lost on the swings. Instead of having to renovate dilapidated houses, now they had to expand the system of public services, which also carries a considerable financial burden. Thus, in the case of new investments, local authorities now attempt to make deals ensuring that the investor contributes in some way to the development of the public services system (e.g. by building a new nursery school).

### **Systems of conflict**

Eastern European investments generate unique systems of conflict, which are in a certain sense similar to, but in another sense very different from those experienced in the countries of Western Europe. The investor must first reach an agreement with the local government. This step is followed by the long process of official authorization. A good relationship with a local government does not guarantee that the authorities will be easier to handle, however<sup>20</sup>. In preparing this study, our interview subjects complained that building licensing and the work of the authorities are getting "more and more confusing, complicated and unpredictable" and applicants feel more and more vulnerable and powerless: "We suffer many abuses from the authorities within the bounds of the law for which there is no remedy; but even though we know we are right, we still cannot make a scene, because we would just blow our own chances" (Csizmady, 2008) In more than one case, investors have become fed up with fighting inconsequential officials and have simply moved on to another country.

Besides local governments and authorities, the third major source of conflict is local inhabitants and civil organizations, which are still weak, but are beginning to raise their voices. The most common situation is when inhabitants and investors have a clash of opinions, which is where local NGOs tend to step in. In the case of investments situated in downtown areas, similar conflicts arise in connection with the saving of beautiful buildings in brownfield investments, especially if the given investment involves demolition. Usually it is local inhabitants and civic groups dedicated to protecting buildings built around the end of the 19th century that fight to save such buildings. Another type of civil organization that has environmental protection at the top of its agenda is the greatest opponent of greenbelt gated community projects.

Besides potential conflict between investors and local inhabitants, conflict also frequently arises between those who live in surrounding areas versus and who are moving in. Those who live in the area tend, in the spirit of "not in my backyard," to oppose any changes that might have an effect on their daily lives (be it noise, increased traffic, large numbers of new people arriving in the area from who knows where, etc). We have recently seen several examples of the latter, where investors have realized developments which resulted in the moving in of a population that differs greatly in its composition from that already living in the area. Such is the case when a higher-status population appears in a lower-status area to take up residence in an inner city rehabilitation project or by moving into houses built in a former industrial zone.

Due to the nature of gated communities, conflicts are likely to arise not only among those living in the surrounding areas, but also among those living inside the development itself. A typical source of conflict can be the differing status and lifestyles of owners and tenants. Investors with good foresight try to avoid this situation by planning the investment for a relatively homogenous population with similar status, and by adhering to this principle when selling the apartments. Given that there are highly favourable mortgage loan

opportunities, a lot of people buy apartments as investments, which they then let out, and hence “other kinds” of people also appear: “It is a different class of people who rent apartments for a couple of months or a year, which are not theirs, as opposed to those who actually buy an apartment, consciously plan for it, assess it, buy it and appreciate the fact that they have reached this point. They are a separate category from those who do not own an apartment.”<sup>22</sup> Foresight, therefore, is not always enough and instead of a homogenous population, an almost homogenous one may be formed, which – taking potential sources of conflict into consideration – can be even worse than a heterogeneous community.

### **Physical properties**

There are differences not only between lifestyles (gated communities versus other housing) but also between individual gated communities, since living in a luxury one is different from living in an “average” one that is a gated community only by name. The formulation of the hierarchy of gated communities, and each one's position on that hierarchy, is marked by various factors. The most important is the given development's place in the urban structure. Some gated communities were launched in a city's agglomeration, while others found their place on the edges of downtown areas, on the outskirts (e.g. Malá Sarka, in the 6th district in Prague), or in former industrial zones among the so-called brownfield investments (e.g. River Diamond, in Prague's 8th district). Gated community construction does not spare the inner parts of cities, either. During rehabilitation and gentrification, huge residential park-like blocks may be placed on empty lots, or entire blocks of houses may be pulled down in order to replace them with new, closed blocks of buildings (e.g. in Budapest, where we can witness a similar transformation in the old Jewish district).

It is generally the investor who selects the location of the project that they find suitable for their targeted circle of clients: luxury gated communities are built in elite neighbourhoods, of course, and middle-class ones as brownfield investments. Besides location, architectural design can also reveal status: in East Berlin, for instance, higher-status investments most resemble Italian villas (e.g. the Arcadia in Potsdam), whereas in the case of bigger investments built for middle-class clients, the style of English terraced houses is favoured (e.g. Rummelsburger Bucht in Berlin). (Bodnár-Molnár, 2007) There are, however, status-independent elements of style which are “international” and can be sold in Warsaw, Prague or Budapest. The styles of Eastern European gated communities and residential parks are, then, in a certain sense uniform, but in another sense, they can display significant differences.

In addition, status must be made apparent not only in the urban location and in the development of the houses and the surrounding area, but also in the name of a development. Whereas in most Eastern European capitals, gated communities or residential parks are usually given some English fancy name (e.g. Riverside, River Loft and Sun Palace in Budapest, or Comfort Inn and Embassy Suites in Sofia), perhaps signalling the presence of a foreign investor, in East Berlin, name-givers are rather inspired by the immediate geographical environment, and therefore the name bears a real meaning only for locals (e.g. Rummelsburger Bucht).

In Eastern Europe, investments built for higher-status clients serve two main functions: on the one hand, to provide a suitable home for the “winners” of the change of regime (i.e. symbolic of their social status), and on the other hand, to separate and in a certain sense protect the former from the poor, i.e. the “losers” of the changes. Houses are generally surrounded by walls – as in the case of classic American gated communities, which are further fortified by electronic gates and a 24-hour security service. Luxury conditions, however, mean not only comfort, but also strict rules that often violate personal rights: guards make videos of every guest, and it is impossible to get into such places without being noticed and registered. Besides, life is governed by strict rules concerning the use of common spaces. Security and the level of regulation are almost perfect.

Although this classical version does exist here, it is not really characteristic of this segment of the housing market, since it could not gain ground to the extent that it did in the South American countries. The first gated communities designed for the rich in Central and Eastern Europe sprang up at the end of the 1990s. At that time, there was not yet a large enough volume of solvent demand in these countries, nor was there a

large enough volume of Western employees who would have required this type of residence. Perhaps this is why this form of housing has not been able to gain a bigger share of the housing market either in Budapest or Prague, or in East Berlin and its environs. Maybe the best example of this “lack of success” is the “Arkadien” development, which was built in Potsdam in the former GDR in 1998 (designed by the Californian Moore/Ruble/Yudell architects’ studio). The press dubbed the investment “Beverly Hills on the Havel,” due to its stylistic features and its location on the UNESCO-protected banks of the river Havel, and the selling price of the apartments competed with the highest square-meter prices in Berlin at the time. It was the first investment of this kind on the Berlin market, and turned out to be far less successful than had been expected. By the end of 1999, only less than half of the flats had been sold. The high square-meter price, high communal charges and far too long commuting time, and last but not least the unfavourable image of this former area of East Germany, all made the work of the marketing team rather difficult. Due to this failure, the building of luxury gated communities slowed down for a time, and a more modest downtown version of gated communities gained ground in Berlin, which might be compared to the Caesar House in Budapest (without the common spaces). Seven such buildings were erected downtown. The typical potential buyer was identified as the office worker who has moved from Bonn to Berlin, who is “afraid of the big city jungle,” and therefore has a desire for security and a comforting environment. Of course, these are only randomly selected examples of luxury gated communities: the American dream cannot simply be imported into each of the former communist countries. It is also necessary to adapt to the local economic situation, customs, tastes and requirements.

The forging ahead of luxury gated community developments further east and south in Europe has been somewhat more successful. Russia is perhaps the best example of how living in a gated community can become a very powerful symbol of status. At the end of the 1990s, members of society who had suddenly become rich on the one hand wished for an orderly, secure environment, and at the same time wanted their residence to reflect their desired or real social prestige. The first gated communities of the housing boom starting at the turn of the millennium were still isolated, secure islands designed for foreigners (e.g. the Pokrovsky Hills of 260 terraced houses with an international school of its own). These, however, were soon followed by developments that were designed to meet the needs of the Russian upper middle class. These offered not only apartments but also a wide range of services within their gates, meaning complete isolation on demand. To enjoy services, residents no longer had to step outside the safe walls, as a bank, shopping mall, nursery school, restaurant and tennis court were located on site (e.g. the Vorobjek Gori in Moscow). (Cséfalvay, 2008)

Bulgaria is following a similar path to Russia. While under communism only party functionaries in high positions could live isolated from “the people,” after the regime change isolation became the privilege of the rich. In Sofia, the first gated communities at the turn of the millennium were mostly designed for foreigners, but recently there have been more and more investments that attract the Bulgarian upper-middle and middle classes. Those who wish to live in gated communities are buying not only apartments, but also security, peace and the company of people in a similar position as they are; thus, in a sense, they purchase social status as well. In Sofia, the factor of security (secure parking lots) is of primary importance in selecting an apartment, but a well-tended park environment is just as important (primarily because public parks are neglected and apparently dangerous). (Sommerbauer, 2007)

As all around the world, gated communities inhabited by the classical middle class are rather far from the image of luxury gated communities in Central and Eastern Europe, both in appearance and in terms of services offered. Although the primary function is still security, isolation and the company of people of similar status are aspects that are not always fully realized. It frequently happens that people who live in such parks do not have enough money to pay for many of the services, and sometimes cannot even afford to maintain a security service. There are many gated communities where bars and gates at least guarantee the enclosure of the area, but there are other cases where gates have only symbolic value (the building block is not surrounded by a wall), and others where designers solve the issue of enclosure by exploiting the features of the landscape (e.g. parks, waterfronts) rather than using real fences. This means that people living in the



vicinity can go into the area and use, for instance, waterfront areas or playgrounds (as in the case of the riverfront Marina Part development on the Danube in Budapest, or the Tiergarten Dreieck in East Berlin, where the playground can be used by anyone during the day, but is completely closed at night). In these cases, the most precious “value” of the gated community seems to be lost. In spite of this, there are demands for these apartments, as even semi-security can mean more than living embedded in the fabric of the city.

The security of gated communities carries a different meaning in Central and Eastern Europe than in South Africa or Latin America. It is less about security in the physical sense (in terms of avoiding crime), and more about the “security of the private sphere, proprietary rights, use of space, and lifestyle.” (Cséfalvay, 2008) One of the advantages of gated communities and residential parks closed to a certain extent is that they draw clear lines of ownership and responsibility. The area cannot be used by anyone, but only by those who have bought themselves the right of usage, those who are in the “club”: private property is strongly and visibly separated from public property. And this – the security of rights and ownership – is one of the most precious values in today’s Russian society, for example. Behind this one can detect the chaotic conditions surrounding the transfer of ownership in the past twenty years: although most apartments have become private property, the buildings and infrastructure, as well as the common spaces, still remain in public ownership, and, due to anomalous conditions of management, are rather disordered.

The other great advantage of gated communities or residential parks is that they provide homes for a homogenous population. The price range of the given apartments strongly determines the composition of the buyer group, hence assuring that in polarizing Eastern European societies, people of the same kind end up next to each other, ensuring resemblance in lifestyle and values, and reducing conflicts arising from differences in cohabitation norms. Although a residential community does not equal a true community in the strictest sense of the word, it frequently implies a community identity that might best be described as the identity of the winners of privatization and the economic transformation. (Cséfalvay, 2008)

The increasing number of gated communities goes hand in hand with changes in the composition of customers. Although demographic data do not yet support the hypothesis that among the residents of gated communities almost every income group is now represented, our survey data are indicative of this tendency. (Csizmady, 2008) There are three main drivers behind the popularity of gated communities or residential parks: one, this is the only form of mass housing construction; two, there is increasing polarization in Eastern European societies; and three, there is increasing demand due to the wider range of customers, as this type of home has now also been discovered by the middle classes.

This form of housing is thus continuously spreading, and investors are “standardizing” residential parks (with similar apartment or house designs, similar marketing strategies, etc) and, to a certain extent, standardizing whole neighbourhoods. They plan, build and market houses in a similar vein as happened during the earlier spread of prefab housing technology. This correspondence is becoming so obvious that more and more people are drawing a parallel between the communist-era housing estates and the residential investments that are slowly becoming a mass form of housing. Even though there are different architectural ideas, materials and techniques applied, the sight of them still arouses similar feelings. This seems to be true, despite the fact that residential parks are, in terms of the arrangement of the houses, their exteriors and the ground plan of their apartments, much more versatile than their predecessors, while the built-in materials used are of a higher technological standard.

Many see the future of old prefab housing estates in their transformation into residential parks of some kind. In recent years, East German communist-era housing estates have been “thrown on the market” as gated communities with only minor transformations in their security and services (usually offering apartments both at market price and as social housing). As far as the renovation of housing estates is concerned, the approximation of their physical conditions to that of gated communities seems a viable alternative. However, we do not yet have enough experience of the long-term results of such operations. (Glasze, 2001)

## Hungarian gated communities and residential parks

*“Tempting prospects”<sup>7</sup>*

After World War II, in Hungary as in the other former communist states, there was almost exclusively one form of mass housing, which was the state-funded housing estate. By the beginning of the 1990s, parallel with the socio-economic changes – and not least as a consequence of these – this kind of housing basically ceased to exist. Prefab housing factories were closed and pulled down, and industrial or residential areas established in their place.<sup>8</sup> After an interval in housing construction following the regime transformation, the building of gated communities began. In Budapest, the boom came around the middle of the 1990s. According to certain estimates, by 1998 already 25-30 gated communities had been built in the capital, and 15-20 in the agglomeration. These numbers further increased by the year 2000 (to 25-40, and 20-25, respectively). In 2007, there were a little over a hundred gated communities and residential parks.

In the beginning with this form of housing, the aim was obviously not to build apartments in mass volume, but by riding the wave of the emerging shortage in housing, to offer higher-status members of society residences that catered to their needs, and which were somehow different, visibly standing out from their surroundings. This kind of development did not wish to compete with villa-type housing, but to serve as homes for slightly less affluent, but still well-off strata of society. Classic gated communities in the American sense could not yet gain ground; we find the classic elements of these in less than 10% of Hungarian gated communities. In the remaining 90%, neither the architectural style and standard nor the scale or operating conditions of the services provided correspond to the Western European “definition.” Although they carry the traits of modern architecture – human-centred design, closeness to nature, etc – the look and number of houses does not conform to the ideal or typical model. Related services are either missing or are deficient. In spite of this, there is great demand for such housing, as many believe that the primary attraction of gated communities is not so much their architectural style, but rather their novelty and security, as well as the homogenous population that lives within them.

Hungarian gated communities cannot be constrained within the limits of the classical definition. The five types that currently exist possess mixed features:

1. The first type comprises classical gated communities. A part of these were built at the end of the 1990s. They contain 15-25 apartments, are provided with luxury services, and have very high square-meter prices and high maintenance charges. (e.g. Tündérkert) It was primarily high-status families who gained wealth during privatization that moved here in the first place, and these are the people most likely to buy a second apartment in a downtown residential park in Pest. Around the year 2000, these investment projects lost ground, but after a few years there was a further boom in the building of classical residential parks, (e.g. Kakukkhegy) which still continues, albeit at a moderate pace and in different locations.
2. The second type comprises middle-range gated communities. These are usually situated in the greenbelt outer districts of the capital, and usually contain 50-100 apartments. Of the features of a classical gated community, it is mostly only enclosure that characterizes them, while only a few of the typical services are included. The type according to their status can be divided into two further subtypes: To one belongs the ones were built for higher status population. To the second belongs the residential type, that is built with less sophisticated architectural and environment features, which is for instance typical in the outer districts and in the outskirts of the capital, The lower-middle class families are overrepresented in these.
3. To the third type belongs the unification of a number of self-contained houses into a gated community. Within this category, two subtypes can be distinguished. One is where the investor himself builds both the self-contained houses and blocks of flats, and the other where he builds only the infrastructure and the wall/fence and sells the building plots, where buyers can build or have their

houses built. These are typical of the outskirts of settlements in the agglomeration of Budapest, at least 15 kilometres from the capital.

4. To the fourth type belong housing estate-like gated communities which are usually not designated as gated communities, but named simply as parks, parklands, etc. These investments have appeared in the last 3-4 years in the capital. They contain buildings of 8-10 floors or even higher. (e.g. Central park, Rákóczi Liget ) Their stylistic features resemble the more modern housing estates (built in the 1980s). For this type, considerable solvent demand exists – despite favourable mortgage loans – only for properties of a certain size and price range. (We call this type in the paper residential park, but to be mentioned that in Hungary we have only one term for both – gated community and housing park: lakópark.)
5. The fifth type contains pseudo-gated communities, with several thousand apartments, architectural features that include enclosure, security systems and services typical of gated communities (e.g. Kleopátra-Ház, Riverside). Investors in effect do not consider these building units as gated communities, but in their marketing they are promoted as such, strongly influencing the perception of society in this direction. The apartment structure of the buildings presupposes a heterogeneous resident population, since we can find an entire range of apartments, starting from small and simple (cheaper) ones to large and expensive penthouse apartments.

### **Composition of new residents**

We cannot yet give a complete and comprehensive picture of the social composition of the population living in above mentioned the five type of gated communities. First, this is because representative data collection is only carried out once every ten years, during censuses, and second, because investments still take place at a rapid rate, so the market is constantly changing. By 2011, by the time of the next census, the housing boom will probably have subsided, and the bulk of apartments intended for the middle and lower-middle classes will have been completed. Nevertheless, we need not give up completely on the data, as our survey of gated communities (and residential parks) does provide some outline of the tendencies.

Our research indicates that there are significant social differences and these can be divided into three status groups: low, middle and high.<sup>9</sup> According to this categorization, at the time of our research, 17% of already occupied gated communities belong to the lower, 43% to the middle, and the remaining 40% to the high social status group. The inhabitants of gated communities are on average much more educated than the residents of prefab housing estates. The ratio of people with a higher education is extremely high. Within this category, the ratio of households which have members with a higher education is 62% in high-status, 49% in middle-status, and 26% in lower-status parks. There are on average 2.5 persons per apartment, and of this the average number of dependents reaches almost one person. As to the composition of households, the ratio of those living alone is not as high as previously assumed (20%). In lower-status gated communities, the proportion of families with children is higher (60%), and that ratio decreases as we move up the status ladder (44.3% and 40.6% for middle and high status, respectively). Accordingly, the ratio of couples living together without a child shows a reverse tendency, i.e. it is the highest within the high-status group and lowest in the low-status group. In the case of more than one fifth of those moving into a gated community, this is their first apartment, and for 36% it is the second, while two fifths have already changed apartments more than three times. Among those for whom it is their first apartment, the ratio of people from the countryside is slightly higher (54%), as is the ratio of young adults (56%).

By analyzing our data, we were able to distinguish typical customer groups and purchase constructions relating to new apartment buyers as set down in the table below.<sup>10</sup>

**Table 2: Breakdown of new buyers in gated communities**

Price of apartment	Customer basis	Purchase construction
HUF 8-10 million	Coming from the capital, completed secondary school, financially active, just entered labour market	Considerable amount of credit
HUF 10-15 million	Coming from the countryside, young, high education or still studying, living alone	Very considerable amount of credit, but also strongly self-financed
HUF 15-20 million	Coming from the capital, young, living as couple	Self-financing + credit
HUF 20-40 million	Coming from the capital, middle-aged, with degree, families with children	Self-financed, supported by small amount of credit

Source: Csizmady, 2008.

A significant portion of the buyers of gated community homes comes from housing estates (40%), and within that mostly from prefab housing estates (32%). One fifth come from downtown apartment blocks with inner courtyards (there is no difference according to the position of the apartment here, as the ratio of people coming from courtyard-facing or street-front apartments is around 7% in both cases). The ratio of those moving in from a family house or from a block of flats with a garden is 19% and 15%, respectively.

**Table 3: Former type of residence among those who have moved in past 5-6 years (%)**

Former place of residence	Present place of residence			
	Gated community	Newly built apartment	Old apartment	Prefab apartment
Family house	18.8	38.2	27.1	21.3
Block of flats with garden	14.7	15.3	5.5	4.3
Downtown block of flats with courtyard, apartment overlooking street	6.9	9.6	14.3	5.3
Downtown block of flats with courtyard, apartment overlooking courtyard	6.7	4.4	15.3	6.3
Other type of downtown block of flats	6.7	8.4	12.9	5.3
Housing estate apartment (prefab)	31.9	15.7	15.9	47.3
Housing estate apartment (not prefab)	8.3	3.6	4.7	5.3
Other	6.2	4.8	4.3	4.8
Altogether (N=)	100.0 (872)	100.0 (498)	100.0 (635)	100.0 (207)

Source: Csizmady, 2008.

However, gated communities are not the same in this respect either: as we can see in Table 4, among the residents of higher-status gated communities, those who come from blocks of flats with a garden and from downtown blocks of flats are overrepresented, while those who previously lived in prefab housing estates are underrepresented compared to average-status gated communities. In the case of residents living in middle and lower-status gated communities apartments, the situation is reversed. Among these, the ratio of people coming from prefab flats is the same (41%-42%), which is almost twice as much as that of the high-status group. The situation is again the reverse in the case of residents who previously owned apartments in downtown blocks of flats: these people account for 29% of those who now live in high-status apartments, but only 15%-17% in the case of the other two groups. A possible explanation for this is that people who

move from a prefab building that is in a better location and therefore more expensive, or from a downtown block of flats, can afford to live in more expensive gated communities (whether with a loan or without), whereas those coming from cheaper apartments can only afford apartments in bigger and less well-located gated communities (or residential parks).

**Table 4: Former type of residence among those who moved into various types of gated community in past 5-6 years (%)<sup>11</sup>**

Previous place of residence	Status of the gated community			
	low	middle	high	together
Family house	22.7	20.7	18.2	20.0
Block of flats with garden	13.6	11.4	21.4	15.6
Downtown block of flats with inner courtyard <sup>12</sup>	15.2	17.4	28.9	21.5
Housing estate (prefab)	42.4	41.3	22.0	34.0
Housing estate (not prefab)	6.1	9.2	9.4	8.8
Altogether (N=)	100.0 (132)	100.0 (368)	100.0 (318)	100.0 (818)

Source: Csizmady, 2008.

### From housing estate to residential park?

*“Life, rhythm, freedom”<sup>13</sup>*

One part of Hungarian gated communities, which we call now residential parks are thus very heterogeneous, with different designs and with resident populations that can differ greatly in terms of social status. As a matter of fact, they somewhat resemble the type of residential settlements built at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. But how do housing estates imperceptibly become residential parks, or rather, how does a certain type of gated communities become a housing estate-like?

In the beginning, construction of gated community was concentrated on the elite areas of the Buda side. However, soon there were no more large and easily accessible plots left. Hence, on the one hand, investments started to move out towards the agglomeration of the capital and targeted the population that moved out of the city, and on the other hand, they were directed at empty plots in downtown areas and the outlying districts of Pest. However, most of the gated communities built do not possess the “classical” features of gated communities, and this is particularly true of those built in areas of Pest. These parks instead tend to resemble the housing estates built during major housing investments of the communist era, rather than their own archetype. Given that the term “housing estate” has taken on a derogative meaning, investors have chosen trendy names to disguise the resemblance. In their advertising, they imply the possibility of a new lifestyle different from the one to which potential customers are accustomed. The strategy is to distance themselves from the negative images attached to housing estates. Despite these marketing tricks, the changing image of gated communities bears a haunting similarity to the changing evaluation of housing estates. While in the late 1950s and early 1960s housing estates meant modern apartments with a high comfort level, with the launch of prefab construction from the beginning of the 1970s, people began to think of them as huge and less friendly neighbourhoods. Negative images came to be associated with housing estates, especially on the part of those who had never lived there: alienation, poor living conditions (too hot or too cold heating, windows with poor insulation, etc), and the ideal of the prescribed socialist lifestyle. New home construction from the beginning of the 1990s, and gaining speed towards the end of the decade, consciously differentiated itself from all this. New residential neighbourhoods were named gated communities, residential parks, residential gardens, parks, houses and parklands. Nevertheless, with increasing numbers of buildings and floors in such developments, the classical features of gated

communities faded into the background by the turn of the millennium.<sup>14</sup> The new neighbourhoods thus became hauntingly similar to the better class of former housing estates: from this point, it is only one “leap” onwards to having the same problems arise and seep into the public consciousness. (Since these bigger residential parks were built only a few years ago, the accumulation of problems and their coverage in the press is likely to appear only later.)

So what does the “ordinary” citizen see and feel in all this? In the survey conducted as part of our research, we asked respondents to give their views on a list of nine statements related to the features of gated communities. Five statements related to the definition and services, and four to the population living there, of which there was complete agreement on two. Irrespective of their place of residence, a large proportion of respondents agreed with the statement that “the term gated community refers to a higher standard of built environment” (more than 70%), as well as with the statement that “it must be provided with certain basic services” such as common garages, security guard service, garden maintenance, and so on (around 85%). As to the question of whether luxury services are an essential part of it, there was less agreement. More than half (65%) of those who live relatively far from gated communities (in old and prefab apartments) thought that luxury services form part of basic services, whereas those who had recently visited some newly built apartments during their search for a home (27% living in new apartments) or who are already living in such apartments (33.3% in gated community) were less likely to take this view. Some 40%-46% of respondents agreed with the statement that “a gated community (in our term residential park) is in many respects similar to a housing estate,” irrespective of their current place of residence. Although this parallel has emerged in the media, its effect and presence is not as strong as the effect of investors’ advertisements promising a better and different life. Even so, the latter effect apparently still cannot dispel the perceived similarity between the two in the appearance of the built environment. This line of thought was followed by the statement “everything is labelled a ‘gated community’ these days,” with which more than half of respondents agreed, and even more in the case of gated community inhabitants themselves (71%). Perhaps the latter best understand the real content of this statement – or, in other cases, may see signs that the privileged status of their chosen form of residence is being undermined.

The modern, enclosed – and therefore highly desired - world of the gated community was accessible only to higher-status people in the early 1990s. With the boom in new housing projects, marketing specialists rode that wave and linked the apartments for sale with the lifestyle and comforts of the upper-middle class. The “better” life still radiates through the media, advertisements and billboards, and its effect can be clearly felt in the attitudes of the population, but it is also noticeable that gated communities have lost some of their appeal. Due to investments carried out on a grand scale, the values of uniqueness and rarity have disappeared, as parks offering different price structures and standards have appeared and more and more people (60%) believe that “gated communities today meet the needs of every layer of society and class” (people just have to find the option that suits them best). Although the housing projects differ greatly from each other, inside they are relatively homogeneous, and are inhabited by people with similar social status and lifestyle (60%-70%). Parallel with this, according to a majority of people who live in prefab housing estates (75%), a gated community apartment is still perceived as concomitant with a rise in social status. The reason why acceptance of this opinion is highest within this group is perhaps that residential parks are the greatest rivals to housing estates. A large proportion of people living in the latter move or have already moved to residential parks, where the style of living is similar but “without having a stigma attached.” In conversation it conveys a very different message if a person mentions the fanciful name of a residential park when asked about his/her place of residence rather than naming, say, the housing estate in Békásmegyer. It is mostly noticeable within this group how place of residence can ostensibly raise social prestige or at least give a sense of belonging to a higher stratum of society. A little more than half of people living in old types of building, two fifths of people in gated communities and more than one third of people in new apartment buildings carry this image in their minds. Advertisements often link this housing with young adults or young couples, and the secure green area inside, and the often small, but multi-roomed apartments are also designed to cater to the needs of young adults with primarily (small) families. While less than one third of

those living in such places actually believe that gated communities meet the needs of that group, almost half of those who live in different residential surroundings believe this to be so. It seems that while the image implied by the media is very strong, when we get “within the walls,” this image is very much losing its power and probably approximates reality.

From all this, it seems that gated communities are no longer regarded as they were at the beginning of the 1990s – either by those who live in them or by potential buyers, despite the attempts of investors to suggest and maintain that image. Nevertheless, demand seems undiminished, which may be explained by several factors. The most important of these may be that residential parks provide the easiest way to acquire newly built, relatively cheap apartments, sparing the hassle of building one. Nevertheless, critical voices from architectural circles are also getting louder, and today we can witness theoretical discussions similar to the architectural disputes that once surrounded the implementation of prefab technology. Urban specialists, architects and urban designers criticize not only residential parks as architectural units, but the buildings and houses within them as well, and even the lifestyle attached to them – primarily in terms of the desire to achieve enclosure, isolation and security: “This is an architectural language that provides opportunities to both big and small for pomposity, and all this because we are unable to guarantee public safety and peace for citizens.” (Bojár, 2000:35)

### **Drawing parallels**

Parallels between housing estates and residential parks are often drawn by critics in analyses of their architecture. Some are simply seen as less successful new editions to the line of architecture leading back to the earliest housing estates built in projects of the communist era (Varjasi, 2001) A total lack of creativity is often brought up against them, and though their look, application of building materials and the design of their living spaces and services clearly differentiate them from classical prefab building blocks, “for the present time, they are hardly more convincing than their much-maligned predecessors.” (Szentpéteri, 2004:15) Beyond their outer appearance, shocking similarities in flat dimensions and ground plans are also evident. A majority of flats in residential parks are small (approx. 50 square metres) to tiny (approx. 27-40 square metres), just as in housing estates. At the time, this arrangement of flats was justified by the housing shortage, while the present argument rests more on financial constraints upon buyers and how this shapes their needs. Paired with low capital strength among investors, the situation created has limited the qualities of the building complexes realized up to the present on the one hand, and on the other, has become indicative of future developments and larger housing projects. The aims of investors match the needs of owners where the number of rooms is concerned: the more, the better. Many people preferred living on housing estates in the early 1980s because everyone could have their own room. For this reason, even a flat of 49 square metres would have 1.5 bedrooms and a dining room. Residential parks aim to provide the same: “The size of flats ranges from 29 to 82 square metres, with a special emphasis during the planning stage on the principle of ‘as many bedrooms as possible within the given space.’” A flat of 44.23 square metres will have two rooms, one of 66.28 square metres three rooms, and one of 79.15 square metres four rooms.

Among ground plans for housing estates, a few types were dominant on the market. Though further prototypes that may have been used for greater variation did exist, Hungarian architects were only allowed to use a few, and were thereby limited in their room for manoeuvre. According to architects, the floor plans of residential parks have not yet fully developed, and are often unnecessarily complicated. One of the most striking characteristics of these houses is the separated and hierarchical presentation of public, semi-private and private areas. Shared spaces receive greater prominence than earlier (a spacious shared lounge, mail room, garden recliners, playing field, etc). (Vámos, 2006) It may be noted that these features of residential parks’ ground plans may have the purpose of making the flats more attractive, at the same time establishing a marked difference in relation to similarly sized flats in housing estates. In principal, public spaces were meant to be very important in the communist era, too, but this was not realized in practice. As conceived originally, the “socialist type of person” would not cook or wash at home, but would perform these chores in

the common dining rooms and laundry of the estate. This explains the small and/or windowless kitchens and tiny bathrooms of housing estates. However, these communal service units were either never built or did not function as planned, not so much because of the manner in which they were built, but rather due to the mentality of the people who lived in housing estates.

One of the advantages offered by residential parks could be the great number of public spaces. And yet a shortage or lack of public spaces and facilities is the present trend in Hungary. Experts in housing development see a number of reasons behind this. First, investors prefer the construction of residential parks with more flats because they are short of capital. (In the case of fewer flats, services become less economical to operate and costs raise prices to unrealistic highs.) Meanwhile, those who are able to afford services are not ready to move into residential parks with too many flats. For this reason, the majority of residential parks at present only offer the kind of basic services that can also be found in an apartment block: garbage disposal, cleaning, and lighting of communal areas. Perhaps a gardener, a reception desk or a security guard are extra features only characteristic of a residential park, but the purchasing power which would be able to pay for Western “standards” simply does not exist. Second, the financial resources of the majority of Hungarian home buyers are completely taken up with raising the amount necessary for purchase of the real estate itself. Home buyers who do not take out loans are quite rare. In addition to monthly mortgage payments, very few are able to cover the rather high amounts necessary for expensive communal services. Third, the approach of the Hungarian middle class differs greatly from its Western counterparts: “Even with the money available, a Hungarian will much prefer as few people sharing as possible.” A “subculture” within the segment of the public that can afford shared services, and which would also be willing to actually pay for a wider range of shared services, cannot realistically be expected to emerge. A prime example of this is playing fields.

Several quality-related issues arose with regard to housing estates built during the 1970s and 1980s. The owner or tenant could make lists of problems. Here the problems could be recorded (e.g. window cannot be shut, wallpaper torn, PVC floor marked with cigarette burns), and the register was then passed on to the investor. The investor sent an inspector around, who made a full survey of the flat with the list in hand. For some of the problems, the inspector would offer repairs or a tiny sum of money for the owner or tenant to handle the repairs themselves. However, the inspector would dismiss the majority of the problems as insignificant and would reject the appeal. With regard to the residential developments of today as well, an increasing number of complaints about work of shoddy quality are voiced. People moving into these flats may find themselves confronted with problems with which they have been only too familiar for decades (e.g. windows cannot be shut, floors tiled unevenly, walls becoming mouldy, etc). While the attitude shown by today’s investors varies, a repeat performance of the scenes described above is not rare. Another interesting parallel is that recognizable elements of the interior furnishings of residential park flats are beginning to make a marked appearance, which might well once again become symbolic. The wall-to-wall carpet, which was an indispensable – though much disliked and derided – fixture of a flat in a housing estate, is evidently being replaced by laminated flooring. The oil-resistant skirting of housing estate kitchens and bathrooms is now replaced by far more modern glazed tiles, which now reach not just one but often two metres in height. Is it possible that the generation now growing up will come to hate laminated flooring and glazed tiles as much as the previous generation abhorred wall-to-wall carpeting and oil skirting? This, then, is how a housing estate, gradually but not unnoticed, transforms into a residential park.

Investors consider marketability of primary importance at the stage of planning. The appearance of the building, and the number and dimension of flats, is subordinate to this question. The location more or less determines the target group. Parallels between housing estates and residential parks are naturally found in this dimension as well. The two models did not, of course, come to be marketed in identical systems, but they were similar in that the prestige of the location had a marked influence upon the appearance of the flats constructed, the number of floors and the size of the flats. No particular problems arose when it came to the “sale” of flats in housing estates, as the shortage of housing and favourable rents or purchase conditions



always insured a mass of applicants/buyers. Present prices on the real estate market, however, are highly susceptible to location, and to the physical condition and appearance of homes. It is a matter of greater interest how well flats in larger residential parks will keep their value, or how far they may fall into the trap of adversely located housing estate flats, whose sale now faces difficulties. For the moment there is a boom on the market for newly built real estate and especially residential parks, which also offer security. Advertising, well-managed marketing, and not least increasingly cheap loans, also result in purchases for investment purposes (not just in the case of foreign or better-situated families, but also among the middle class). In spite of this, however, more and more dissatisfied voices can be heard, and the proportion of those who feel that they did not, after all, make the right choice when they moved into a residential park is also growing.

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## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Sun Palace- Buda – advert slogan

<sup>2</sup> The basic idea for its internal structure was inspired by Welwyn Garden City in Hertfordshire, England, built in the 1920s and 1930s

<sup>3</sup> Poor and immigrant neighbourhoods that are becoming increasingly isolated, for instance in France.

<sup>4</sup> As examples, we can mention the neighbourhoods built in Leipzig, Frankfurt and Dortmund in the framework of the “Parkstadt 2000” programme

<sup>5</sup> Izabella Garden Budapest 6<sup>th</sup> district – advert slogan

<sup>6</sup> Sun Palace Budapest 3<sup>rd</sup> district – advert slogan

<sup>7</sup> Csillagkert Terrace House Budapest III district– advert slogan

<sup>8</sup> It went on simultaneously with the building of housing estates of course. It is true though that these small housing estates, built for the privileged classes of the time, were not called housing estates.

<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately we could not examine the fourth type on the basis of the survey data, as our interview makers were rarely let in the apartments in these places.)

<sup>10</sup> Here we handle together the inhabitants of residential parks and or other new apartments

<sup>11</sup> The case number difference is due to the fact that the table does not contain the ‘other’ category.

<sup>12</sup> In the case of the residential parks there was no difference between the status groups according to the location of the apartment

<sup>13</sup> Jazz Loft, Budapest 3<sup>rd</sup> district – advert slogan

<sup>14</sup> Today the only common characteristic is the security of the buildings (either gates that open and close automatically, 24-hour security service, or closed chained TV network)