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Gated communities as new forms of segregation in post-socialist Budapest



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ABSTRACT

In the cities of East Central Europe high-status gated residential enclaves emerged after the collapse of communism symbolizing the new dimensions of social segregation brought about by the post-socialist transition. Due to the highly liberalised housing market and the infiltration of global capital the proliferation of gated neighbourhoods became possible. The aim of this paper is to analyse the role of gated communities in Hungary in general and in Budapest in particular. To find out the driving forces behind the gating phenomenon we apply the case study approach analysing the development of a typical gated neighbourhood in one of the suburban settlements of Budapest. During the research special emphasis has been placed on the attitude and behaviour of three types of stakeholders: the developers, local government and the homeowners. The Magdolna-völgy gated community reflects the contradictions that have characterised the transition of Hungary from single-party communist system to neo-liberal capitalism since 1990. The weak position of local municipalities as opposed to real estate developers can be related to the decentralised, deregulated public administration system and the *laissez faire* attitude of neo-liberal state. Gated neighbourhoods became symbols of polarisation and conflict within local societies. The case study demonstrates that the affluent section of society can efficiently segregate themselves from the rest of people, and can successfully privatise public spaces and create safe and privately controlled spaces behind the fences.

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Introduction

As part of the socio-spatial differentiation of East Central European cities the emergence of high-status gated residential enclaves has recently received considerable attention (Brade, Herfert, & Wiest, 2009; Glasze, 2005; Hegedűs, 2009a; Hirt & Petrovic, 2011; Polanska, 2010; Smigiel, 2009). The spread of gated communities is a relatively new phenomenon in this part of the world dating back to the collapse of communism which generated far-reaching political, economic as well as societal changes. According to Gentile, Tamaru, and Van Kempen (2012) the socialist city was an ideology based archetype of homopolis where egalitarianism, mass housing construction, and standardisation prevailed. The highly centralised housing allocation system aimed at social mixing and homogenisation set strict limits to the housing aspirations of the better off and any extreme form of segregation. The highly subsidised new state-owned apartments were very attractive for the socialist elite, not least because their quality was much better than the bulk of the existing housing stock (Szelényi, 1983).

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After 1989–1990 the principles of state-socialist redistribution of income and goods (e.g. housing) were replaced by the rules of the market which necessarily set off profound changes. According to Sýkora and Bouzarovski (2012) cities of the post-socialist countries have been subjects of three major strands of transition embedded in a certain time sequence: short-term institutional transformations that created a general framework for transition; medium-term transformation of social practices exhibited in the everyday life of people; and, the long-term transformation of urban space. In the first years of transition the basic principles of political and economic organisation were changed. Due to marketisation of state assets, liberalisation of prices and growing exposure to international competition and globalisation, profound economic restructuring commenced leading to de-industrialisation, growing wage and income disparities in these countries. As a consequence, social inequalities started to grow rapidly creating new patterns of residential differentiation and new forms of segregation (Marcinczak, Musterd, & Stepniak, 2012; Sýkora, 2009a, 2009b). Growing social polarisation was reflected both in the establishment of new enclaves of affluent population, as well as segregated quarters of the socially excluded (Kovács, 1998; Ladányi, 2002). In this respect the emergence of gated communities (hereafter GCs or GC) can be interpreted as part of the ‘second’ transition period when pent up demand of the affluent for more prestigious forms of hous-

ing erupted like a genie from a bottle (Hirt, *in press*). When this demand was gradually met by private developers, the socio-spatial segregation of post-socialist cities has also radically changed (Gentile et al., 2012; Smith & Timár, 2010; Sýkora, 2009a; Tosics, 2005a). Due to the post-socialist transition the socialist propaganda of collective will has been replaced by individual choice in a consumption-orientated capitalist society (Czepczyński, 2008) and cities of post-socialist East Central Europe have become quickly heteropolitanised (Gentile et al., 2012).

The main aim of this paper is to analyse the role of GCs in the heteropolitanisation process of Budapest, their special forms and functions, and the mechanisms of their development. Based on empirical research findings this paper seeks to answer the following questions:

- How has the emergence of gated and guarded neighbourhoods taken place in space in the metropolitan region of Budapest?
- What are the main motivations and interests of developers, residents and local governments regarding the development and consumption of gated enclaves?
- How can the process of gating be fitted into the theoretical context of post-socialist urban transformation?

The rest of the paper is divided into five parts. The next section briefly introduces the most relevant concepts focusing on the emergence of GCs worldwide and in the post-socialist countries. After the theoretical context the methods and data used in our study are described. In the following section we present our findings regarding the typology and spatial distribution of gated communities in Budapest and its agglomeration. It is followed by the presentation of our empirical findings based on qualitative research methods. In the final section we try to fit the observed processes into a wider conceptual framework.

Theoretical approaches

Gated communities are “walled or fenced housing developments to which public access is restricted, often guarded using CCTV and/or security personnel, and usually characterised by legal agreements which tie the residents to a common code of conduct and (usually) collective responsibility for management” (Atkinson & Blandy, 2005, p. 178). GCs normally provide their inhabitants with exclusive public goods (e.g. swimming pool, playground, green spaces) at a higher quality and efficiency than the local governments which is a key to their global success (Webster, 2002). These neighbourhoods are separated from their surroundings not only by physical but also by legal means. Residents of GCs have to endorse a document called ‘Covenants, Conditions and Restrictions’ (CC&Rs) which details the rules and regulations for homeowners and provides the fundament of societal life (Blakely & Snyder, 1997).

Although the global diffusion of gated communities as private residential enclaves started from the United States by now they became a worldwide phenomenon, independently from culture, economic development or political regime (Blinnikov, Shanin, Sobolev, & Volkova, 2006; Douglass, Wissink, & Van Kempen, 2012). Since the late 1990s a vivid discussion has been taking place in the literature on the popularity of GCs and the motivations of people for moving into such residential enclaves all over the world (Atkinson & Blandy, 2005). Basically, two competing theoretical approaches can be distinguished in the field. On the one hand, the *market-driven* process approach conceptualizes the rise of gated communities as a market-based solution to the provision of local public goods and services, restricted by a club economy. According to this approach GCs operate like cost-sharing clubs, because their residents

privately finance goods and services that are commonly owned and used, while non-residents are excluded. On the other hand, the *politics-driven* approach put the emphasis on the rising individualism and exclusionary behaviour of the affluent that leads to the development of gated communities (Cséfalvay, 2011). Scholars arguing for the politics-driven approach stress that the withdrawal of the state as a service provider, the deregulation of the economy and the subsequent social polarization lead to the self-segregation of the affluent in voluntary ghettos with strong physical barriers (Bauman, 2001; Glasze, Webster, & Frantz, 2006). A common theme in both concepts is that they pay the utmost attention to the role of security in explaining the genesis of GCs, though their reasoning is very different (Blandy, Lister, Atkinson, & Flint, 2003). The market-driven process approach considers security as part of public services, and sees the emergence of gated communities as a shift in crime prevention from central and local government to the neighbourhood level (Glasze, 2005). As an opposite, the politics-driven approach underlines the strong ties between the segregation of the affluent and their fear of crime. Researchers supporting this approach interpret gated residential developments as physical reinforcement of the social and spatial split between the “have lots” and “have nots” (Atkinson, 2008; Blakely & Snyder, 1997).

In the post-communist urban context Polanska (2010) also pointed out the importance of security when asking respondents about the most important reasons for moving to a gated residential neighbourhood in Gdansk. Other authors, however, emphasized that security is not the main reason for moving to a GC in post-socialist East Central Europe. Analysing the answers of surveyed residents ($n = 870$) to the question concerning the reasons for moving to GCs in Budapest Csizmady and Csanádi (2009) found that the most important factors related to the quality of the new home, its design and modernity, whereas the question of security played a subordinate role. This is in line with Cséfalvay's (2009) findings based on a household survey among residents ($n = 120$) of GCs in Budapest. He found that, although security considerations were important, they were not the most decisive factors for moving into gated neighbourhoods. The importance of security in the emergence and growing popularity of GCs was also questioned by other authors (e.g. Smigiel, 2009). If security does not help in explaining the rapid growth of gated communities in the former communist countries what could be the main driving forces behind? Based on previous studies focusing on the housing preferences of Budapest residents (Berényi & Szabó, 2009; Kovács, Wießner, & Zischner, 2013) we assume that the fear of crime or the provision of additional services (club goods) are not the main triggering factors that might explain why people move to GCs in Budapest and the reasons for the popularity of such residential enclaves lie more on the endeavour of the middle-class for greater social homogeneity, higher prestige and new lifestyle.

Analysing the proliferation of GCs in American cities Vesselinov, Cazessus, and Falk (2007) put forward the “gating coalition” concept. The term was borrowed from Logan and Molotch (1987) and it refers to a mutually advantageous tripartite game among developers, local government and middle-class homeowners. Developers tend to produce high density housing developments that provide some commonly owned goods and services in order to maximize profit. Local government seeks to attract affluent taxpayers to increase their income, without investing in local infrastructure and public goods. Finally, homeowners want to live in well-controlled private spaces with exclusive access to a wide range of amenities. Does this concept help in explaining the growing popularity of gated residential enclaves in the former state-socialist countries as well? We assume that the post-socialist version of “gating coalition” differs substantially from the North-American

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