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The Spatial Planning in Relation to Gated Communities in the Central Hungary Region

Gated communities are an internationally widespread phenomenon today, especially common in cities and their suburbs (see, e.g., Atkinson, R. – Blandy, S. (eds.) 2006). In Central-Eastern Europe, they first appeared after the collapse of state socialist systems (Lentz, S. 2006, Stoyanov, P. – Frantz, K. 2006). Since 1990, in the course of the transition to the market economy, social and economic differences have increased immensely and the process of segregation of population groups within individual municipalities is also accelerating. The presence of gated communities causes often worldwide, and also in Central-Eastern Europe a source of conflict of spatial planning, for instance.

In this work we try to respond that what is the relationship of gated communities with spatial planning in the Central Hungary region like. The area of the Central Hungary region is 6,919 km² and its population is nearly about three million inhabitants. The region includes the Hungarian capital Budapest and the county of Pest around the capital.

According to the findings of our research, gated communities have no historical antecedents in Hungary: here they appeared later than in Western Europe, only from about the very beginning of the 1990's. Since then, their number has been dynamically growing. A large part of Hungary's gated communities are unlike those in Western Europe: the majority are not physically "gated" from their environment, are not guarded and provide relatively few services for their residents. However, a small number of "real" gated communities, i.e. ones similar to those in Western Europe, can also be found. There are many types of gated communities in Hungary, but we lay stress two basic types of them exist: one is comprised of detached family houses, the other consists of multi-storey condominiums. Gated communities are found in all major towns and cities in Hungary, though most of them are in the Central Hungarian Region (especially in Budapest, the country's only city that qualifies as a significant city on a European scale).

Gated communities are usually built as green field projects or in Hungary mostly on brown field sites, through the transformation of existing built properties (Bodnár, J. – Molnár, V. 2007). They have a variety of impacts on their surroundings. Their construction results in the exclusion of the public from often significantly sized former public spaces. However, Hungary's spatial planning and municipal politics are not yet capable of properly managing the problems that gated communities give rise to, and control the process of their establishing on a regular and adequate way. The problems triggered by gated communities are in many cases even not addressed by spatial planning, yet. The system of spatial planning in the Central Hungary Region (but of other regions of Hungary, as well) appears to lack unified directives and guiding principles towards the new "private fortresses" of our postmodern era. Thus the negative consequences of this recent state may be much more far-reaching in terms of spatial planning, too: e.g., further socio-spatial polarisation of urban and suburban areas of the region by the means of gated communities and destroying natural values through the more intensive land use caused by them.

1. Introduction

The gated community is a typical global social phenomenon of our era which is already well-known in the whole world. Its scientific research began belatedly just after its appearance and it is still at an initial stage in Hungary. Continually increasing scientific literature is available about the emergence and spreading of the phenomena. Gated communities are investigated from the dissimilar (sometimes fundamentally different) point of view of geographers, architects, sociologists, lawyers. The spatial location, the conflicts arising from the space use and space paths of their residents can be studied in social geographic aspects.

2. The general features of gated communities

Depending on the researcher's discipline, gated communities can be defined and typified in various ways. According to a detailed American definition (Low, S. 2004), they are residential developments surrounded by walls, fences, or earth banks covered with bushes and shrubs, with a secured entrance. Sometimes, their protection is provided by inaccessible land such as a nature reserve, and, in a few cases, by a guarded bridge. The houses, streets, sidewalks and other amenities are physically enclosed by these barriers, and their entrance gates are operated by a guard or opened either with a key or with an electronic identity card. Inside the development there is often a neighbourhood watch organization or professional security personnel patrolling on foot or by automobile (Low, S. 2004). Gated communities restrict access not only to residents' homes, but also to the use of public spaces and services

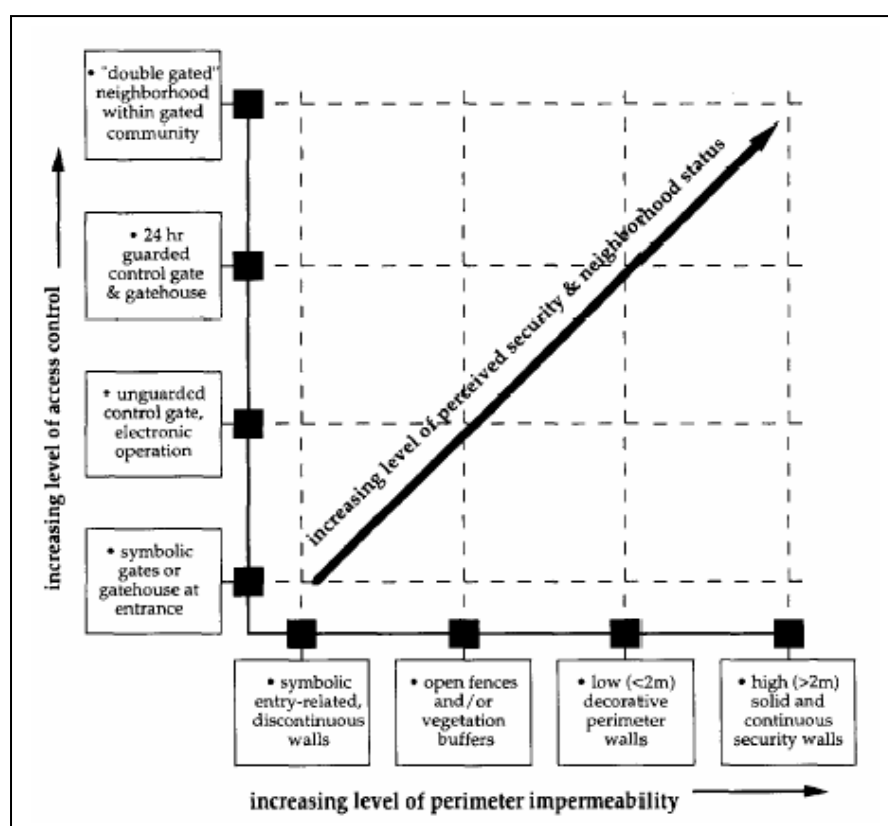


Figure 1. A typology of enclave neighbourhoods organized around the variables of the level of access control (gates), and the level of perimeter impermeability (walls) (Luymes, D. 1997)

– roads, parks, facilities – situated within the enclosure. Their size varies from a few to ten thousands of homes. Many include e.g. golf courses, tennis courts, fitness centres, swimming pools and lakes (Low, S. 2004, Figure 1, 2).

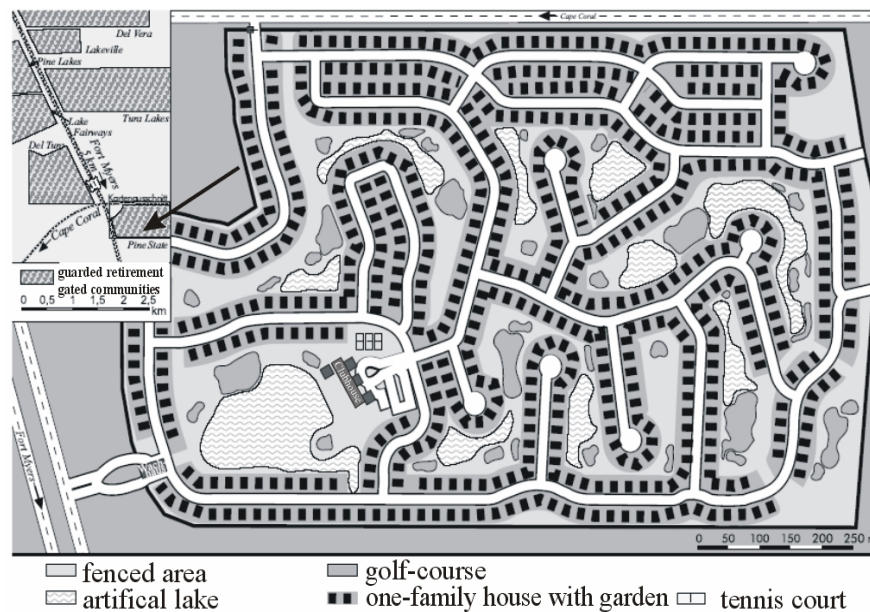


Figure 2. The morphology and functions of a typical gated community (Florida, USA) (Glasze, G. 2001, modified by the author)

There are only few real, functional gated communities delivering services mentioned above in Hungary. Many of them are “gated community” only by name; because they are either not physically gated from their environment, or not guarded, they only provide relatively few services for their residents, if they provide any (Boros, L. - Hegedűs, G. - Pál, V. 2006). Up to now in Hungary there are only few “real”, classic Western-like gated communities delivering services mentioned above. In the Hungarian language gated communities are usually called “residential parks”.

In many countries gated communities are managed mainly by variously formed institutions called “private neighbourhoods”, which are established by the investors. Every property owner has his possession in the establishments of gated communities. This common property is overseen by elected boards. Every customer has to endorse a document called “covenants, conditions and restrictions” (CC&Rs). This document lays down several, sometimes quite strict rules which are often infringed by the home owners (Blakely, L. – Synder, M. G. 1999).

The separation of different social, ethnical communities dates from the Antiquity (Luymes, D. 1997). In the Antiquity and Middle Ages the walled-off enclaves were not only fortresses, but also symbols of security of the monarch and other members of the feudal aristocracy. Since the modern times, residential segregation can be proved not only in the dimension of ethnicity, but also on the basis of the social-economical status. The private, grouped living form which is separated from its surroundings still exists; in fact, gated communities seem to be worldwide phenomena.

Residential complexes, most similar to the recent forms of gated communities, existed already in the 19th century in Europe; they were also built by private investors. However, gated

communities were infrequent until the 1960's, and 1970's. Since then the modern forms of them have (firstly retirement gated communities) begun to spread in the USA. Later they appeared both in the rural areas (in the form of the so-called 'country clubs'), and in the middle-class suburbs of the USA. They began to proliferate in the zones of suburban single family-tracts and high-density urban apartment complexes. Since the late 1980's they have become ubiquitous in many areas of the country (Blakely, L. – Synder, M. G. 1999). Indeed, they have become popular from Latin-America to China. Their number is dynamically increasing in the entire world. Special, local factors (e.g. the traditions of living in an enclosed community, the level of public safety, political conditions) have also contributed to their success in many places (see, e.g. Hook, D. – Vrodljak, M. 2002). The number of gated communities has also grown in Europe, but here – in relation to the USA – fewer of them can be found, yet. Within Europe gated communities first appeared in the 1980's on the Mediterranean seacoasts (Spain, France). In the 1990's, many suburban gated communities were established in the neighbourhoods of Madrid and Lisbon, and in Great-Britain as well. They have emerged in the agglomerations of Vienna, Berlin, and in East Central and Eastern Europe at the same time (Glasze, G. 2001, Lentz, S. 2006, Görgl, P. J. 2008).

Many social, economical and cultural factors on a global, regional, and local scale are instrumental in evolving and in the existence of gated communities (Atkinson, R. – Blandy, S. (eds.) 2006). Besides the survival of historical antecedents, economical (social and economical globalization, the emergence of post-industrial, fragmented city agglomerations, the changing patterns of housing), land utilizing and social (e.g. the fear of crime, the decline of public life of the settlements, the worsening level of public services, the demand for a better quality of life) factors also contribute to their emergence. The investors, real property developers also play an important role in the spreading of gated communities by various, sophisticated ways of generating demand on their products (Hook, D. – Vrodljak, M. 2002). The marketing of gated communities is rather intensive, sometimes even aggressive in Hungary, as well. It often suggests that moving into the given gated community means a new, much more beautiful life, and it helps to achieve a better human quality for the homebuyers. The names of many gated community also illustrate this point in the country (e.g. Golden Grape Residence, Prestige Towers). Developing gated enclaves causes various advantages and disadvantages to their residents and their surroundings (Blakely, L. – Synder, M. G. 1999). The researchers consider these advantages and disadvantages in a different way. The effects of the gated communities seem to be totally different depending on the various points of views the settlements and the people living in the gated communities have. For instance, the settlements get sometimes considerable income by them, which will cause an increase in the place and division prices. However, extended public spaces may become private-owned by their building, and the fragmentation of the spaces, the frequent and increasing practice of social exclusion and segregation in the settlements can be triggered by the realization of them, as well.

3. Processes influencing the establishing of gated communities in the Central Hungary Region

During the state-socialist period, Hungarian cities and towns did not have real local authorities. Their economic role was confined to the fordist manufacturing industry which concentrated to the extended continuous urban areas. The urban real estate market did not function due to the lack of market conditions. The urban use of space was wasteful. Very intensive state intervention determined the urban real estate market, and the urban labour

market was also formed by the state equalizing intentions. Because of these, the level of residential segregation remained low in the state-socialist era. Urban planning played more important role, and their scope for action were much broader than in the Western European cities. Urban planning was a part of the general spatial planning, and it was subordinated to the state plans and strategies regulating the whole network system. Monumentalism and constructing “great planning units” featured the urban planning, and the interests of the local urban districts were left unregarded (Kovács, Z. 2008).

The collapse of the socialist system, the transition to a market economy and a parliamentary democracy meant some very serious changes. This transition can be interpreted as a path-dependent development (the new system is built upon the ruins of the past or even from the ruins of the past by adaptation of guidelines from the to-be-followed market economies). Post-socialist socio-economics transformation (the introduction and operationalisation of the market forces in a neo-liberal regulatory framework and the institutions of pluralism) with the pitfalls of young democracies is over in Hungary like in all the East Central European countries. The formation of a comprehensive new socio-economic framework of cities sets the conditions for more subtle development of specific urban areas with old or completely new function. Uneven socio-economic development does not only apply to global or national spatial levels but also affects the urban level even in the countries of the global semi-periphery (e.g. ex-socialist counties). The redifferentiation process is very important: the cities located in the region redifferentiate functionally by reordering the scale and location of urban land uses like residential, industrial, recreational, commercial, transportational and institutional areas. (Földi, Zs. 2006). Since the transition process the possibilities of local politics and planning related to urban development highly increased. Privatization and economic structure change triggered the appearance of global capital in the urban space, the fast development of services, and the decline of industry. The liberalization of real estate market, the privatization of the former state-owned social housing stock and other state-owned real estates made way for the spatial competition of urban functions and the income-based residential mobility (and different living preferences) of population. Therefore after the change of regime intense social and spatial polarization can be observed in the intra-urban spaces of the Hungarian cities (Kovács, Z. 2008). The mentioned polarization takes place in Hungary at every level: at the level of settlements, microregions, counties and regions. Suburbanization became much more intensive from the 1990's, especially in the agglomeration of Budapest, many young residents belonging to the middle-class moved out from the city.

During the change of regime, the new, democratically elected parliament enacted the Local Government Act in 1990. This Act produced a dual structure in local government: the municipalities (settlement local governments) and the county level with no subordinated relationship between them. The Act made the settlement (towns, villages) local governments (municipalities) the main actors of the local governmental system. The local governments have both obligatory and voluntary tasks, and they are entitled to establish and maintain institutions (schools, kindergartens, etc.). Each local government is an individual economic entity with its own budget, and the income of the local governments is based on normative central support. The urban government of Budapest operates in a two-tier system: there is Budapest itself as the capital city of Hungary, and besides there are the governments of the 23 districts having the identical rights and obligations towards the inhabitants. This dual system causes many advantages, but even more disadvantages. Serious disadvantages are e.g. the lack of communication in this two-tier system or the unclear distribution of competences (Földi, Zs. 2006). Spatial planning is practised in Budapest at the levels of the 23 districts

governments (many times with significant differences) and the level of the capital city. Sometimes the relationship between the mentioned two-tier levels is also oppositional. Outside Budapest, in the Budapest Agglomeration spatial planning belongs to the local governments. At higher levels, the institution of the county and region coordinate spatial planning.

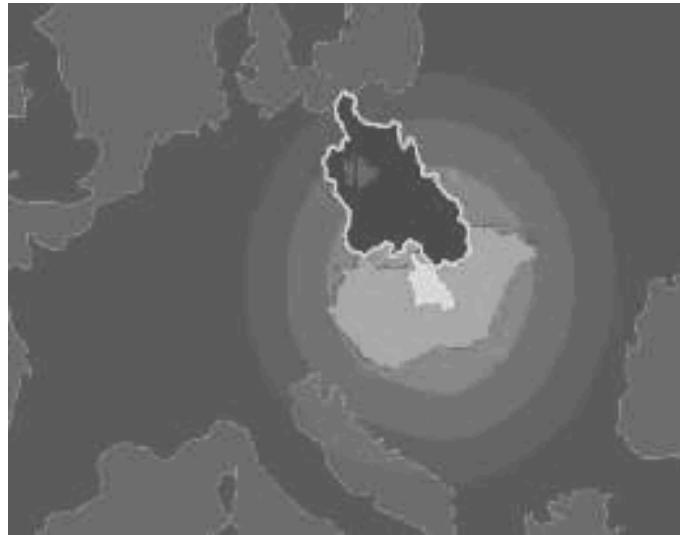


Figure 3. The Central Hungary Region
(<http://www.kozpontiregio.hu/eindex.html>)

The area of the Central Hungary region is 6,919 km² and its population is about three million inhabitants. This NUTS-1 and NUTS-2 level region includes the Hungarian capital Budapest and the county of Pest around the capital. This is the most developed Hungarian region (Figure 3). The purchase power is the highest here in Hungary, and globalization takes the most intensive and various effects here inside the country.

The first Hungarian gated communities were also established here, in Budapest in the early 1990's. But the real boom of building gated communities began only at the second half of the 1990's, and peaked around 2005 (Béres, J. 2002, Bodnár, J. – Molnár, V. 2007). In 2007 there were 71 gated communities featured by 24-hour-port service and /or guarding service (with app. 14000 flats) and 32 gated communities featured by other security measures (e.g. monitoring, magnetic card entrance systems, app. 5000 flats) in Budapest. In the suburban zone of Budapest there were 32 gated communities identified in 2007.

4. The actors of establishing gated communities and the relationship between spatial planning and gated communities in the Central Hungarian Region

In our study, we analyze the districts government level in Budapest, and the level of local governments in the Budapest Agglomeration. Beside our own study, we also use the case studies of other researchers. But, first of all, it is worth analyzing the economic significance of the gated communities and the actors involved in their establishing.

There are many interpretations and models about the gated communities. It is worth analyzing the economical factors determining the foundation of the gated communities. According to an

often-used categorization, goods can be classified according to excludable and non-excludable, and rivalrous and non-rivalrous dimensions (Figure 4).

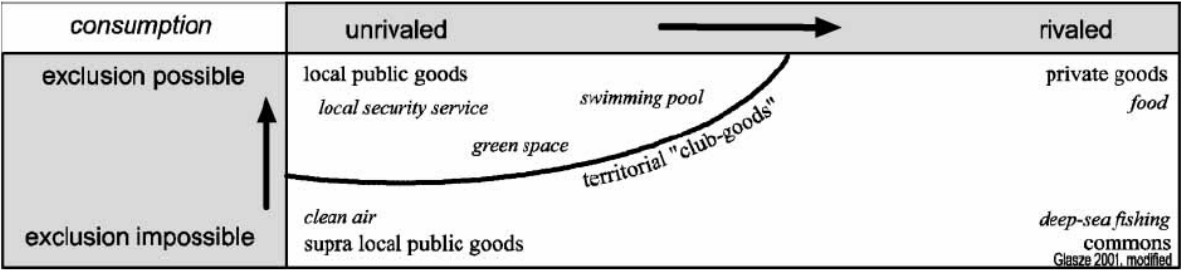


Figure 4. Private goods, public goods and club goods (Glasze, G. 2005)

It is important to point out that a resource (e.g. a park) is not equally benefited by all the members of a city. The fortunate ones, who live closer to it, will benefit more from it. In this sense, even the formally “public goods” are, in fact, not really public for every member of the society. The farther someone lives from a given public good, the higher the cost of traffic and the more time is needed to use it.

The case of gated communities is something similar to these so called public goods. But there is a very important difference. Gated communities provide many collective goods strictly only to their inhabitants. In fact, already Tiebout stated that many collective goods are practically not collective goods, but “local” public goods (Tiebout, C. 1956). In the view of Tiebout, settlements contend with each other for the potential buyers (immigrants). The citizens vote by their foot – they move to the settlement where the most and best public goods are available and the lower taxes have to be paid. Therefore the mentioned competition stimulates the settlements to provide more and more and better and better services in exchange for imposed taxes (Cséfalvay, Z. 2007).

According to another American economist Buchanan, groups which collectively, but exclusively share the consumption of specific goods on the basis of ownership-membership arrangements (which usually feature gated communities) are “clubs”, and the excludable collective goods are “club goods” (Buchanan, J. 1965). In this way, the establishment of gated communities with their self-governing organization may be considered as the creation of club economies with territorial boundaries. We can explain the potential attractiveness of gated communities in the way of analysis of private neighbourhoods as club economies (Glasze, G. 2005). Because of the excluding free riders (people who do not pay from using the facilities of gated communities), gated communities are very efficient in economical sense. In an economic term, gated communities mean a very successful and efficient way of housing not only to the potential buyers, but to the real estate developers, and municipalities, as well.

According to McKenzie’s triangle model, the rise of gated communities can be described by the triangle of developers, local governments, and homeowners in the United States. All members of this model are interested in building gated communities. Developers want to realize high density of dwellings. They provide dwellings in a package with some commonly owned and used services in exchange. Local governments want to attract rich taxpayers without spending for local infrastructure from their financial resources. Homeowners want to live in a safe environment with many amenities and having exclusive access. Because of these reasons, every member in this triangle has its own interest in building gated communities. In

Hungary, there is not a competition in a Tieboutean sense. Because of the high redistribution rate of central government in Hungary, the wealth of a settlement and the wealth of its citizens are not directly related. The majority of financial resources come from the central governments, and local taxes play only a minor role in the financing of the cities (Cséfalvay, Z. 2007).

In accordance with McKenzie's triangle model (McKenzie, E. 2003), all actors (investors, municipalities, inhabitants) gain profit out of this relation. This is the situation in the United States where everybody wins. In Hungary, according to the results of our study, the municipalities and the inhabitants seem to be weaker players in this run (Figure 5). The average inhabitants do not have so many benefits from this process (apart from the people living in gated communities, who do have these benefits). The developers usually have great political and financial influence in realizing their ideas against municipalities, and the local society is important for them only as a potential purchase power. In opposition to the USA, or other Western countries, the foreign developers play a much more important role than the domestic ones. The big transnational real estate companies are very common not only in Hungary (Cséfalvay, Z. 2007, Bodnár, J. – Molnár, V. 2007), but in other former state socialist countries from the Eastern European bloc, as well.

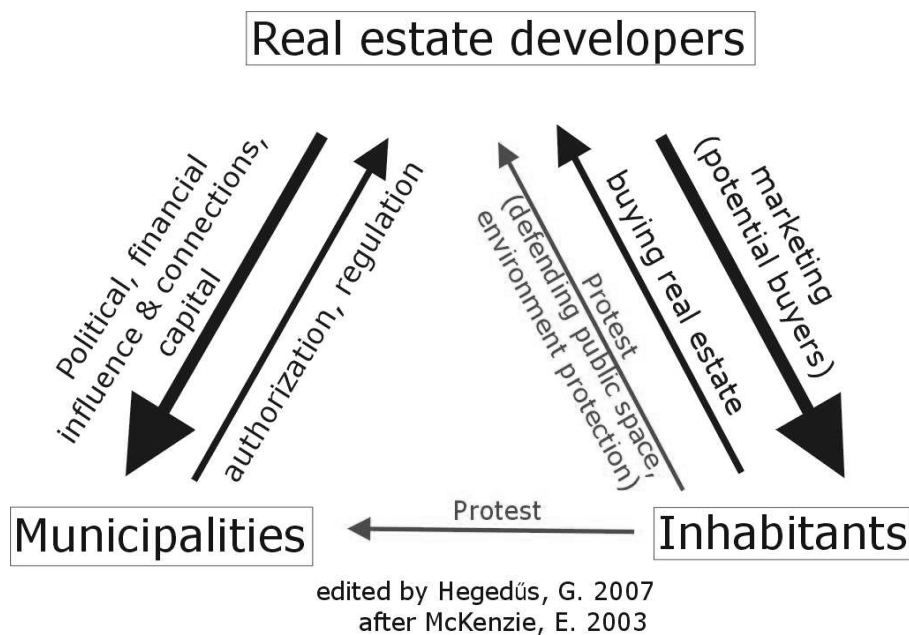


Figure 5. Interpreting McKenzie's triangle model in Hungary

According to many research outside Hungary, even at the more developed countries spatial planning is not capable to control the establishment of gated communities and to ensure the common local interest against the investors (Blandy, S. et al. 2003). Municipalities would play a very important role in the authorization and regulation of gated communities. As we mentioned earlier, every local government (both in Budapest – districts –, and outside) has its own right to determine its own spatial planning policy to a large extent.

Vámos stresses in a study conducted in Budapest, that at district level sometimes many valuable pieces of ground were sold from the municipality to investors. The investors got

them at a bargain price. These cases were not cleared up. The authorities of local governments modified the spatial planning documents according to the investors' demands. The profit-oriented Hungarian home-building investors intended to get pieces of ground that had low prizes or that had unfavourable (but easily corrigible) features. Unfavourable conditions meant unclear ownership or lack of (spatial planning) regulation, which were advantageous from their point of view. That is way that many "unfavourable" pieces of ground were built up with gated communities at several points of Budapest. In Hungary the establishment of gated communities is not regulated concerning town-planning and architecture by itself. Therefore it would be only the local government's task to point out the directions of the real estate developing serving the common interests (Vámos, D. 2001). But, in two of her case studies, the building up and the changing function of the plots was started by the initiative of the investors, the municipalities did not have any conceptions. The making of the so-called regulation plan is the duty of the local authority. But sometimes the investors make the part regarding to their project instead of local authority to realize their investment in time (local authorities renew regulation plan at times). Vámos mentioned regulation deficiencies regarding the projects of the two analyzed gated communities (Vámos, D. 2001).

Based on their research Bodnár and Molnár state that the relationship of the housing development to its surroundings and the structuring of public and private spaces are also indicative of the local game between the private developer and the district planning authority (Bodnár, J. – Molnár, V. 2007). Investors also have to be more familiar with local ways of conducting business (especially when it comes to dealing with local government administrators and planning authorities) and have to have an ample social capital. One of the consultant of Bodnár and Molnár recounts, "in District II no one could build for a while; everyone knew that a certain developer had exclusive ties to the district government, so applying for construction permits would have been in vain" (Bodnár, J. – Molnár, V. 2007). Resource strapped local governments have pressed developers to fund urban development projects (e.g. cleaning of contaminated land, construction of public road, public playground) in exchange for cheap land and concessions in building densities. In their case study they analyze the establishing of "Marina Part" gated community project near the Danube river. The negotiation of the border of private and public has been very intense and cut deep into material interests and power aspirations of the developer and the local authorities. The developer wanted the state (either at the district or municipal level) to share their costs of cleaning the area and laying down basic infrastructure there. The local government wished to relegate the entire cost to the developer, in exchange they offered real co-operation. The district government has had a constructive relationship with the developer for years (Bodnár, J. – Molnár, V. 2007). Of course, the results of the mentioned research by Vámos and Bodnár and Molnár should not be generalized to all of the 23 districts of Budapest and all investors.

According to our research, the local governments of suburban zone of Budapest chose very different attitudes towards suburbanization and towards establishing gated communities supposedly connected to suburbanization process. Some local governments try to avoid or just slow the process of suburbanization (e.g. they do not parcel out new plots to entice movers from Budapest to settle down), and they intend to preserve the traditional town / or village scape. On the contrary, some other local governments aim to increase their number of residents (and therefore their inland revenue) at a quick pace. They parcel out many new plots in the form of establishing gated communities, as well. Piliscsaba settlement followed also this way in the 1990's. Gated communities located in the agglomeration of Budapest often have a higher social-economical status and a relatively homogeneous society that differs from the rest of their municipality, and they often complain about the unsatisfactory public services

provided by the municipality they belong to. This was a main trigger in 2007 for an elite gated community called “Magdolna Völgy (Magdalena Valley)” in an attempt to secede from Piliscsaba to become administrative autonomous unity. This event was the first of such, unprecedented, controversial case in Hungary which could be only prevented by the president of Hungary who makes a decision on such cases.

5. Summary

The gated communities are a global social phenomenon of our era and they have already widespread in the whole World. They cause various effects on their area and their surroundings. These effects may be entirely different if looking at them from the various point of views of the settlements and the people living in gated communities. In opposition to the views of their investors emphasizing merely the advantageous features of gated communities in their marketing activity, concerning the result of scientific examinations they have some disadvantages as well that have drawback both to their surroundings and to their inhabitants, too.

Gated communities can be considered as developments providing club goods strictly to their residents. These club goods are unrivalled, but excludable – they offer numerous rather favourable facilities, and exclude the free riders. That is why these developments are very efficient in economic sense. In the view of Tiebout, the settlements compete with each other for the potential buyers (immigrants). The citizens move to the settlement where the most and best public goods are available and the lower taxes have to be paid. So the mentioned competition stimulates the settlements to provide more and better services in exchange for the imposed taxes. According to the triangle model of McKenzie, the rise of gated communities can be described by the triangle of developers, local governments, and homeowners. All members of this model are interested in building gated communities. Because of these reasons, every member in this triangle has its own interest in building gated communities. The mentioned conditions are quite different in Hungary where there is not a Tieboutean competition. Because of the high redistribution rate of central government, the wealth of a settlement and the wealth of its citizens are not directly related. The majority of the financial resources come from the central government, and local taxes play only a minor role in financing the cities. In Hungary, according to the results of our study, the municipalities and the inhabitants seem to be weaker players in McKenzie’s triangle model. Most of the inhabitants do not have so many benefits from establishing gated communities.

Municipalities should play a very important role in the authorization and regulation of gated communities. But developers have usually great political and financial influence in realizing their ideas against municipalities, and the local society is mainly important for them only as a potential purchase power. It seems thought-provoking that not only in Hungary, but even in more developed countries, spatial planning is incapable to control the establishment of gated communities and to ensure the common local interest against the investors. In Hungary, gated communities are generally hardly considered at the different levels of spatial planning, and their various (sometimes negative) effects are not addressed, either. There seems to be huge differences between the various local governments and their spatial planning concerning gated communities. If spatial planning has the necessary attention and measures, and the local authorities have the needed legal means towards gated communities, then both of them could be fulfil their original function: the protection of the long-term common interest against the

short-term interest of the investors of gated communities and the residents living in these enclaves.

A much more comprehensive research is needed in order to be able to examine the generalization potential of these concluding statements, and to eliminate or mitigate the disadvantageous effects of the gated communities. These studies could be connected in parallel to the analysis of the spreading and numerical growth of the Hungarian gated communities, as well.

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