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GATED COMMUNITIES – INDIVIDUALIZATION OR SEGREGATION IN HABITAT

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ABSTRACT

Nowadays, when we are constantly bringing up European values and virtues, the topic of the gated communities is extremely important. Who lives in such communities and what are they in reality? This question is based on the constant clash between the rich and the poor, the ones who have and the ones who don't, between the privileged and the migrants looking for shelter. There is that wall which separates people and makes ones special against the others. In the end, the conclusion is that this social model of inhabitation leads to social segregation, which breaks the integration connections, both in society and in the traditional urban structure.

E. Blakely defines the gated communities as “residential areas with restricted access, such that spaces normally considered public have been privatized. Physical barriers – walled or fenced perimeters – and gated or guarded entrances control access. Gated communities include both new housing developments and older residential areas retrofitted with barricades and fences” [1]. In Bulgaria the acceptance of similar communities is defined by the wide acceptance for a contemporary city construction of one- or multi-family buildings, accompanied by additional amenities such as swimming pools, gyms, restaurants and others, by all means fenced and closed off for exterior visitors. Actually the gated community's types vary from “castle” type one-family houses with high and thick fences and the most state-of-the-art security systems to fenced-off army blocks, turned into hostels for refugees. All these

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residence models are similar in their being fenced off, and all of them can be defied as gated against visitors or tuned into a prison of their own.

The topic surveys the first type of gated communities, built for the people, representing the middle and upper middle class. According to the presented statistics, the basic motivation which people state in choosing living in such type of communities are two: first, motivated by fear as the engine for ‘desire for isolation’, and second, the desire for individuality, for panache, for demonstrating one’s stature and being different.



Fig. 1, 2. Gated communities in the center of Poland, Warsaw

The dominating paradigm which is behind the rise of the gated communities, starting from the USA and reaching New Zealand, from the Close East to West Africa, from China to Latin America, is growth; which is also viewed as a synonymous to progress. Both growth and progress are aimed at the individual and for their benefit. “All that would gather the family in a secure, well maintained environment and would provoke them to spend their free time there.” [2].

The key words of the globalization are freedom of choice, opportunities for individual development and self-expression. The dream for constantly rising standards results in the form of constant inequality. That means that the prosperity of few, living in beautiful isolation in the gated communities, is realized through grabbing, exclusion, exploitation and long-term poverty of the multitude of people outside of the barriers. Without the unequal relations, created by the global economic system and managed for the benefit of the rich, the gated communities would not be able to exist.



Fig. 3, 4. Restrictive signs „Private property, do not trespass!”

In Bulgaria there are sufficient examples of fencing off public spaces, limiting the access through specific places which otherwise should be open for the public, for the benefit of

rich and privileged groups of people. There are also examples of restricted public access to the sea shores and various dams, “which have somehow become private”. Examples like these lead to the conclusion that the gating is not just a result of the psychological state of fear and desire for security.

It has changed into a desire for isolation, domination and showing off. We fence off not to protect ourselves from a possible assault over our personality and property, but to demonstrate how we stand out from the crowd; to show prestige and prosperity, to distance ourselves or distance the rest of the world from us through various forms of fences and security systems.

The gated communities offer high economic standard and highly priced services and in turn require high usage of material and social resources in order to maintain their status, which is the reason for their existence. The human desire to live in a secure and calm environment is natural, but is that a privilege, available only to few? What happens to those living in the gated communities and how to interpret the desire for individuality and showing off within the development of the society as a whole?



Fig. 5, 6. Temporary residence complex “Eden Park”, Sunny Beach, Bulgaria

For Bulgaria the consequences of the development of gating communities are yet to be seen. One of the major prerequisites is the lapses in law regulations, which is beneficial neither for the investors nor for buyers. Another factor is the deformation in the values of people who have been living in such environment for long time. The confidence that “I am protected and I have privileges” actually is quite illusory. Other examples from life in Bulgaria show that even gated communities for the middle and upper middle class may be subject to crimes.

Most Bulgarian projects could be identified both as European and American models. The initial desire for secured residence in individual houses among nature is gradually enhanced by the idea for residential communities which offer living in an apartment in a secured city environment. Very popular are the gated communities with vacation profile, located in the residential areas at the seaside of Black Sea resorts (Balchik, Sozopol) or within the winter resorts and mountain villages (Bansko, Dobrinishte, Razlog). The price is defined mainly by the location of the complex, the availability of sufficient infrastructure, the size of the area and the separate living quarters, the value of the additional services and the cost of the resources and labor required for their construction. The initial prices exceed by 20 – 30% the prices of traditional building construction. In the process of exploitation, problems with monthly fees for maintenance of the space between buildings, the kids’ playgrounds, the landscaping, the water areas, and the streets of the community gradually start to arise. More often than not the lack of clear regulatory systems which define the rights and the obligations of the users is becoming a reason for not choosing this type of residence.

Fact is that there are countries like Germany, where there are no gated communities. Accused of excessive tolerance, that country has long ago realized the huge risk of segregation in society and deliberately banned the gating of certain neighborhoods.



Fig. 7, 8. Gated type of communities „Vitoha tulip and „Sofia Sky“, Sofia, Bulgaria

In the US the gated communities are called CIDs – Common Interests Developments. Compared to the US, in Bulgaria the combination of people in the communities is based solely on one criterion – their financial means. It is not important what your education, job or area of activity is. Various layers of society coexist well enough, from custom officers to politicians; all of them can become neighbors in the gated communities, as long as they can afford it financially. This fact defines the newly formed middle class in our country. Of course, there are such complexes, where the formation, similarly to CID, is based on mutual interest, such as playing golf, which has become sufficiently popular in Bulgaria in the last years.

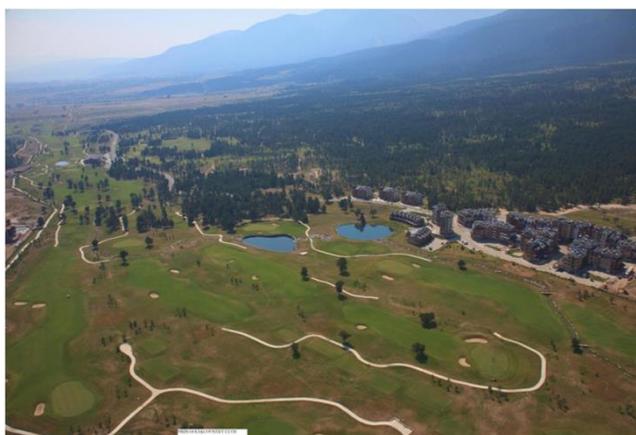


Fig. 9. Panoramic view of the golf course "Pirin Golf Resort", Bulgaria

No matter how understandable and logical it may be, any form of gating is a prerequisite for segregation in society. Whether based on feelings of fear of assaults on person and property, or the result of the desire for panache and prestige, this kind of residence creates not only a formal closure and isolation, but also absolutely real preconditions for separation and deformation of the urban environment.

Allowing an isolated type of residence that defies urban principles inevitably leads to segregation. It could be argued that the gated communities have become more popular in recent decades as a new form of residence in Bulgaria, which is the spatial segregation of the wealthier segments of the population as a result of the social stratification of society, subject to two main motives: security for life and property and prestige and self-presentation through the form of residence.

Residing in gated communities has deep historical roots, connected with the culture and the values of various peoples and the necessity for ensuring security for different layers of society. The gated communities nowadays are motivated most of all by social differences and the desire to provide security for everyday life and property. They are a sustainable form of residence in communities with high level of social differentiation and will continue to develop in the conditions of neoliberal model, which keeps generating constant social inequality and individualization. Gated types of communities lead to fragmentation of the urbanized territories, to extensive development of the cities, to depopulation of centers and to reduction of the activities in the public areas. Residential gated communities represent spatial and social segregation as a reflection of the social stratification of the contemporary society and the social economic relations within.

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СЕЛИЩАТА ОТ ЗАТВОРЕН ТИП – ИНДИВИДУАЛИЗАЦИЯ ИЛИ СЕГРЕГАЦИЯ НА ОБИТАВАНЕТО

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Ключови думи: архитектура, комплекси от затворен тип, сегрегация, обитаване

РЕЗЮМЕ

В днешно време, когато непрекъснато говорим за европейски ценности и добродетели, темата за селищата от затворен тип е изключително актуална. Кой обитават тези комплекси и какво същност представляват? В основата на тези въпроси стои вечният сблъсък между бедни и богати, имащи и нямащи, привилигирвани и мигранти, търсещи подслон.

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