

## High-Rise Housing Estates as Vehicles of Social Exclusion in Post-Socialist Cities

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Housing estates cannot be considered merely as products of the socialist system since they can also be found in Western Europe though their significance and role differ from that of the former socialist countries. Housing estates on the housing market of Western countries are important, nevertheless they represent only a low proportion of the whole dwellingstock (P. Dunleavy 1981, U. Herlyn 1989, E. Van Kempen - S. Musterd 1991). In spite of that, from the beginning of the 1980's almost all western-european governments made attempts to carry out various programs on modernization and rehabilitation of housing estates.

The problems in East-Central European countries turn up to be more serious, since the number of dwellings in housing estates and people living there goes far beyond the West-European scales. (W. Rietdorf - H. Liebmann - T. Knorr-Siedow 1994, E. Müller 1997). Building quality is in many cases lower and rehabilitation is very needed, However, steps for renewal have not been accomplished as yet.

The idea of housing estate and the building of the first housing estates in Hungary dates back to the turn of the century, but an overall expansion was not accomplished till after the II. World War. Considering the size, building material and technology, we can talk about generations of high-rise estates, which apart from the built environment show significant differences in terms of the natural and the social environment (Hegedûs J. 1987, Szelényi 1990, Kovács Z. 1998).

After 1989 the housing market of Hungary has gone through substantial changes. Housing policy was changed dramatically, state influence became negligible, private initiatives increased in importance. In line with the transformation of the housing market most of the former public

dwelling stock was privatised. In Budapest the share of state housing sector decreased from 51 percent to 15 percent between 1990 and 1997. The remaining public housing sector can be found basically as two types:

- a.) inner-city tenement blocks, built at the turn of the century; and
- b.) high-rise housing estates, built during the era of communism.

The privatisation also set off an increasing residential mobility, in which younger/better off families are leaving state housing and shifting to the private sector. Public housing is gradually becoming residualised, and serve as shelter for the poor and disadvantaged social groups.

Housing estates from different periods of construction show basic differences in terms of their physical, social and natural status and environment. One of the main aims of our research is to reveal the differences of these spheres by studying selected housing estates and to investigate the relation to possible trends of social exclusion in the different types of housing estates. The other intention of the research is to indicate the possible ways of redevelopment the types of investigated estates, especially the estates in worst condition (not only physically but socially as well), in order to determine a future strategy which is closely connected to urban politics and planning.

### ***The development of housing estates in Hungary***

According to data from the last Hungarian Census of 1990 there were approximately 600-650 thousand dwellings located in housing estates in Hungary. This equals around 16-17 per cent of the total dwelling stock in a housing market of 3,8 million dwellings. In Budapest 32,2 per cent of dwellings were estimated to be in housing estates in this year. This has, however, somewhat declined in the last ten years due to the fact that the vast majority of new housing built during this period has not been in estate form.

### ***High-rise estates of the 1950s***

The "Stalin baroque" housing estates of the 1950s usually contained a small number of dwellings, each for a total of between 300 and 800 families. These estates were built close to the centre of towns and fit well into the urban landscape. Built with a relatively high quality, such estates were

often considered a step forward in terms of the level of comfort available for the average household. By the end of the 1950s, however, this socialist-realist architecture lost in importance, whilst uniformity in design began to dominate. Most of these estates from the 1950s, despite the small size of each apartment, are not currently considered very negatively due to their location and design.

### ***High-rise estates of the 1960s***

At the beginning of the 1960s the first large high-rise housing estates were developed in Budapest. The housing estates of this period were located further away from the city-centre, but they were still organically linked to the city by existing infrastructure. Houses were built with traditional materials and methods and had variation in the height of the buildings (4 or 9 storey) and the physical layout. Most estates of this time currently still have a mixed status and, although not considered prestigious, they have not become ghettos.

### ***High-rise estates of the 1970s***

From the late 1960s, housing was increasingly based on prefabricated element technology and the establishment of gigantic «housing factories» started. These «factories» were often built as extremely dense high-rise estates of 12-15.000 dwellings, often housing 30-40.000 people. Quantitative factors were considered more important than qualitative ones. Most of these estates were built on undeveloped peripheral locations and were most often poorly served by transport and other facilities. This resulted in an often inhumane environment, which along with the decreasing quality, meant that these estates were unpopular from their opening. The buildings, most of them built by panel construction methods, were uniform and massive, most often 10 storeys. Such estates are currently of primary concern in Budapest, with many having the potential to become real ethnic ghettos (Ladányi J. 1993). Social exclusion in its pure sense can be easily observed in these neighbourhoods.

### ***High-rise estates of the 1980s***

By the 1980s, connected to the severe economic crisis in Hungary, state housing construction rapidly declined and private forms of housing provision became dominant. During this time,

primarily small-scale estates in higher-quality locations closer to the city centre with owner-occupied housing were built. Such estates incorporated new architectural and design aspects as well as having purposely built private commercial facilities located on the ground floor or basement. These are the "star" housing estates that have been more able to successfully retain their value and popularity in the chaotic real estate market that has developed after 1989.

For the research project we are using selected cases (2 from each category) in order to compare the housing conditions and social life of the different types of housing estates. Special emphasis is placed on the mechanism of exclusion, deprivation, lack of resources, access to public services, as well as local government policy. Factors of social exclusion such as relative poverty, unemployment among residents, low participation of residents in "local affairs" etc. are in the focus of our empirical research.

### ***Phases of the research project***

#### 1. Investigation of the built environment of the chosen sample fields

- a) Characteristics of the building conditions of the sample housing estates
- b) Survey on the dwelling stock, evaluation of their physical condition
- c) Evaluation of the dwelling stock, and conditions (statistical survey, analysis of the changes of the housing market, residential mobility, time and method of investments, renovation, management of houses.
- d) Other aspects of infrastructure

#### 2. Investigations of the social environment of housing estates

- a) Demographic profile of residents (age, education, profession, income, migration-commuting, segregation)
- b) Relationship between environment and local society (satisfaction with environment, intention to move, shopping habits etc.)
- c) Transportation (private car ownership, parking facilities etc.)
- d) Free-time activities
- e) Investigation of local social activity (social integration, local organisations, willingness to improve residential environment etc.)

3. Investigation of the natural environment
  - a) Aspects and characteristics of green areas
  - b) The most important environmental problems

### *Methods of research*

- Analysis of macrostatistical, polling and governmental data of the sample areas
- Questionnaire survey based on simple, representative sampling in the local society
- Interviews with residents based on the method of stopping people in the streets
- Deep interviews with experts of the local governments, analysis of concepts for improvement included in general setting plans, mapping of the strength of local politics to change environment
- Investigation of the experience of west-European cities for improving the conditions of housing estates. Examining possibilities of adaption and application.

Based on the research results the outlines of the subcategories of the given types of housing estates may appear. From this we can outline: what are the most important strategical decisions to be made in certain case study areas from the side of urban politics, local government, town planning and through resident participation which might ensure the "survival" and improvement of the housing estates, physically as well as socially. We should as well ask whether our results reflect specific Hungarian conditions, or if it is a typical Eastern-European phenomenon.

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