

## Sofia after 1989: new reality of residential development

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# Sofia After 1989: New Reality of Residential Development

ISKRA DANDOLOVA

## Abstract

*In this article is discussed the new reality of residing in Sofia after 1989 and the tendencies of development of the urban territory concerning housing areas. It is argued that the transformations of the urban reality are significant and they concern the social structure as well as its territorial partition through housing space. It is clear that Sofia lost great quantity of public spaces and got larger. A part of the Sofia urban sprawl is converted to high quality place of residing. The relatively heterogeneous housing communities of the socialist city now are predominantly transformed to homogeneous ones. Fragmentation and segregation between city centre, inner city urban territories and outskirts are changing dramatically the social stratification of the society. There are limited number of studies presenting the changing situation and few research temptations to explain the phenomena. Using qualitative and quantitative data and information, collected between 2005-2010 for a special project, the article suggests reasons for this new reality of residing and try to emphasize some future visions for the housing in post-socialist Sofia.*

Sofia, housing transformation, social stratification, urban segregation, visions of development

## Zusammenfassung

### Sofia nach 1989: Eine neue Realität der Wohnbebauung

*In der vorliegenden Arbeit werden die neue Wohnrealität in Sofia nach 1989 sowie die tendenzielle Entwicklung des urbanen Raums in Bezug auf Wohngebiete erörtert. Es wird argumentiert, dass die Veränderungen der urbanen Realität beträchtlich sind und nicht nur einen Einfluss auf die sozialen Strukturen, sondern, aufgrund des Wohnraums, auch auf die territoriale Unterteilung haben. Es ist offenkundig, dass Sofia viel öffentliche Fläche verloren und sich räumlich ausgedehnt hat. Ein Teil des urbanen Zersiedlungsgebiets Sofias wird in Wohnfläche mit höchster Lebensqualität umgewandelt. Die relativ heterogenen Wohnsiedlungen der sozialistischen Stadt werden nun vorwiegend zu homogenen Anlagen umgebaut. Die Fragmentierung und Segregation zwischen dem Stadtzentrum, den innerstädtischen Gebieten und den städtischen Vororten verändern die soziale Schichtung der Gesellschaft auf drastische Weise. Eine begrenzte Anzahl an Studien befasst sich mit der sich wandelnden Situation und nur wenige Forschungsarbeiten unternehmen den Versuch, dieses Phänomen zu erklären. Der vorliegende Artikel weist, basierend auf qualitativen und quantitativen Daten und Informationen, welche zwischen 2005 und 2010 für ein Sonderprojekt gesammelt wurden, auf mögliche Gründe für diese neue Wohnrealität hin und unternimmt den Versuch, einige Visionen für das Wohnen der Zukunft im postsozialistischen Sofia darzulegen.*

Sofia, transformiertes Wohnen, soziale Schichtung, urbane Segregation, Entwicklungsvisionen

## Introduction: The impact of dramatic political transformation on the urban housing environment

“Coming back home, Sofia where I was born and grew up was absolutely different for me. The old, friendly look of houses had disappeared. People were different. The spirit of the neighbourhood was breathing in a different way. I was back to an unfamiliar city.” (NENOFF 2005, p. 13). This confession of a political emigrant is not surprising. During the last seventy years Sofia had to face two tremendous ideological and political upheavals (1944 and 1989)<sup>1</sup> and has experienced dramatic transformations in three urban phases: capitalist, socialist, and post-socialist or neo-liberal (neo-capitalist). Each of those social and political phases and changes in Bulgarian society reflects the considerable metamorphoses of the urban space in Sofia.

Urban consequences of restructuring society are often central concepts in recent urban discourses and debates in the United States of America (USA) and in some European Union (EU) countries (SASSEN 1991; MARCUSE 1996, 1997; PAQUOT 2000, 2009; VIALA 2005 etc.). These researches follow the tradition of famous urban sociologists from the “School of Chicago” and classics in sociology (BURGESS 1964; PARK 1929; SIMMEL 1984 [1898]; WIRTH 1938 etc.), followed later by those from “1968’s French Movement” (LEFEBVRE 1968; CASTELLS 1970, 1972; LEDRUT 1968, 1984; BOURDIEU 1986 etc.). All argue that urban form and environment have a close relationship with the political power and the social stratification of the society in the space. But only a few authors in today’s debate have expanded their theoretical analyses or research findings specifically to the social change in post-socialist countries (1989) and the impact on the urban situation provoked by the process of transi-

tion from socialist to the neo-capitalist development of cities (SZELENYI 1983, 1992; HEGEDUSZ 2010; TSENKOVA & LOWE 2003; STANILOV 2007 etc.).

Due to all political and social changes, Bulgaria, as one of those post-socialist countries in transition since 1989, expresses strong transformations on the macro as well as on the micro level of its urban structure. After the political shake up, Sofia, the capital and largest city, in Bulgaria (about 25 % of the total population) accumulates metamorphoses in the urban structure in a more intensive way than other locations. European history shows that during different time periods and according to political power and social change one and the same space in the urban environment accommodates a variety of communities and activities in different ways (MAGRI & TOPALOV 1989; BOUVIER 1997; PINCON & PINCON-CHARLOT 2007; MAURIN 2004; DANDOLOVA 1998 etc.). The city centers could attract, in turn, the wealthy classes and then give in to the wave of poor hired laborers and immigrants. A similar situation could prevail with respect to the outskirts of the city, which at beginning of capitalist development mostly sheltered the industrial activities and the poor strata, but later, quite to the contrary, attracted the well-to-do and rich strata.

In Sofia, during its thousands years of existence, the density of buildings and population density changed many times including green areas, variety of social, cultural and economic activities. In modern times, the shift in the preferences from planned productive economy to free-market and business activities in some areas, or the new vision in the residents’ willingness regarding the quality of the environment starts to dictate in a different way many urban structures. Most of these preferences depend above all on the change of working and living conditions, communications, social prestige and possibilities for prosperity that the environment offers to citizens in the new shape of physical and social terms. The combination of factors of preference in this case is quite rich considering air

quality, noise, capacity of technical infrastructure, type of closeness between neighbours, the kind of construction of the house, the proximity of transportation, the cultural habits of residents and more. During the on-going post-socialist period, these processes of change in urban structure and social life are taking place in Sofia dynamically. In this context, it is important to underline that usually residential areas are the most vulnerable and sensitive urban areas that reflect relatively quickly the impact of the social change and structure as well the inhabitants’ way of life. Many studies reveal that housing mirrors very clearly the metamorphoses of society (MOTEV 1997-98). The partitioning and separation over the centuries of these spaces into places of residence of ruling classes and ruled, rich and poor, old residents and newcomers, partly has been described and continues to attract interest for research (POPOV 2011; HIRT 2012; STADDON & MOLLOV 2000)<sup>2</sup>. Some authors already confirmed through different investigations that influence and show how the social-political change transforms the housing structure and conditions (TZENKOVA 2009; DANDOLOVA 1998a). Thus, in looking for the changes in the present-day condition of the Bulgarian housing environment, we can show the marks of the post-socialist development of Sofia after 1989.

## Sofia during the socialism: housing and urban development

The existing pre-war<sup>3</sup> housing in the central Sofia was predominantly organized by condominiums and family houses.<sup>4</sup> The first condominium in the city was built in 1927-28 (DANDOLOVA 2001-2002). During the socialist period (1944-

1 1944 marks the year of political change of the country after the WWII: the establishment of the soviet model of socialism; 1989 is the year of political change after the Fall of the Berlin’s wall, the end of the soviet model of socialism and the start of the transition period to democracy and market economy.

2 The key issue for the success of these analyses is the provision of enough correct original data and sociological findings (demands in strong decrease after 1989!). Collected and analysed by the author research findings in this article are used before this publication by S. HIRT (with the permit of the author) for her book “Iron curtains: Gates, Suburbs and Privatisation of Space in the Post-Socialist City”.

3 World War II

4 In this case *family house* means a house for one family or for several families derivate by the initial one: old parents, married children (brothers/sisters), some close relatives, several generations of the same family and different other large family combinations.

1989), the urban space of Sofia underwent drastic changes (MOLLOV 1997). The most important of these were provoked by: the massive change of ownership in 1944 from private to public (with few exceptions concerning "personal ownership and activities"); the nationalization and collectivization of the land, also some business and cultural real estates and industrial property; the nationalization of the means of production; the introduction of collective hired labor; and the transition from prevalently agricultural to predominantly an industrial national economy. A large number of family houses were nationalized, or condominiums replaced them. Due to the destruction from the WWII in Sofia (about 25 %), to the shortage of housing stock, to the nationalization of ownership, and the considerable flow of population to the capital city as a new industrial centre, the authorities had to build quickly mass-size housing, classified as large housing estates (LHE). Some of the LHE in Sofia were and are still the size of a whole town, with a population of as many as 100,000 to 120,000 inhabitants and sometimes more, situated in the free agricultural land on the outskirts of the city. They were the main place where people could provide a dwelling for themselves. The other housing provisions, including the private and cooperative were reduced to a minimum or entirely eliminated (DANDOLOVA 2000).

Populating the LHE happened in an organized way and under the control of the authorities: political, local and entrepreneurial.<sup>5</sup> The aim was not only to shelter those in need, but also to mix the different social strata, to create a social cohesion and equality - one of the basic ideas of the socialism for the society. As a result, the residents found themselves living in heterogeneous communities, faced with the challenge of establishing new human network. The authorities disregarded the opportunity of inhabitants of maintaining contact with the traditional

territories of already formed social communities no matter how small they were. In the new places of residence, people who did not know one another, coming from different social environments and cities, with different backgrounds and culture made new social contacts. They now had to share the same housing conditions and urban proximity, so this new residence became a shared one for everyone. The dwellers inevitably formed new relationships, in most cases with a feeling of solidarity regarding their new environmental conditions, and in mutual tolerance (DANDOLOVA 1998b). The different social groups and communities found themselves living together concentrated in certain urban sectors in the city. Thus, in socialist Sofia, the population was generally mixed in the space with the exception of the higher ruling elite (DANDOLOVA 1998b).

Numerous studies about the connection between social changes of the neighbourhoods and the residential environment have shown that the inhabitants of LHE up to 1989 were predominantly satisfied with their dwellings and the living conditions. Many of them were newcomers to the capital city, relatively young people with children, who had left the provinces. However, some old dwellers of Sofia also left their overcrowded old dwellings and were particularly satisfied by the housing conditions and the technical infrastructure of their new LHE homes, with indoor toilets and hot running water, central urban heating, a separate flat for each family (in most cases): *"Tell me who invented central urban heating: I want to build a monument to him. You can't imagine the tragedy of heating a house in the countryside."*

*(neighbourhood "Darvenitza", grandmother Ivanka, 1978)*

The inhabitants of LHE were not totally satisfied with everything: they felt uncomfortable with the size of the dwelling<sup>6</sup> and wished for more space and contact with the natural green surroundings. In

some cases they were displeased with the aggressive cultural habits of some of their neighbours. They felt some nostalgia for the province, the small town or village that they had left behind, wished for a lower populated area and felt exhausted from the urban life. However, the general conclusion was that about 80 % of the citizens indicated before 1989 they preferred living in a flat in a prefab block to a separate house (DANDOLOVA 1994). In the socialist period, predominant factors for forming these peoples' attitudes toward and evaluations of the housing environment were collectivism, the political appeal for solidarity and joint action in work and in recreation, and the lack of an alternative for housing.

## Sofia after 1989: housing and urban development

### First steps of transformations

The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 led to intense political and economic changes affecting all social spheres of life in Bulgaria (STANILOV & HIRT 2009). Ownership was once again at the center of debates. A large-scale return of private property or 'restitution' began in 1989 after they had been nationalized and collectivized in the years beginning in 1944: different kinds of land, housing, different types of building, including industrial enterprises, agricultural provisions etc. An active privatization of municipal lands, buildings and social housing commenced. A restructuring of the means of production was imposed and a market economy was introduced at once, which brought about great differences between the social positions of different groups and communities, and hence in their attitudes towards housing and the housing environment (HIRT & KOVACHEV 2006). The emergence of a housing market (DANDOLOVA 2002b, pp. 127-139, 2002c pp. 237-250), which was non-existent during the time of socialism, introduced a new order of redistribution of the housing stock and accelerated the transformation of the residential environment.

Thus, at the end of the 1990s, preconditions were created in post-socialist So-

<sup>5</sup> Part of the flats have been constructed and distributed by the enterprises for their workers.

<sup>6</sup> In order to rapidly alleviate the housing crisis in this period, housing construction projects were for small-size but numerous separate dwellings.



fia to end the stagnation of people in the same housing. A neo-liberal process of uplift and transformation in housing market started. In this period, priority was entirely given to private housing construction. The state housing construction plants were shut down by the state authorities. Entrepreneurship rocketed. Foreign capital came into the country. These processes brought about a new reality of residential environment in terms of space and social atmosphere as well as a connection between the center and the periphery.

Since the 1930s multi-storeyed housing started to replace individual houses in Sofia. This marks the first boom of the massive housing construction during the capitalist period of the city centre. Thus, in capitalist Sofia, a model of construction emerged. The rich and upper tier of the middle class households settled in the center of the city and the nearby inner-city neighborhoods, while the lower social groups and poor households settled in the outskirts. The second boom of housing construction in Sofia originated during the socialist period, in the 1970s, when the mass-scale construction of LHE began in the outskirts of the city and the social profile of their inhabitants became mixed. The third boom of housing construction started during the post-socialist, neo-liberal period after 1990.

According to statistics ([www.nsi.bg](http://www.nsi.bg)) the housing stock constructed during the socialist period of Sofia is the highest (VESSELINOV & LOGAN 2005). LHE comprises 70 % of the entire housing stock, and today a big part of these buildings are dilapidated. About 75 % of the population of Sofia live in them. Today, this housing stock causes numerous social, financial, legal, architectural, technological, and operational problems. Controversial proposals have been made to either reconstruct or demolish them: the Municipality, of course, wants to keep them and to reconstruct them, but some experts believe that only about 40 % of these buildings can be renovated and modernized (DIMITROVA 2000, pp. 139-145; POPOV 2009). So, what about the re-

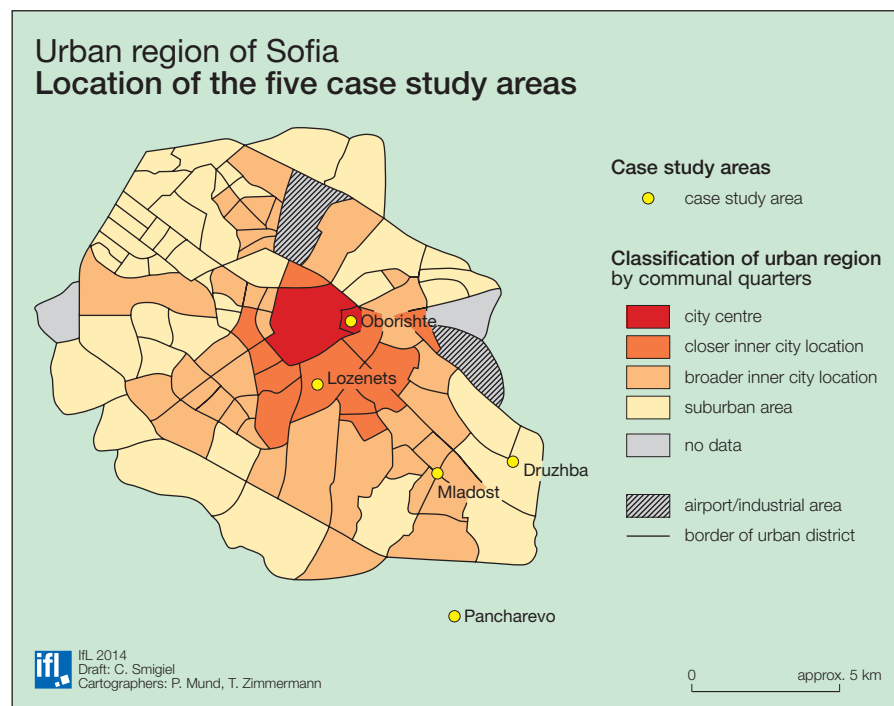


Fig. 1: Location of the five case study areas

maining 60 %). Their physical state is quite dilapidated and cannot be guaranteed a long existence (not to forget that the seismic zone of Sofia is on level nine on the Richter Scale). This very serious evaluation should be proven case by case. It is up to the Municipality of Sofia to direct the housing policy to face the risk of a large number of buildings collapsing that could leave thousands of people homeless.

### Housing transformations after 1989: Research Design

From 2007 to 2011 an international study<sup>7</sup> was conducted to discover and describe some of the urban-social changes that had taken place in residential areas in post-socialist countries since 1990 (BRADE, HERFERT, WIEST 2009). Its pur-

pose was to determine the impact of the political and social-economic transition on the urban environment after the collapse of the socialist regime. The study focused on residential space as a basic part of the built-up areas and as the most vulnerable to social changes. A special research program and methodology were developed to detect and determine by case-studies the socio-spatial and physical transformation of different residential neighbourhoods as well as the residents' attitudes towards and satisfaction with their new/changed living conditions. The Bulgarian case study was focused on the urban region of Sofia, where the following five neighbourhoods were selected for in-depth analysis (Fig. 1):

1. The "Oborishte" district is a case study area in the city centre of Sofia (Fig. 1). It is an old residential neighbourhood with a mixed housing stock in terms of age and quality. Some houses date back to the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century, but many condominiums have been built during the period between the wars, from the first housing boom. Some modern housing has been built after 1989. This area is the most expensive in the city, with a population which is now becoming younger and richer,

<sup>7</sup> The international research project «Between Gentrification and a Downward Spiral: Socio-spatial Change and Persistence in Residential Neighbourhoods of Selected Central and Eastern European Urban Regions» was financed by DFG from 2007-2011. The lead partner was the Leibniz-Institute for Regional Geography, Leipzig. The other four research participants are from Hungary (Budapest), Bulgaria (Sofia), Russia (St Petersburg) and Lithuania (Vilnius). The survey is non-representative for the entire city, only representative for the chosen neighbourhoods. It only gives predominantly tendencies. The research instruments and documents, the methods of collection, registration and analyses are equal for each country. Read more about the research and its methodology and methods in the article: BRADE, HERFERT, WIEST 2009 pp. 233-244.

with prestigious offices and high business activities.

2. The “Lozenets” district was chosen as a case study in inner-city location. Like Oborishte it is considered expensive and desirable. The neighbourhood is known as artistic, romantic and green. Its housing contents very old detached houses in abundant greenery as well as relatively small condominiums.
3. The neighbourhood of “Mladost” was selected as an example of prefab LHE. It has more than 120,000 inhabitants and was built after 1970. Due to its proximity to the Vitosha mountains and a higher quality of construction Mladost shows a higher image and social profile than other LHEs in Sofia.
4. Accordingly, the neighbourhood of “Druzhiba” was selected as a less prestigious prefab LHE. It is located in the north eastern part of the city in a more polluted area and shows a mixed quality of housing: from very dilapidated old blocks to modern, well-built new housing blocks.
5. The case study of “Pancharevo” represents finally an old suburban neighbourhood, which is well known for leisure. It is a very popular area which attracts many people to live and to partake in free time activities.

In each of these neighbourhoods we conducted structured, face-to-face interviews with residents (all together more than 470) asking for housing conditions (e.g. surface of the home, number of rooms, facilities), residential satisfaction and mobility as well as for the residents’ background (e.g. age, gender, number and type of household members, level of education, employment, ethnic identity). In the case of Sofia the sample of residents was not collected randomly. In addition to the interviews with inhabitants, we took a large collection of photos to evaluate the housing transformation explained through the semantics of housing pictures. A number of different types of experts (30) also gave their opinion about housing transformations. Moreover, the study of the Sofia urban region relies on



Photo: Case study neighbourhoods: The neighbourhood of “Oborishte (top left) and the inner-city neighbourhood of “Lozenets” (top right), the large scale housing estate “Mladost” (bottom left) and the suburban neighbourhood “Pancharevo” (I. Dandoloва 2008/2009)

statistical information available from the national censuses. The main body of data is from 2001, although for certain areas of analysis, analogies were drawn with the census from 1992. More recent data from the 2011 census were only available for some indicators, and it was possible to use them for comparisons and for evaluating the urban-social profile and divisions.

#### Research Findings: main transformations of the residential neighbourhoods in Sofia

One of the main transformations of the residential neighbourhoods in Sofia after 1990 is triggered by the “chaotic” conditions of urban development which come along with the increase of the quantity and variety of new construction. In consequence, the physical quality of residential neighbourhoods suffers from densification, which is often *“against the interest of existing inhabitants, in contradiction with the existing laws and regulations about urban development and housing conditions of the citizens as well as against some aesthetic architectural principals”*. After 1989 the influx of peo-

ple into Sofia has intensified which was due to the difference in achievable potential prosperity in different regions of the country. This difference is the main factor for people moving to more prospective regions, which in turn increases social pressure and creates overpopulation in some territories (DANDOLOVA 1998-2000, 2001-2002, pp. 16-21).

This social pressure from the overpopulation after 1989 is connected also with the expansion of the Sofia territory. The urge to expand the urban territory and to include new areas into the city is excessive and hard to suggest that it is controlled by some institutions. The spontaneous space-expansion results in dangerous interference with existing buildings, urban greenery, some open areas and natural resources on the outskirts of the city (e.g. in the mountains around Sofia). This trend to convert the remaining green and natural environment into an urbanised area is growing quickly on an ever greater scale in SOFIA (GRIMM-PRETNER 2006).

According to our survey, all types of investigated neighbourhoods have experienced densification in population and

construction. For example in the case of Oborishte in the city centre of Sofia, most of the small houses are extended in height and surface. Some of them have been demolished and huge buildings replace them, destroying green areas and courtyards. In inner city neighbourhood of Lozenets, multi-storied housing has aggressively substituted gardens, parks and individual houses. The same is true for the LHEs where densification takes place in between the housing blocks, on sport fields, playgrounds and green areas. In suburban areas like Pancharevo, new housing appears on former urban agricultural land in large scale.

In our survey, we registered different opinions on this issue. Some residents, predominantly young people, were indifferent about the increased population density which affects on their city life, or they unconsciously approved this trend: So they want to be closer to the city centre even if the area is overpopulated. Middle aged respondents and senior citizens were negative about the destruction of the green and natural environment (with an accent against the construction on the foot of Vitosha Mountain) and of expanding the urbanised territory. However, when asked about the kind of environment they would prefer to live in, the majority of all respondents, young or not, were against overly populated areas. This contradiction was widely confirmed when they were asked to describe their ideal house: they wished for “more greenery”, “more open space”, “tranquility” and “a house very close to the city centre”! To wish to live in a detached house with a green yard in the city centre is a practical absurdity in most large cities, including Sofia. In reality the result is perhaps that these people support the enlargement of the city, hence, the destruction of the green, natural environment in it.

*“I dream of having a house in the middle of a garden, in a small neighborhood, close to the city centre, of listening to the birds sing in the morning.” (a resident of Druzhba 2009)*

Expansion of urban territory in Sofia is the process of introducing more activities and social life to areas, which were previously unused or used for less intensively urban purposes. The price of the land plays a central role in this demand and pressure for urbanisation.

*“I’m looking for a plot of land to build some small houses on, but the price of the land where you can have access to infrastructure is very high. In this case you certainly have to go to the outskirts without being sure that the land extension will be approved for construction.” (Entrepreneur, Sofia 2009)*

The extended areas for housing and especially for the construction of gated communities in Sofia are part of the city’s periphery, situated outside the boundaries of the city. The authorities’ general strategy is to limit the extension of the city territory by different urban and administrative tools in order to protect the

green and natural environment, to make the city more compact. Thus, the subsidies for constructing new urban infrastructure on the outskirts of the city are limited: they are under municipal jurisdiction of local contributors<sup>8</sup>. Entrepreneurs know that according to the Bulgarian law, the municipality will pay the technical urban infrastructure for the extended areas. This is a very important and profitable investment for them. However the entrepreneurs’ social and economic requirements create pressure for extensions, which the authorities cannot resist. One of the strategies for counteracting this trend of extension and solving the problem of investment is the intense urban development, the densification of the existing neighbourhoods. But this is a controversial solution as well, since the

<sup>8</sup> The objection is that all the local contributors should pay the collected benefits for few entrepreneurs on these extended territories.

| Urban region of Sofia                                    |               |          |         |         |            |
|--|---------------|----------|---------|---------|------------|
| Age structure of population in case study neighbourhoods |               |          |         |         |            |
|  | Neighbourhood |          |         |         |            |
|  | Oborishte     | Lozenets | Mladost | Druzhba | Pancharevo |
| <b>Total population</b>                                  |               |          |         |         |            |
| <b>Age group</b>   | n=100         | n=101    | n=100   | n=100   | n=50       |
| 18 - 25  | 31.0          | 38.7     | 6.1     | 27.0    | 2.0        |
| 26 - 35  | 11.0          | 9.9      | 22.2    | 23.0    | 8.2        |
| 36 - 45  | 19.0          | 5.9      | 26.3    | 9.0     | 18.4       |
| 46 - 60  | 19.0          | 23.8     | 23.2    | 34.0    | 20.4       |
| 61 - 75  | 20.0          | 21.7     | 22.2    | 7.0     | 51.0       |
| <b>Immigrated population since 1991</b>                  |               |          |         |         |            |
| <b>Age group</b>   | n=56          | n=47     | n=51    | n=34    | n=18       |
| 18 - 25  | 46.4          | 68.1     | 7.8     | 26.5    | 5.6        |
| 26 - 35  | 16.1          | 12.8     | 33.3    | 44.1    | 16.7       |
| 36 - 45  | 23.2          | 8.5      | 31.4    | 11.8    | 33.3       |
| 46 - 60  | 8.9           | 8.5      | 17.6    | 17.6    | 5.6        |
| 61 - 75  | 5.4           | 2.1      | 9.8     | 0.0     | 38.9       |
| <b>Immigrated population before 1991</b>                 |               |          |         |         |            |
| <b>Age group</b>   | n=44          | n=54     | n=49    | n=66    | n=32       |
| 18 - 25  | 11.4          | 13.0     | 4.2     | 27.3    | 0.0        |
| 26 - 35  | 4.5           | 7.4      | 10.4    | 12.1    | 3.1        |
| 36 - 45  | 13.6          | 3.7      | 20.8    | 7.6     | 9.4        |
| 46 - 60  | 31.8          | 37.0     | 29.2    | 42.4    | 28.1       |
| 61 - 75  | 38.6          | 38.9     | 35.4    | 10.6    | 56.3       |

Source: own survey 2007

Tab.: Age structure of population in case study neighbourhoods



densification of built-up areas very often means to destroy greenery and to increase pollution. This pollution as a logical part of densification is in turn the factor to push some population groups to leave the central and inner city areas and to move to suburban neighbourhoods.

But not only the physical features of the investigated residential neighbourhoods have changed in Sofia since 1990. Thus, our survey shows that the older generations dominate more in the suburbs than in the other parts of the city (Tab. 1). Moreover – due to dynamic new housing construction in the last years – the neighbourhood of Lozenets has experienced an influx of younger and ‘richer’ people since 1991. A similar process has taken place in “Oborishte”. This increase of young inhabitants in these two neighbourhoods is also due to the new possibility of homeowners after 1989 to rent their housing as they wish (Fig. 4) what was not usual before 1989 due to strong regulations. But nevertheless, both old inner-city neighbourhoods are still today particularly characterised by their former residents, even though the majority of them has become older and poorer over the years, creating stark social and small-scale differentiations within the neighbourhoods. So some of the old owners face financial problems, thus sell their centrally located housing to economically powerful younger households and move to less expensive areas of the city. Also in the LHEs it is young generation who mainly lives in the new housing blocks built after 1990. The previous “young families” who moved to the LHEs in the 70’s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, have grown old; they predominantly have stayed in their flats and old blocks. Especially “Mladost” is famous for this process of small-scale differentiation, since it is characterised by many new housing estates built between 1990 and 2000. This process is

### Urban region of Sofia Households with high income and university degree in different neighbourhoods 2007

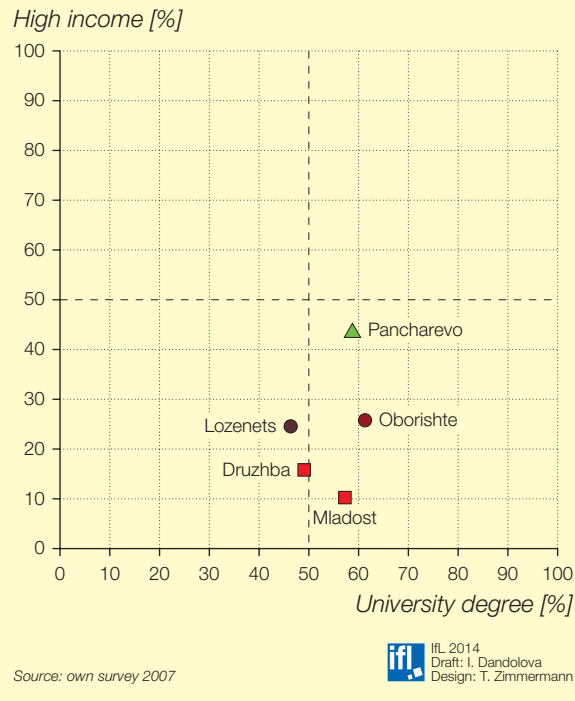


Fig. 2: Households with high income and university degree in different neighbourhoods 2007

also shown by the statistics, which reveal a higher share of children under six in the households. Apart from that, our survey shows that new and young families can be also found in the suburban neighbourhood of “Pancharevo”, but less than in the other neighbourhoods. But since the presence of youngsters and children was low in the suburb up to the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, this slight increase of young people is one sign of revitalization and up-grading; the newcomers are in search of a more ecological living environment.

While our survey data is not from a randomly nor a representative drawn sample, it still suggests that the inhabitants of “Lozenets” and “Oborishte” more often have a higher education compared to the majority of residents asked in Sofia (Fig. 2). The income of inhabitants in these two neighbourhoods is also often higher compared with people in the other neighbourhoods (Fig. 2), yet no considerable correlation exists between the inhabitants’ education level and their in-

come: So often people with higher education are poorer than less educated people.

Sofia faces a permanent process of change and transformation due to the intensification of land use<sup>9</sup>. The constantly advancing new technologies require new types of social and cultural activities as well as new types of housing. The process of ‘recycling’ the currently declining urban areas or the simply abandoned ones is a strategy applied in Sofia to reorganize and use the urban territory more efficiently without further expansion of city boundaries. Thus, the city follows the idea and challenge to reconsider the existing land uses and to use the territory more intensively in physical and social respects, making it more densely inhabited and attractive for social life.

After 1989 the whole built-up area of Sofia was characterized by the transformation of the housing stock, adapting it to the needs of commercial, office and business functions. This was for example the case in “Mladost”, where a new business mare was built. Due to the restitution and privatization of land, the building density increased in a short time. However, the density of population in the city core of Sofia is lower than in a typical European capital city. While Sofia has close to 700,000 people living within five kilometres from the centre, the concentration of employment in the city centre is much lower, thus weakening its economic potential (DIMITROVA 2000).

The search for profit through new housing construction on the part of entrepreneurs, and the influx of newcomers have boosted the housing market. The city region is growing quickly in area and density. According to the survey, this phe-

<sup>9</sup> In 2011 Sofia has a permanent population of about 1.3-1.5 million people and a temporary population of about 0.3-0.5 million. The mobility dynamics of the inhabitants and their migration rate is relatively high and still growing.



nomenon has happened predominantly at the expense of the suburbs. The villages at the foot of the mountains around Sofia have grown significantly. The “Pancharevo” district is particularly exposed to this process. Once places of temporary or seasonal living, the villages have turned into densely populated territories with housing for permanent habitation. The sub-urban neighborhoods of “Boyana”, “Dragalevtsi”, “Simeonovo”, “Bistritsa”, have absorbed tens of thousands of inhabitants. In these preferred regions, the construction of the first gated community has also begun. More have followed quickly. The suburban areas are collecting economically more powerful households. The social stratification in the city at the beginning of 21<sup>st</sup> century has begun to change.

According to this survey “Lozenets”, the inner-city residential neighborhood, is also a preferred place of residence. The neighbourhood comprises several perimeter blocks<sup>10</sup>. It was formerly part of the large green belt with parks in Sofia and had links-roads and lanes to Vitosha mountain, but most of these links are now closed. After 1989 their territories have been privatized and constructed<sup>11</sup>. In the last twenty years, most of the green spaces of “Lozenets” have been covered with buildings, mainly with housing. The neighbourhood used to be full of predominantly detached houses and villas; these have now been converted into upscale perimeter blocks (four to five floors or more). This area with historic buildings, historic gardens, parks, and monuments has now reached the high population density of approximately 8,000-10,000 inhabitants per square kilometer (www.nsi.bg).

Since 2000 the attractive courtyards look of “Lozenets” have strongly deteriorated. The housing here is facing a drop in price as it is becoming over-built and over-

populated. The old settlers are predominantly highly educated, elderly people, with a considerable share of pensioners. The newcomers are predominantly young households, upper middle class, with high incomes, and they are gradually replacing the old settlers. In our survey, we found several cases of young owners of flats paid for by parents in high political positions. The private initiatives, the restitution and speculative land transactions, have led to a decreased share of green and recreation areas in “Lozenets” and in the compact city centre. Many local gardens, squares, and children’s playgrounds now house parking lots, cafes, catering facilities, and housing. The public green space per capita in Sofia has decreased significantly<sup>12</sup>.

**Missing reconstruction**

The social structure as well as the physical features of the LHEs are also very dynamic. According to the existing studies, many of the original inhabitants from the LHE have tried to move to other parts of the city since 1989, either to the inner city, or to the upgraded urban territories on the outskirts (DANDOLOVA, FILIPOVICH & EDGAR 2007; SMIGIEL 2013). This process is not as developed for the original inhabitants of the central and inner-city neighbourhoods.

Moreover, the survey suggests that the share of low-income households grows increasingly in the LHEs today, since low-income people of other parts of the country or the city move to the neighbourhood (Fig. 3). Most of the inhabitants of LHE are unable to renovate their housing as they would wish. They are forced to adjust to the situation that the technical equipment of the dwellings in LHE is not of an acceptable level anymore; it is predominantly run-down. Missing financial resources is stated in the survey as the

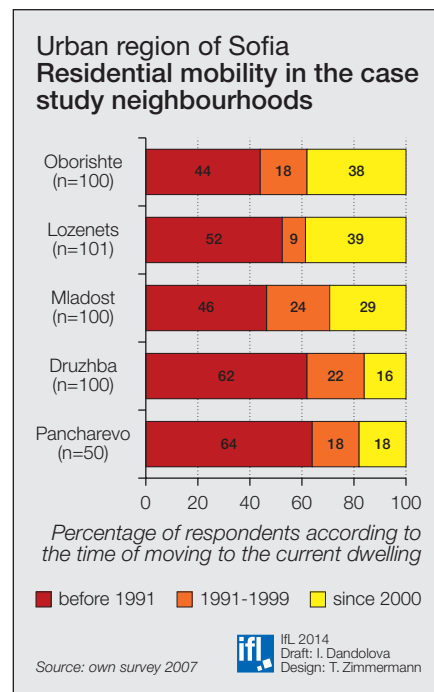


Fig. 3: Residential mobility in the case study neighbourhoods

important factor for the incapacity to maintain the housing correctly. The blocks of flats are in severe need of total refurbishment, but this process is also affecting housing and households in other parts of the city.

But today, according to the statistical data (www.nsi.bg), the entire housing stock of Sofia needs significant refurbishment and reconstruction. The city centre is mostly built up with seventy to eighty-year-old condominiums which are now very dilapidated. The inner city is full of housing of various ages. Many of these buildings need upgrading, especially with regard to more energy efficiency. The housing quality has become a central factor for people to stay or move. Therefore residential mobility has developed in all parts of the city.

Another major problem of the prefabricated LHEs is the fact that the land once allocated by master plans for public services, and partially for open green spaces, was not completely utilized according to these plans before 1989. The lack of time and priorities during the construction of housing blocks left some terrain unused which were intended mainly for services and social/leisure activities. After 1989 these plots were subjected to considera-

10 Perimeter block is a closed chain of buildings, following the perimeter of a quarter/block.

11 Constructions have been put on these parts of the area, so many roads/lanes to the mountain have been closed for large public.

12 According to the municipal report from the department of “Green space, gardens, parks”, 2009-2010, the public green space is calculated to be 35 sqm but in reality, according to some parallel informal suggestions it is less than 10 sqm/per capita. The amount of local public green spaces within the radius of 15-minute walking distance in the residential areas is diminishing due to the transformations of land-use patterns and restitution activities.

ble chaotic private entrepreneurial pressure and construction. The urge for quick profit has affected the architectural and urban quality of the residential environment and caused social discomfort for the population.

The affordability and access to housing via the housing market is very much financially restricted today, due to the gap between the incomes of Bulgarian households and housing prices. In 1998 the price of a 75 square meter flat was nineteen times the average annual Bulgarian household income (about five times in some EU countries). The price for one square meter living space in Sofia in 2007 was between 800 and 3,000 Euros; the average was about 1,200-1,500 Euros per square meter; this amounts to about six to eight months of an average annual individual income for employees. To buy a flat of 75 sqm, this individual would have to pay about thirty-five to forty years of annual income.

Until now, neither effective state nor municipal financial mechanisms nor social support exist for affordable housing and people in need of a dwelling. Banks offer housing loans but access to them is difficult; interest rates are about 8, usually 10 to 16 % for a 10 to 20-year loan and generally flexible, progressive and largely profit orientated. The housing production in the last few years has been relatively high, but very speculative. The housing market is affordable for less than 6 % to 10 % of potential buyers. People who can afford real estate, usually make numerous 'estates transactions', i.e. selling some insignificant small family estates or land and drawing several loans with the help of the extended family to accumulate the means for buying a single dwelling. Limited control exists over the transactions and the authorities have no regulation of the housing market. The totally free market is regulated through real estate agencies. The profit for the market actors is relatively high. No considerable choice is left for the underprivileged and poor urban population.

The housing sector for modest families in need in Sofia today is characterized by

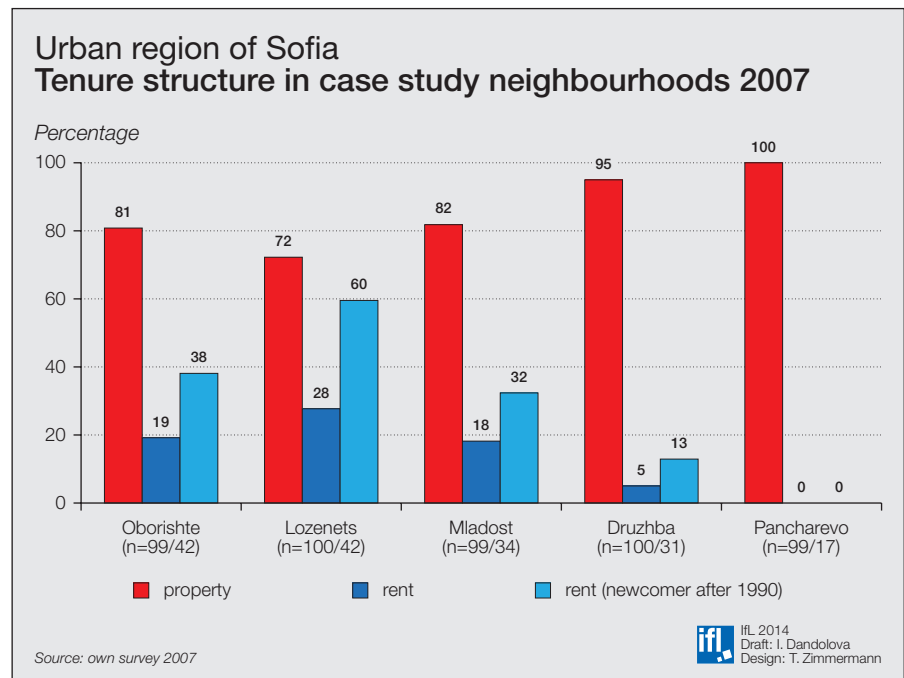


Fig. 4: Tenure structure in case study neighbourhoods 2007

limited tenure choice because of dominant private ownership, owner occupation, and a very small proportion of social rental housing constructed before 1989 (renting before 1989 was practically only possible in municipal housing, which was predominantly located in LHEs). After 1989, no social housing was constructed anymore. During the last few years – according to some statistics (www.nsi.bg) – some municipal housing was relatively kept in quantity, but at a marginal level of 3 %, while the share of private housing in Sofia increased from 86-88 % in 1989, to 93 % in 2001 and 97-98 % in 2011. The private rental market for housing emerged in Sofia in the 1990s (Lowe, Dandolova, Hegedus 1998) and was relatively insignificant at the very beginning, given that the majority of owners possessed only one dwelling<sup>13</sup> with relatively small footprint. Official statistical data about the rental market for housing doesn't exist, today. However, according to data of our survey, the share of rental housing is increasing (Fig. 4) - the interest in renting a flat in large cities is growing. So today, a part of the old housing stock is rented, and there are new homes

<sup>13</sup> According to the socialist rules one family was allowed to possess only one urban home up to 120 sqm and one second home up to 65 sqm.

to rent too: due to the global crisis, many of the houses as a result of the construction boom in 2000-2010 remain vacant or unsold and some of them are now offered for rent. The figure 4 reveals the residents' preferences for the inner-city neighbourhoods of "Lozenets" and "Oborishte", where the rental shares are the highest in comparison to the LHE-neighbourhoods of "Mladost" and "Druzhiba". The suburban area of Sofia with few rare exceptions practically has no tenants: all its inhabitants are homeowners.

#### Privatization of public spaces

The restored ownership of nationalized and collectivized land in Bulgaria after 1989 is known as restitution or denationalization. This process embraced a large part of land and different types of building in the city, upon which social activities had previously been located, e.g. kindergartens, residential buildings, public service buildings, terrains for various infrastructural activities, green areas. It was paradoxical that in many cases after 1989 a restituted property proved to have two legal owners: one after the nationalization and one after the restitution, since in the socialist period great parts of the nationalized real estate had been sold and privatized by other owners

than the initial ones. Conflicts soon arose, and municipalities did not have the will and capacity to introduce and implement the compensatory mechanisms that the law envisaged.

The real estate restituted after 1989 set the housing market in motion (DANDOLOVA 2002c, pp. 237-250). The situation was different regarding restituted land falling within LHE, especially when this land was within the settlement territory. The most highly disputed cases were when land was restituted in a way that infringed upon the life condition and activities of the current LHE dwellers. After 1989 many cases of restitution concerned the land between blocks – land which had been agricultural territory at the time of land collectivization. As a rule, the land of LHEs remained municipal property after 1989, although it had been private agricultural before being built upon (or converted to urban on the charge of all contributors). However, there was a certain pressure to sell these restituted urban plots of land because their price was for ‘urban’, not for ‘agricultural’ and the profit from the difference went to the restituted owners, not to the municipality/contributors who had paid the conversion. Apart from the restitution of some lands in the LHE, other plots of land were additionally privatized. Thus the densification of the LHEs was going through double directions. This has likewise disturbed the existing communities in the LHE. The survey has shown that the citizens of Sofia do not approve of, and are even indignant about, the overly speedy process of restitution and privatization of municipal terrain and their construction for the purpose of private business profit. This has drastically disturbed their everyday living habits. Privatization of public spaces is massively evaluated as a negative process for the urban life.

*“Years ago I bought this apartment with a view to the mountain and I was hoping to live my last years here peacefully. Now, in a matter of some months they built a hotel in front of my windows. I lost the view to Vitosha, they deprived me of the sunshine*

*and replaced that with the vulgarity of the hotel scene. How can I sell it? Who would want to buy this dump? And at which price? They ruined my life.” (Mladost, resident of block 56)*

Beside the restitution process, the survey shows that privatizing public territory triggers negative impacts or: The privatization of green areas causes indignation among many citizens. In a matter of about twenty years, according to data from the municipality, Sofia has lost one third of its green areas (Report of the Municipality of Sofia 2009). Gardens and park territories, some of them of historical value, have been irrevocably lost.

*“Where will the children play now? We protested so many times to save the little garden and the children’s playground, we even turned to the prosecutor’s office! No results. How much longer will upstart rich make their profits at our expense?” (Mladost, resident of block 54)*

The restitution and privatization of land within settlement territory not only takes away from public space in which various activities of the dwellers took place, but disturbs the functions of the city regions because construction is chaotic and in many cases the new private owners raise buildings for activities that are incompatible with a residential environment. The survey very clearly shows the negative attitude of citizens toward this municipal policy. Thus, it happens, that block-inhabitants wake up one morning to discover that new buildings have sprung up in front of their windows on grounds meant for sports or for children’s playgrounds. According to the interviews, the entrepreneurs used illegal means jointly with representatives of municipal authorities and the court to acquire land in these regions with a complete urban/technical infrastructure. It is obvious that a house built on this area has a higher market value.

*“How is it possible to build a night bar and casino ten meters from a housing block – it’s impossible to sleep: noisy customers, fights, drunken revelry, music turned up to an unbearable volume. Not to mention that in the morning we take*

*our children through the refuse, used syringes scattered around. Our entrance has turned into a public toilet. People from the municipality answer us saying that the owner of the casino is a private entrepreneur and has his private business interests. Where’s the role of the municipality, where’s the police, and why are we paying taxes?” (Mladost, house superintendent, block 54)*

### **Upgrading the housing quality of Sofia’s periphery**

For centuries a number of small settlements and villages connected to Sofia have encircled the capital. Their inhabitants were peasants supplying the city with food and primary materials. Since the end of the 19th century most of these settlements have become preferred places for country homes of the city dwellers – a long term tradition in this region<sup>14</sup>. This trend grew considerably during the socialist period, when people were allowed<sup>15</sup> to build a second home outside the city. Every third family in Sofia at that time owned a house somewhere outside the city in a village. The foot of the Vitosha mountain sheltered thousands of citizens from Sofia as seasonal or permanent dwellers (Dandolova 2002b, pp. 127-139). These villages, especially those at the foot of the mountain, gradually became attractive neighborhoods of the city after 1989 with a considerable amount of new modern housing. This residential environment started to grow with new intensive reconstruction after 1989.

Our survey demonstrates that the suburban “Pancharevo” district brings much satisfaction to its residents, and is widely desired by households in comparison with other investigated neighbourhoods (Fig. 5). Pancharevo is one of the most attractive residential neighbourhoods in the suburbs of Sofia. According to the survey, four main types of people live in

<sup>14</sup> This tradition dates from roman time. It is due to the climate, way of agricultural activities, local households’ production, social organisation of life etc.

<sup>15</sup> To remember: during the socialism each family was allowed to own only one urban dwelling/flat up to 120 sqm and one second home (up to 65 sqm built footprint).



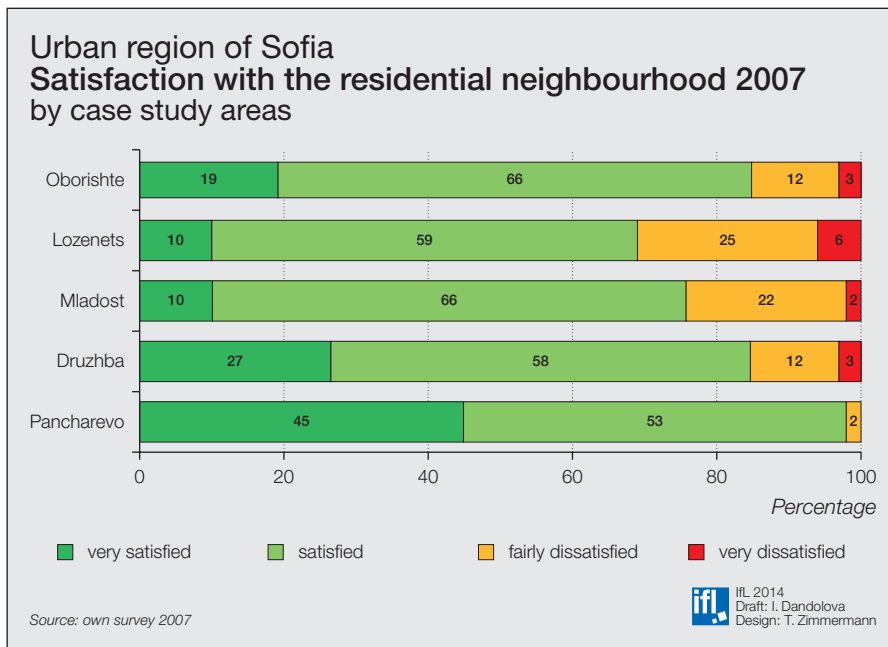


Fig. 5: Satisfaction with the residential neighbourhood 2007

Pancharevo, and all of them increase and improve their housing conditions.

- The first group of *dweller*s are *old standing families and their heirs*, who live there permanently. They add stories to their houses, annexes, upgrade the buildings, and even erect new buildings on the old family plot. Specifically, after the restitution of agricultural land, most of the local inhabitants sold their farmland at high prices and are thus able to afford to improve their living standards and professional activities.
- The second type of *dweller*s are *old standing families, who live there only temporarily* and have their own homes in the city. After 1989 many of them undertook construction in these country houses, improving the living conditions with respect to technical appliances, heating, outer appearance, and the infrastructure. Very often their idea is to improve the facilities and conditions to stay temporarily, but also to provide the option for permanent living (if circumstances in the family become more complicated).
- The third group of suburban residents are *newcomers, who permanently re-*

*side*<sup>16</sup> in new, separate estates. They are rich people building large, modern and expensive houses and facilities. The outer appearance of their houses reflects the rather questionable aesthetic tastes of the owners, who rarely listen to the advice of professionals. Thus, in the suburbs a new style of housing has emerged, that people deridingly call “*mutrobaroque*”<sup>17</sup> from the term “*mutra*” (= thug), which is the colloquial term for the *nouveau riche*.

- And finally, there are the *newcomers in gated communities*, who are Bulgarians or foreigners. Gated communities were built the first time in Bulgaria some years after 1989, chiefly under the influence of US prototypes. They house rich and upper middle class owners or tenants (SMIGIEL 2013).

But why do the people want to live in suburbia? The reasons respondents indicated are several, namely the pollution in the city centre (dust, noise, car fumes etc.), the few possibilities for contact with green areas and nature, the higher vandalism in the city, undesirable neighbors

<sup>16</sup> The houses are for permanent living, but the owners have several estates and they only occasionally live in these houses.

<sup>17</sup> “*Mutrobaroque*” in translation is something like “*Mafia Baroque*”.

in multi-storied buildings, and the unacceptable coexistence with people of different cultural habits.

*“I disliked the life in my previous house: disturbed day and night by the neighbours of different culture and activities. They were constantly spoiling my life. We moved with my family to live in the gated community and we found much more comfort, peace, security, and my dream home had come true in comparison with the previous place.”* (a resident of Pancharevo, 2010)

The favorable natural environment on the outskirts of the city - especially the proximity to the mountain - attracts many Sofia residents to live here permanently. Thus, their dream of living in a cleaner, natural environment is satisfied there; their detached houses provide calm, greater convenience, open space, and opportunities for self-expression, for a more satisfying life:

*“Here it is very ecological, with real nature all around. But you have to have a considerable income or be comparatively wealthy by Bulgarian standards.”* (resident of Pancharevo 2010)

The desire of the citizens of Sofia to live outside the city after 1989 is greater than the resources of most people, and a comparatively small share of households can afford to buy a plot or a house in the outskirts. Certainly, after 1989 the quality of life in the outskirts of Sofia was much higher and the housing there is constantly growing in quantity and quality. However, living there does not always bring positive emotions. It has its disadvantages as well, even for inhabitants in gated communities:

*“The lack of outside insulation of the walls is a disadvantage. Last year we had to pay 550 Euros for heating monthly plus 250 Euros monthly charges for services. The charges for heating are enormous. Some owners additionally insulated their houses. Other changed the heating system. The infrastructure of the village is completely new and separate from the other territory. The water supply, the sewage system, the electricity network are separate from the city network. We have an individual independent electric supply in case*



there is a damage or breakdown in the city system. It costs a lot, but it is important for the quality of life and the security system. We are able to pay for our comfort.” (resident of a gated community, Panharevo 2010)

According to the survey, the discomforts of living in the suburbs are chiefly related to a lack of well-developed technical infrastructure on the urban level as well as a lack of good roads. A household there must necessarily have at least one car. Stores for provisions are distant, so people must stock up for longer periods. For children of pre-school age, such a home is ideal but later creates great problems for parents. Adolescents and youths find themselves restricted regarding opportunities for contacts and social and cultural activities.

**Conclusions: the decomposition of socially mixed residential neighbourhoods and the composition of homogeneous housing communities**

The analysis of housing transformations after 1989 has shown that the specific socially mixed structure of the – in other respects similar, even identical – prefabricated housing blocks has started to dissolve slowly. The relative success of the achieved social cohesion in LHEs in socialism risks to become discredited by the transition to market economy. Social stratification began, and becomes obvious in the residential neighbourhoods. Many households of the LHEs would like to leave, but only very few, economically active citizens from the emerging middle class or other strata with higher financial resources can afford it actually due to a highly speculative and thus restricting, private housing market. This process of separation and “self-exclusion” of the out-migrating households has run for years, and still continues in certain “waves” which follows the political and economic events after 1989.

Those who stay in the LHEs have mostly no adequate economic and financial activities to move out. Gradually niches of impoverishment occur in these residen-

tial neighbourhoods: in Bulgaria, the highly discussed process of the “pauperization” of the mass of people challenges today the socio-spatial cohesion of the prefab housing estates. The former heterogeneity of the LHEs’ population is threatened to gradually reverse into a kind of homogeneity of prevalently low social strata of society and the poor layers of the middle class (Fig. 6) – at least in some estates like for example the neighbourhood of Druzhiba in Sofia.

The process of socio-structural downgrading of some LHEs is not only triggered by the out-migration of better-off households, but also by the influx of new households with limited financial resources. The newcomers can be grouped in four types:

- The first type are the dwellers who are heirs to the first owners of the prefabricated dwellings.
- The second type are also native citizens of Sofia, in most cases young people who are not able to get into the housing market at a higher level and filling up the niche of the cheapest housing.
- The third frequent type of new house-

holds are active citizens from the interior of the country who have been compelled to go to the big city due to unemployment, inadequate labour opportunities, and unsatisfying living conditions in the smaller settlements.

- The fourth type are tenants with low income, most often students, employed citizens from the country, temporary settling people, immigrants.

The intensity and scope of socio-structural downgrading, however, differ very much among the LHEs of Sofia. Thus, the LHE of “Mladost” represents an important counterpart to “Druzhiba”: It is still characterized by a socio-spatial stability and social mixture, since “Maldost’s good location and image (inherited from socialist times) as well as its densification with new, attractive housing after 1989 pulls better-off households.

But where did residents of the LHEs’ move to? There are various cases, but it is clear that they go to live in more adequate and, therefore, more expensive residential neighbourhoods. Some of them moved to the suburbs, to nearby villages

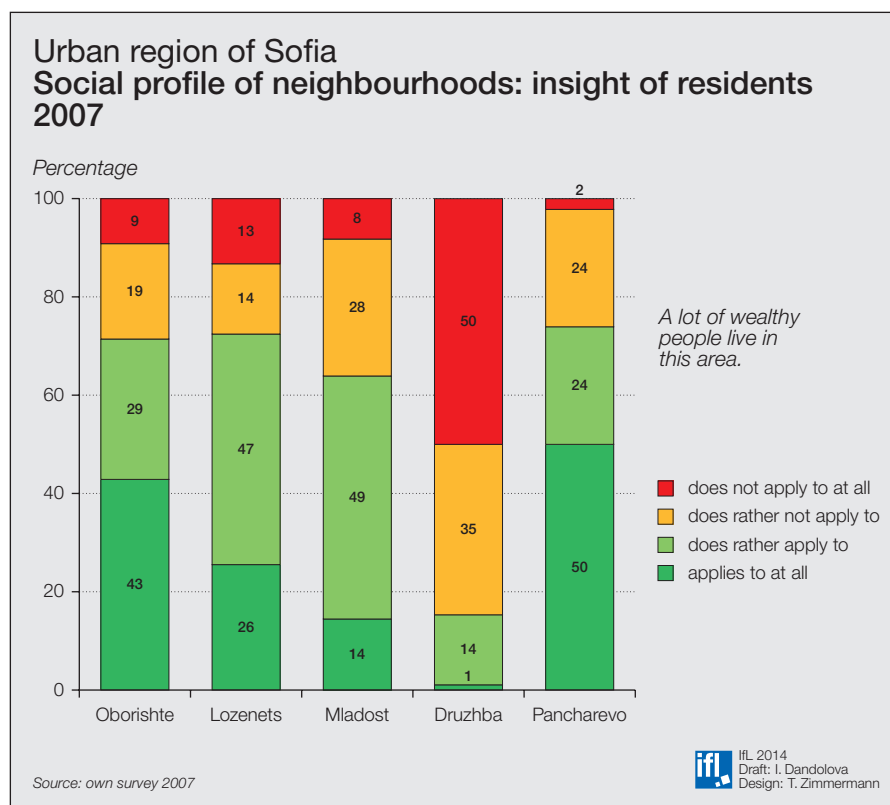


Fig. 6: Social profile of neighbourhoods: insight of residents 2007

close to the mountains or to gated communities, contributing to the significant socio-structural – to some extent exclusive – upgrading of suburban neighbourhoods. Another part moved to old housings in the city centre or inner city like in “Oborishte” and “Lozenets”: They looked for better transportation connections and a more animated cultural environment. A third group of dwellers moved to the newlybuilt housing in the central parts of the city or to the districts that are known to have a good residential environment. Thus, since 1989 the urban population has become increasingly stratified and the social space in Sofia much more differentiated, fragmented and – to some extent – polarized. The upgraded, sometimes elitist suburban neighbourhoods contrast to the LHEs which flatter between socio-structural stability and down-grading. The stratification of society is reflected in the urban architectural environment, in the “domestication” of certain city neighborhoods, in their coloring with new social overtones. A kind of homogenization is obtained of specific social groups in certain territories of the city.

### The new reality of residing in Sofia

Thus, the basic hypotheses from the beginning of this research on the transformation of residential neighbourhoods in Sofia after 1989 has been confirmed: We observe the relatively rapid social fragmentation of the urban region. Regrettably, the results reveal trends of a harsh model of neo-liberal social stratification in the urban environment with trends of polarisation. The data showed two opposite ongoing processes, namely the decline and the upgrading of neighbourhoods or parts of them.

The decline is manifested by deepening and rapid segregation of the urban living space in Sofia, by aggravating and extending the poor urban areas like ‘pockets of poverty’, mostly concentrated in LHEs. At the same time upgrading of some housing areas takes place with the appearance of gated communities for wealthy people and some new, high qual-

ity housing (BARTETZKY & SCHALENBERG 2009; SMIEGEL 2009, 2013). These facts are indicative of the increasing process of polarization of Bulgarian society as a whole. The general conclusion is that the social division and segregation in society after 1989 is poignantly expressed in the physical residential environment.

The social stratification of Bulgarian society in the residential environment is evident in multiple forms. Inequalities can be traced not only in extreme such as the difference between prefabricated LHE, the Roma ghettos and the suburban gated communities of the wealthy people. This neo-liberal model of development already exists in many other countries (KELLER 2007, pp. 87-102; MAURIN 2004). Inequalities in Bulgaria are evident in the urban space with unlawfully raised buildings of the super-rich, in the spontaneous (because illegal) expansion of Roma neighborhoods, and in the excessive construction of resorts. Specific fragmentation of residence becomes increasingly distinct in the urban environment. The social homogenization of residential neighbourhoods occurs through the choice of dwellers to stay or escape from some zones of residing. There is a noticeable process of selection that follows not only the specific housing qualities of neighbourhoods, but also features of religion, ethnicity, profession etc. Since 1989, there is a lack of municipal social management and housing policy in Sofia which aims at social mix and cohesion, and acts against the increasing social stratification and separation of communities, against their self-enclosure.

New trends of degradation of the residential environment are discernible<sup>18</sup>, including the appearance of severe conflicts and mutual intolerance between people. The old social communities are breaking

down and new ones are being built slowly which are acquiring new territorial self-identifications (DANDOLOVA 2001, pp. 16-21). The inequality gap is growing sharply, the process of distancing of social poles is intensifying as evident in the formation of strata of poor, homeless, and of well to do, rich and excessively well provided people.

The morphology of urban space, a confirmed indicator for the social stratification (LEVY 2005, pp. 24-48) in the decades after 1989 has also changed. A severe degradation of the housing stock is registered in the LHE: the facades are aesthetically depreciated by partial outer insulation (“patchwork” style) or by chaotic glazing of balconies and loggias and converting these into annexes, with various functions, to the home. Another change concerns the use of ground floors and flats on upper floors for social service functions. This large-scale change in the morphological signs of the residential environment has certainly led to a deteriorated quality of the physical space.

It is clear that visions of residing are closely correlated with the urban and social policies in the city. Obviously it is no longer possible to limit the development of different housing forms as it was before 1989, and their variety will continue to grow. Fortunately, perhaps, housing is adapting to the variety of social strata, to geographical and landscape particularities. However without knowing and understanding the social transformations of the city and without constant monitoring and research on the real trends, it would be hard to apply an adequate policy for harnessing the negative tendencies and protecting the socially weak or excluded individuals, groups, and even small communities. In addition, a social policy dealing with these issues cannot only be adopted at the local level if it is to be truly effective. An integrated approach is particularly important for the prevention of polarisation in the city and the implementation of a policy for reducing social inequalities and for introducing social cohesion.

<sup>18</sup> “DEGRA-CO”: EU project under URBANET programme: “*Vectors of degradation of privatised large housing estates (1950-1990). Specific diagnosis for understanding specific problems of living conditions. Risky situations.*” Responsible for the project from Bulgaria: I. Dandolova. April 2009-March 2010. Coordination from Romania, leader: Vera Marin. Participants from France and The Netherlands (project of HURA-ASDE: URBANET, 7FPEU Commission, 2009-2010).

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## Résumé

ISKRA DANDOLOVA

### **Sofia après 1989: La nouvelle réalité du développement résidentiel**

Cet article fait état de la nouvelle réalité de l'habitat à Sofia après 1989 et des tendances du développement du territoire urbain au niveau des zones résidentielles. Il argue du fait que les transformations de la réalité urbaine sont significatives et qu'elles concernent la structure sociale et sa répartition territoriale au sein de l'espace habité. Il est clair que Sofia a perdu beaucoup d'espaces publics pour en trouver de plus vastes. Une partie de l'extension urbaine de Sofia s'est transformée en quartiers résidentiels haut de gamme. Les communautés d'habitat relativement hétérogènes de cette ex-ville socialiste sont actuellement transformées majoritairement en secteurs homogènes. La fragmentation et la ségrégation entre le centre-ville, les territoires urbains intramuros et les banlieues modifient énormément la stratification sociale. Il existe peu d'études présentant sa situation évolutive et peu de velléités de recherches en vue d'expliquer le phénomène. En utilisant des données et informations qualitatives et quantitatives collectées entre 2005 et 2010 pour un projet spécifique, cet article suggère des raisons à cette nouvelle réalité de l'habitat et tente de mettre l'accent sur certaines perspectives futures de l'habitat dans la Sofia postsocialiste.

Sofia, transformation de l'habitat, stratification sociale, ségrégation urbaine, perspectives de développement

## Резюме

ИСКРА ДАНДОЛОВА

### **София после 1989 г.: новые реалии жилой застройки**

В настоящей работе обсуждаются новые реалии, наблюдаемые в жилищной сфере в Софии после 1989 г., а также тенденции развития городского пространства - применительно к жилым районам. Утверждается, что изменения городских реалий являются значительными и оказывают воздействие не только на социальные структуры, но также и на территориальное деление. Очевидно, что София потеряла большое количество общественного пространства и территориально расширилась. Часть территорий, присоединённых к Софии за счёт сельской местности, превращается в жилые районы с наиболее высоким качеством жизни. Относительно гетерогенные жилые районы социалистического города в настоящее время в основном преобразуются в однородные образования. Фрагментация и сегрегация между центром города, центрально расположенными районами и пригородами резко изменяют социальную стратификацию общества. При этом число исследований, посвященных меняющейся ситуации, ограничено и лишь в нескольких научных работах делается попытка объяснить эти явления. На основе качественных и количественных данных и информации, собранной в 2005 - 2010 гг. для специального проекта, настоящая статья указывает на возможные причины вышеуказанных новых реалий и делает попытку представить соображения, касающиеся развития жилищной сферы постсоциалистической Софии в будущем.

София, трансформирующаяся жилищная сфера, социальное расслоение, городская сегрегация, перспективы развития