

The Theory of the Ghetto through the prism of the Bulgarian reality (a case study of Harman Mahala, Plovdiv)

Nadezhda Ilieva¹, Boris Kazakov¹, Desislava Varadzhakova¹

¹ National Institute of Geophysics, Geodesy and Geography – Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Sofia, Bulgaria
Corresponding author: Boris Kazakov (boriskazakov1@gmail.com)

Abstract

Ghettoised urban structures form an essential component of the urban environment wherever they are found and their distinctive physical traits make them clearly identifiable. In the present study, various theories, concepts and viewpoints – mostly of European and American scientists – have been examined and the theoretical aspects of the term "ghetto" have been outlined through the prism of the Bulgarian reality – based on the example of the Roma neighbourhood of Harman Mahala in the City of Plovdiv. The main research question to which an answer is sought is: are the Roma neighbourhoods in Bulgaria essentially ghettos and how many of the characteristics of the ghetto do they exhibit? The study is based on a survey amongst 500 inhabitants of Harman Mahala or 27.8% of its population, as well as on in-depth, semi-structured interviews, with representatives of local authorities, educational and health mediators from the studied Roma neighbourhood school principals, teachers and students. Through the application of the so-called checklist method, it was established that the studied Roma neighbourhood meets all but one condition (Involuntary segregation), in order to be referred to as a "ghetto" and, therefore, it can only be regarded as a "ghettoised urban structure".

Key words: ghetto, ghettoised urban structure, Roma, segregation, Bulgaria



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Introduction

The transformation in the socio-economic and political sphere that took place at the beginning of the 1990s and the invasion of the neoliberal model of development, in combination with the retreat of the "welfare state", led to an increase in social inequalities. With regard to the growing polarisation, various spatial patterns can be observed amongst the settlements. In Bulgaria, mostly in the cities, ghettoised structures have been formed, which, to a certain point, resemble the characteristics of the "ghetto", related to the spatial concentration of Roma population. A distinctive feature of those ghettoised structures are the interconnected problems accumulated over the years, of various nature: economic, social, urban planning, environmental.

The spatial dimensions of social processes and the reasons for their manifestation are the subject of research by a number of scientists. Studies in the American – (Massey and Denton (1988, 1993), Portes & Zhou (1993), Peach (1999, 2006), Reardon & O'Sullivan (2004), Eastern European – Szelenyi (1983),

Węclawowicz (2002), Sýkora (1999, 2009), Marcinczak (2007, 2012), Toušek (2009) and Western and South European – Boal (1981), Friedrichs (1998), Van Kempen & Oèzuèkren (1998), Musterd & Ostendorf (1998), Musterd (2006), Andersson (2007), Johnston et al. 2002), Malheiros (2002), Harsman (2006), Mudu (2006), Maloutas (2007), Eyradin (2008), Cassiers & Kesteloot (2012) literature differ in the way spatial segregation is perceived, which is a result of the differences in the formation of the modern population and ethnic structure. Traditionally, in the US, spatial patterns of segregation have been analysed and measured primarily in terms of the ethnicity and race of the residents of individual residential neighbourhoods. In western and southern Europe, these processes are mostly associated with ethnic communities that arrive from countries with radically different cultures and/or former colonies. In eastern and central Europe, including Bulgaria, spatial segregation is related almost explicitly to the Roma population.

Since the beginning of the 1920s, a group of sociologists known as the Chicago School, described and analysed spatial housing models, in search of the reasons for their emergence and development. As early as 1925, Park & Burgess (1925) summarised that physical distance generates social distance.

The Chicago School of Sociology (Thomas & Znaniecki 1918; Anderson 1923; Park et al. 1925; Wirth 1928; Zorbaugh 1929; Hoyt 1939; Harris and Ullman (1945) researching "Little Sicilies, Little Polands, Chinatowns and Black Belts", perceives these territories as natural habitats of a given ethnic or racial group in space, formed on the basis of their voluntary grouping in the urban space in order to preserve their cultural identity. Later, some authors, such as Clark (1965), opposed that statement, pointing to the involuntary character as a necessary condition for the grouping of ethnic communities and the restriction of persons to a special area, as well as limiting of their freedom of choice on the basis of skin colour (pinpointing the features of the African-American ghetto, in particular). This element of coercion is also referred to as a mandatory element by Peach (1992). According to Marcuse (2005), the ghetto is "an involuntarily spatially concentrated area used by the dominant society to separate and to limit a particular population group, externally defined as racial or ethnic or foreign, held to be and treated as, inferior by the dominant society". Many academics refer to a place with a certain demographic as a "ghetto" in shorthand. Amersfoort (1980) perceived the ghetto as a residential zone, in which all residents belong to an ethnic, racial or religious group, all members of this group live in this area. Johnston et al. (1968) and Peach (1996) define two features characteristic of the ghetto – the first is that an ethnic or racial group forms the entire population of the respective neighbourhood and the second – the majority of the members of this group are concentrated in that neighbourhood. The second condition was also emphasised as mandatory by Massey and Denton (1993) in the early 1990s. For instance, they highlight race and use it to identify "a set of neighbourhoods that are exclusively inhabited by members of one group, within which virtually all members of that group live". In the 1980s, the opinion that the ghetto was associated with limited economic opportunities of those living in it and not so much with spatial marginality and racial discrimination (Wilson 1987), prevailed. The same author in a subsequent publication (Wilson 1993) distinguishes the organised ghetto of the past from the hyper-ghetto of today. The institutional structure of society is replicated in the hyper-ghetto, where life is organised around an internal and rel-

actively autonomous social area that is exclusive to the majority. Over the past three decades, however, the ghetto is seen as an institution rather than just a neighbourhood that happens to breach a demographic threshold (Wacquant 1997). Later the same author adds that the ghetto is “an ethnically and socially homogeneous universe characterised by low organisational density and weak penetration by the state in its social components and, by way of consequence, extreme levels of physical and social insecurity” (Wacquant 2008). According to Marcuse (2005), the ghetto is an area where an oppressed minority is spatially concentrated and has an assigned identity. Its confinement serves the dual purposes of social control and economic servitude of the resident population. A ghetto is: (1) a space created by relations of power, and (2) used for oppression and control. Consider the following conceptions, which contain one or more of these elements: “an involuntarily spatially concentrated area used by the dominant society to separate and to limit a particular population group, externally defined as racial or ethnic” (Marcuse 2005). Small (2008) adopts several key characteristics of the ghetto that can be said to be easily measurable and can be used to make comparisons: ethnic and/or social homogeneity, poverty, deinstitutionalisation (indicating an organisational density below the city median), the leading role of the state in the emergence of ghettoised structures and that the ghetto is maintained through “involuntary segregation”. As Slater (2009) points out, the ghetto can be defined as a space used by discriminatory authorities to isolate, confine and exploit a single ethno-racial group – a location where a group exiled from society is banished (permanently). Slater adds that “a ghetto is a peculiar, extreme type of urban form rooted in discrimination towards a particular group of people loathed by their oppressors, to the point where the oppressed are forced to develop their own institutions behind the parameters of their involuntary confinement to necessitate their survival”.

Wacquant (2004) opposes Wirth's (1928) classic *The Ghetto* (1928), where the term ghetto is associated with the Jewish ghetto of Medieval Europe, noting that the so-called Little Sicily, Little Poland, the “black belt” of big cities are natural areas that arise from the desire of the respective group to preserve their cultural characteristics, each of them performing a special “function” in the overall urban organism. According to Wacquant (2004), the ghetto is not a “natural area” accompanying the “history of migration” (as argued by Wirth 1928), but is rather a special form of collective violence concretised in urban space. According to Wacquant:

- A ghetto is a social-organisational device composed of four elements (stigma, constraint, spatial confinement and institutional encasement).
- For a ghetto must, first, be imposed and all-encompassing and, second, it must be overlaid with a distinct and duplicative set of institutions enabling the group thus cloistered to reproduce itself within its assigned perimeter. According to Wacquant (2004), a parallel city emerged in the ghetto, with its religious sites, newspapers, clubs, schools, business, political and civic associations rooted in the big city.
- The ghetto should be defined as a boundary area of spatial concentration of an oppressed group, defined by an ascribed identity, in which the confinement is used for the purpose of social control over and economic subordination of the resident population.

- The role of the ghetto is “to maximise the material profits extracted out of a category deemed defiled and defiling and to minimise intimate contact with its members so as to avert the threat of symbolic corrosion and contagion they are believed to carry” (Wacquant 2012).
- “an ethnically and socially homogeneous universe characterised by low organisational density and weak penetration by the state in its social components and, by way of consequence, extreme levels of physical and social insecurity” (Wacquant 2008).

In 2005, Marcuse proposed a taxonomy that included the following types of territorial entities:

- **a dispersed or de-spatialising ghetto**, located at a distance from a central business district;
- **a hard ghetto**, spatially concentrated by relatively rigid economic behaviour in other parts of the metropolitan area.
- **a weak or gentrifying diluted ghetto**, still significantly racially concentrated in spaces of the older hard ghetto;
- **an abandoned ghetto**, the space of some former hard ghettos, abandoned by both market and the state.

From an empirical perspective, we frequently discover spatial patterns that exhibit traits from several spatial definitions; in reality, these patterns should be interpreted as ideal types rather than descriptions of any particular case provided.

Wacquant (2013) notes that ghettoised structures in a number of cities in Europe and North America are wrongly identified with ghettos, firstly – because they are not a consequence of forced spatial limitation and control and, secondly – they have not developed their own parallel institutions. Ghettoised structures in Europe serve as evidence of the failure of multiculturalism, integration, community cohesion and immigration. According to Wacquant (2004), ghettos and ethnic neighbourhoods have different structures and opposing functions, with the main difference coming from differences in social relations within the ghetto, as well as between it and the surrounding city. Wacquant (2013) makes several claims regarding the differences between ghettos and immigrant neighbourhoods, which he defends in one of his publications:

- 1. not all the segregated areas are ethnic ghettos** (only those that are enforceable isolated from and by the rest of the world);
- 2. not all ethnically homogeneous ghettos are poor**; The concentration of poverty in a given territory does not mean that a ghetto has been formed. The author emphasises that there is not always a connection between the ghetto and urban poverty, as there are structural and functional differences between them. Poverty is the most common characteristic of the ghetto, but at the same time, it is a variable and not a necessary condition for its existence;
- 3. not all ethnically homogeneous neighbourhoods are ghettos** (only those whose function is to dissimilate or keep apart as a wall, in comparison with those immigrant districts, which work as a bridge and facilitate integration).

When tracing the theory of the ghetto, the following typical characteristics can be distinguished, which are repeated in the definitions of different authors:

- **Condition 1:** ethnic homogeneity;
- **Condition 2:** the leading role of the state in the emergence of the ghetto; forced spatial restriction; one institution (the ghetto) was created in part by another institution (the state); spatial exclusion and spatial stigmatisation.
- **Condition 3:** behavioural models (high crime rate, high grey economy employment rates); socio-economic characteristics (poverty, high share of unemployed and people with low educational level, social insecurity); weak penetration by the state into the social components of the ghetto.
- **Condition 4:** the absence of the state and local authorities in the development of the ghetto; extreme levels of infrastructural insecurity.
- **Condition 5:** creation and development of own parallel institutions.
- **Condition 6:** deinstitutionalisation, as a result of abandonment by the State.
- **Condition 7:** limited contacts between the residents of the ghetto and the surrounding population; the surrounding majority is unwilling to accept the members of the minority.
- **Condition 8:** involuntary segregation.

Theory and methodology

The analysis of ghettoised urban structures (GUSs) in Bulgaria, based on the example of Harman Mahala, aims to establish how many of these conditions are met by the studied Roma neighbourhood, through the application of the so-called checklist method.

In the present study, combined methods have been used in order to obtain quantitative and qualitative data. In a quantitative aspect, the survey included 500 inhabitants of Harman Mahala or 27.8% of the population, which provides high reliability of the obtained results. A questionnaire was developed, through which empirical information on several main topics was collected, such as: ethno-demographic indicators, socio-economic structure of households, urban planning characteristics, basic household necessities, degree of satisfaction with the city, the neighbourhood, housing conditions, subjective evaluation of the neighbourhood, stereotypes and social distance between the Roma ethnic group and the surrounding Bulgarian ethnic majority, relationships within the community, as well as with other Roma neighbourhoods, access to various urban resources, quality of local infrastructure (technical and social) etc. The results of the quantitative survey have been complemented by the results obtained from the qualitative research methods, such as individual in-depth interviews, semi-structured interviews and focus groups. In this study, a focus group consisting of seven students from "Yordan Yovkov" Primary School (located near the studied Roma neighbourhood) was used. Specific questionnaires were prepared and individual interviews were conducted with representatives of local authorities who have significant knowledge related to the population of Harman Mahala. In-depth expert interviews were also conducted with the principal, the deputy principal and teachers from the "Yordan Yovkov" Primary School, as well as educational and health mediators from the studied Roma neighbourhood. Semi-structured and unstructured interviews were also

used in order to reveal the full variety of responses of the residents regarding the research topic.

Quantitative and qualitative data obtained through field surveys were later combined with spatial data. To establish the transformation trends of the urban development of the city, orthophoto images (from 1952, 1965, 1975, 1982, 1989 and 2010) were used, as well as the Integrated Plan for Urban Reconstruction and Development of the city (2013), the Spatial Development Concept (2015), extracts from the cadastral map of the City of Plovdiv and the General Development Plan of the Municipality of Plovdiv. The Roma neighbourhood was photographed and mapped with the use of an unmanned aerial vehicle (in 2018 and 2020).

Results and discussion

The actual number of Roma in Bulgaria as of 2015 was estimated to be around 720,000 (Ilieva 2022), which is more than double the number of people who declared Roma identity according to the last population census in Bulgaria (NSI 2021). A little over half of the Roma population in Bulgaria lives in urban settlements (cities and towns). According to the last population censuses, Roma population was observed in nearly half of all settlements in Bulgaria. Tomova and Stoychev (2022) cite a report prepared within the framework of the EU-funded project titled "Development of comprehensive measures for the integration of the most marginalised communities amongst ethnic minorities with an emphasis on the Roma", where, amongst other results, a list of 320 "microzones with the most marginalised communities" was prepared, of which 290 were labelled as "Roma" and 30 as "other".

Condition 1: *Ethnic homogeneity*

The actual number of Roma in the City of Plovdiv, according to unofficial data based on the so-called expert assessment, is exceeding 60,000 people or 18% of the city's population (Ilieva et al. 2019). The Roma are concentrated in four homogeneous ethnic neighbourhoods: Stolipinovo, Harman Mahala, Hadji Hassan Mahala and Sheker Mahala (Fig. 1).

About 1,800 people live in Harman Mahala (according to field surveys), who belong almost entirely to the group of the so-called Turkish Roma (millet), since their mother tongue is Turkish, they profess Islam and self-identify as Turks. The surrounding macrosociety of ethnic Bulgarians, however, regards those people simply as Roma (Gypsies) or Turkish Roma (Turkish Gypsies).

Condition 1 is met by the studied Roma neighbourhood.

Condition 2: *the leading role of the state in the emergence of the ghetto; forced spatial restriction; one institution (the ghetto) was created in part by another institution (the state); spatial exclusion and spatial stigmatisation.*

The Roma community had been living in the city proper until the early 1900s, when local authorities made the decision to forcibly expel them to the suburbs.

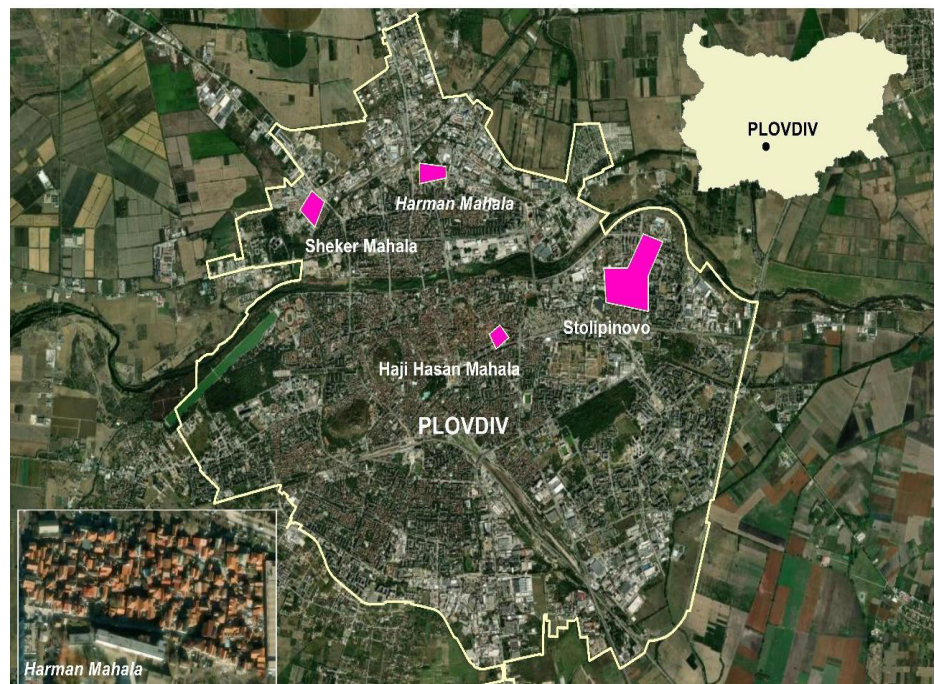


Figure 1. Location of the four Roma neighbourhoods in the city of Plovdiv Source: author

The reasons for that decision according to the elderly residents was the authorities' dissatisfaction with the Roma hygiene and the spread of infectious diseases. At the moment, the newly-formed neighbourhoods were located outside the city's urbanised territory, but over the years, with the growth of the city, they were absorbed. With the exception of Haji Hasan Mahala, which is located in the interior of the city, all other Roma neighbourhoods represent suburbs of the main urban core. This circumstance limits the mobility of the Roma ethnic group, as in most cases, the only way to access the urban core is public transport, which is financially unaffordable for some Roma households.

Condition 2 is met by the studied Roma neighbourhood.

Condition 3: *behavioural models (high crime rate, high grey economy employment rates); socio-economic characteristics (poverty, high share of unemployed and people with low educational level, social insecurity); weak penetration by the state into the social components of the ghetto.*

As of 2021, the majority of Roma in Harman Mahala neighbourhood declared that they have a basic level of education (23.7% of the respondents over 18 have less than primary educational level, 53.2% have primary education level, 23.6% – secondary, and only 0.9% – higher educational level). The low educational level of socially excluded persons leads to difficulties in their integration into the ethnic majority environment, the labour market and the social welfare system. The high unemployment rates amongst the Roma have several serious impacts – poverty, exclusion from the social and economic life of the surrounding society, low motivation for further attempts to look for work, loss of work habits etc., which further reduce their prospects of labour market integration. Long-term

unemployed Roma who are marginalised in the labour market gradually develop alternative strategies to earn a living, such as informal economic activities. A little over half (50.6%) of the respondents of working age declared that they were currently unemployed, 15% were working part-time and only 34.4% were working full-time. Most of the employed (70.5%), however, declared that they worked on an employment contract. Almost half (49%) of the unemployed persons declared that they had been unemployed for more than one year. At the same time, one of the most serious problems is long-term and youth unemployment – 52.8% of the unemployed were aged under 29. The low level of education of the respondents is the main reason for the place they occupy in the labour market and their sectoral employment – mostly in the industry, construction, transport and the service sector. Other most common reasons given by the respondents of the focus groups are: discrimination in the labour market, ethnic intolerance, the nature of the work offered, low wages, discrepancies between the demand and supply of labour, language difficulties etc.

One of the main tools for analysing the well-being of households is to look at the structure of their total income. Salaries are the main element in the budget of 65.8% of the households in Harman Mahala (Fig. 2). Other common sources are the unregulated labour activities, such as "suitcase trade", working abroad, herbs and mushrooms gathering etc.

When the so-called transitional period began, the majority of Roma households were primarily dependent on social benefits; but, since the turn of the twenty-first century, a growing proportion of Roma have not been able to meet the stringent conditions in order to be eligible for social benefits. In recent years, both Roma working abroad and their relatives back in Bulgaria (56% of the households) relying on financial assistance have been increasing. Fifty-nine percent of the respondents said that at least one household member had worked or was currently working abroad. The Roma are looking for solutions to deal with poverty themselves, which contrasts with the processes observed in western Europe, where the state has a leading role in ensuring the subsistence minimum for households in ghettoised neighbourhoods.

Condition 3 is met by the studied Roma neighbourhood.

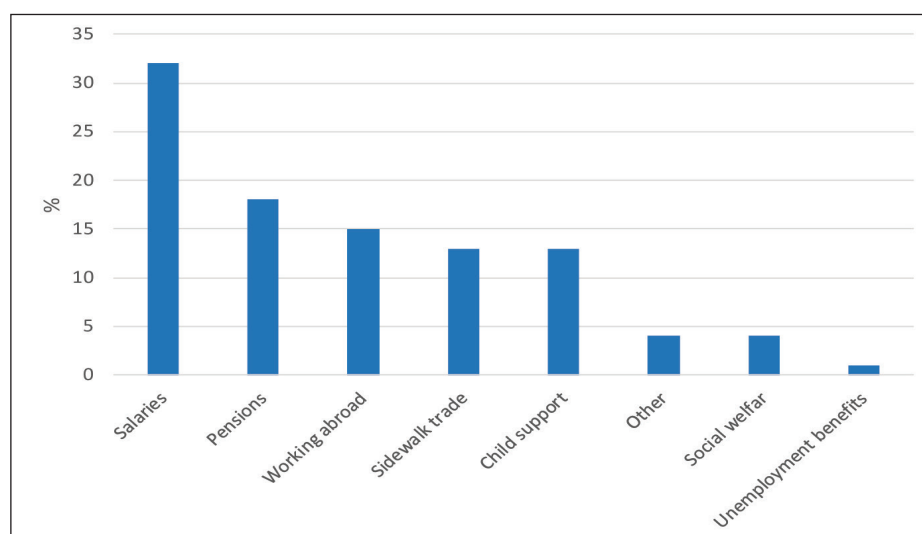


Figure 2. Income structure of the households in Harman Mahala.

Condition 4: *The absence of the state and local authorities in the development of the ghetto; extreme levels of infrastructural insecurity.*

The ghettoised structures in the City of Plovdiv and Harman Mahala, in particular, are very clearly outlined in the urban fabric. The neighbourhood emerged and developed in opposition to any urban planning elements without observing the requirements of the Spatial Development Act. With the exception of two properties, all others are illegal in nature and do not have ownership documents. All buildings were designed and built without approved plans and construction supervision, not meeting the construction technical requirements.

The local authorities are not involved in the neighbourhood's development which leads to expected dissatisfaction on the part of the Roma population in case of a possible demolition of the residential buildings. The problems deepened even more after the socio-political changes at the end of the 1980s. For example, 76% of the residential buildings were built after 1989 and the building density reached 95% by 2021, as a result of the high natural population increase and the improved financial situation of the households after Bulgaria's accession to the European Union, which enhanced working abroad. A total withdrawal of the state has been observed, not only regarding the spatial development of the neighbourhood, but also in terms of compliance with a number of urban planning measures: sewerage, water supply, electricity supply, street maintenance, garbage collection etc.

Condition 4 is met by the studied Roma neighbourhood.

Condition 5: *Creation and development of own parallel institutions*

Within the ghettoised structure, internal laws apply: the right to build a home, for example, is given by internal agreements based on family closeness. Financial relationships are also part of the subject assigned to the community leader or leaders (legal bank loans are not used, as most of the Roma are not part of the legal labour market and, therefore, banks refuse to give them loans). The only laws that apply inside the ghettoised structure are those of the community itself: a city within a city is created as a result, that obeys its own norms, rules and laws.

Condition 5 is met by the studied Roma neighbourhood.

Condition 6: *Deinstitutionalisation, as a result of abandonment by the State*

In terms of medical care, the daily needs of the population are carried out by the so-called diagnostic-consultative centres. For the Roma population in Harman Mahala, the access to these healthcare facilities is difficult, as they are located at a greater distance than the ones stipulated by law. According to the quantitative survey, nearly half (46%) of the respondents stated that the health facilities were not sufficient and over 80% of the population in the ghettoised structure had no health insurance.

School-age children from Harman Mahala attend a school that is 100% segregated and is located at a distance greater than stipulated in the normative documents. A little over half (57%) of the respondents stated that the schools are insufficient in the vicinity of the neighbourhood. Only 10% state that their children attend non-segregated schools in mixed classes. The standards for

access to schools and kindergartens, within a radius of 500 and 300 m, respectively, are not met either.

Green areas in the neighbourhood are missing, as well as open public spaces. The green areas for wide public use are represented by a single park – "Ribnitsa" – whose area not only does not meet the needs of the neighbourhood, but is located at a distance much greater than the requirements (up to 15 minutes walking distance). These green areas are three times lower than the city average (11.51 m² per inhabitant) and seven times lower than the standards laid down in the Spatial Development Act (20-28 m² per inhabitant) for cities the size of Plovdiv. According to this indicator, Harman Mahala can only be compared with industrial zones.

The provisioning of sports facilities, both in terms of access and area per inhabitant, does not meet the required standards.

The service infrastructure is represented by primitive stores for food and everyday goods.

Currently, the local authorities are obliged to develop municipal and regional strategies for the integration of the Roma and one of the main points to be worked on is the desegregation of the Roma population within the urban space. Usually these documents remain on paper and represent mostly recommendations rather than mandatory requirements. Sanctions are not imposed in case of their non-fulfilment, nor in cases where the responsible person does not react to newly-constructed illegal buildings. In practice, the exact opposite process is observed. When Roma families move out of a ghettoised structure, the municipality currently provides social housing in another ghettoised neighbourhood and not in areas of predominantly Bulgarian population. As a result, all those policies contribute to the even greater encapsulation of the Roma population.

Condition 6 is met by the studied Roma neighbourhood.

Condition 7: *limited contacts between the residents of the ghetto and the surrounding population; the surrounding majority is unwilling to accept the members of the minority.*

Limited interaction of the Roma minority with representatives of the ethnic Bulgarian macro-society is observed not only in terms of residential environment, but also in other functional spaces, such as workplace, school, kindergarten, recreation and leisure etc. Public spaces outside Harman Mahala are used to a limited extent: almost half of the residents declare that they only stay in the neighbourhood, less than 20% visit the nearby park, while 7% only visit the area adjacent to the neighbourhood. Just 6.4% of the respondents declared that they play sports actively, 8.6% have travelled

abroad, but mostly to visit relatives who work in Germany. Only 25.5% of the respondents stated that they could afford a vacation in Bulgaria and 15.8% stated that they can afford to go to the cinema, theatre, concerts etc.

One out of five people living in the neighbourhood under study is unable to identify Plovdiv's primary symbolic landmarks, while they can clearly identify places in other Roma communities of the city. The younger generation of Roma, however, are increasingly copying the behaviour model of the ethnic Bulgarian majority. One further factor supporting the defiance of "traditional" behaviour patterns is that almost one-third of Harman Mahala's permanent residents dwell

in foreign countries – usually in areas with mixed ethnic backgrounds. After returning to Bulgaria, these emigrants bring their new lifestyle to the neighbourhood. A large percentage of Roma children, however, only speak Turkish and almost no Bulgarian language at the time they start attending school – one of the primary causes of the Roma students' inadequate academic performance.

The workplace can hardly be considered a shared space for all ethnic groups either – almost half of the respondents said that their only language used at work is Turkish or Romani. Based on the survey results, 11% of employed respondents work outside the city (in other towns in the Plovdiv region or in Bulgaria as a whole), 28% work in different parts of Plovdiv region and 25% work in their neighbourhood or neighbouring districts. All those point to the Roma community's increasing isolation from the surrounding urban area.

The typical neighbourhood dweller still views the rest of the city as a strange and uncomfortable place, even though they are guaranteed access to all sections of the city by public transportation. As a result, the neighbourhood's invisible wall between it and the surrounding urban environment grows more and more.

Condition 7 is met by the studied Roma neighbourhood.

Condition 8: Involuntary segregation

A group's voluntary segregation is protective in that it helps the group endure in an unfamiliar setting and maintain its language and culture. The group that is impacted by marginalisation, stigmatisation and segregation looks for a place where it will be accepted without being intimidated or stigmatised. This is the reason the organisation relocates to an area populated by like-minded individuals. However, typically, such a location is beyond the areas that are home to the main ethnic group. The "autonomous" geographical unit grows more and more cut off from the state and reliant on it, but it also becomes more and more significant due to the importance of internal social networks, loyalty to the place, long-term co-existence (more than a century), internal laws, customs and rules.

Feeling safe and accepted in their ethnically homogeneous environment, the majority of the Roma in Harman Mahala (75.5%) refuse to leave the area. This feeling of belonging to the place is further strengthened by the fact that two or three generations live under one roof and, most often, the neighbours are actually blood relatives. These close interactions between the inhabitants of the Roma neighbourhood can be confirmed by the answers to the survey questions about the residents' satisfaction with the neighbourhood, their neighbours and whether they would move out and live elsewhere: 92% of respondents claim to know every person living in the community and 79% say they regularly get together with their neighbours. Additionally, according to survey data, 84% of participants said they would not move to a different neighbourhood if given the option, while of those who would move, around 67% said they would only move to areas in close proximity to Harman Mahala. The feeling of belonging to the place is also proven by the answer to the question whether the respondents would like to move to a council housing that offers better living conditions: only 14% of the respondents stated that they would move. In terms of neighbourly relations, satisfaction with the neighbourhood and their homes, the vast majority of the respondents stated they were generally or fully satisfied (Fig. 3).

Condition 8 is not met by the studied neighbourhood.

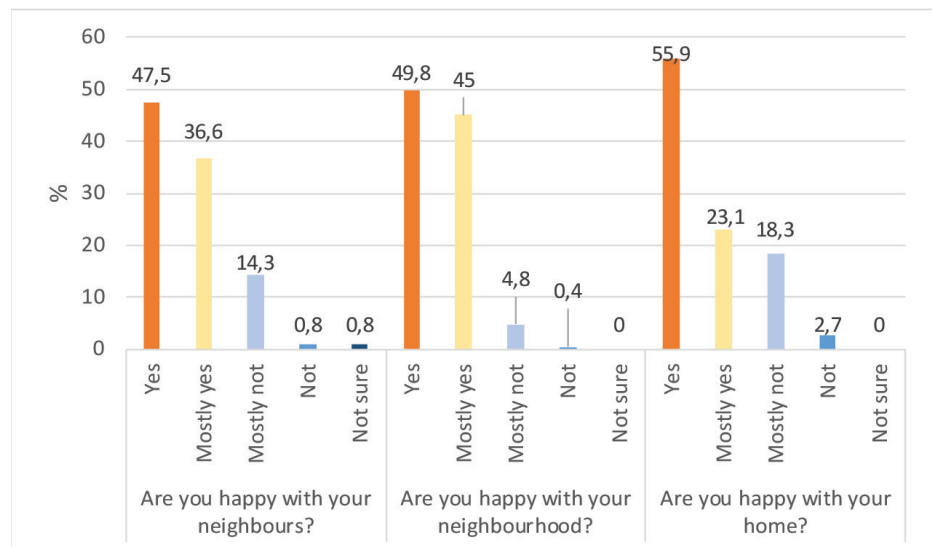


Figure 3. Answers to the survey question “Are you happy with your neighbours, the neighbourhood and your home?”

Source: author.

Conclusion

Ghettoised urban structures form homogeneous areas with a certain stereotype of behaviour of their inhabitants. Moreover, the residents of these structures are largely alike in terms of their social status and financial potential. The division of land in such a “gated community” is, in many cases, based on internal inter-family arrangements for access to a certain land plot, even though the land on which their homes were built is communal and not private. Family ties and the feeling of closeness between neighbours also play a significant role. Due to the limited territorial scope, land is highly valued in the GUS and every piece of it is jealously guarded by its fictitious owners. On this basis, conflicts often arise. Characteristic of GUSs is the formation of a specific attitude towards the city – since the GUS residents do not feel part of the city itself, they just “use” it, but “refuse” to live in it.

“Harman Mahala” meets all the conditions required to be referred to as a “ghetto”, but one – involuntary segregation. Therefore, the neighbourhood can only be defined as a ghettoised urban structure, but not as a ghetto.

The majority of GUSs, including those in Bulgaria, are the outcome of past attempts at intervention by national and local government bodies to address the issue. Very often, these structures are located near industrial sites and/or in urban areas with long-term negative trends in their socio-economic development, exhibiting a high degree of environmental risks etc. The majority of the time, the urban issues that the people of the GUS experience are exactly the same as those of other ghettoised districts in other cities.

The analysed GUS stands out in terms of urban planning characteristics due to its dense construction, low-quality building stock, crowded housing, inadequate living space, lack of basic amenities, high percentage of illegal housing and deteriorating living conditions – all characteristics typical of a ghetto.

Greater birth rates relative to the surrounding ethnic majority, higher rates of infant mortality, unemployment – particularly youth and long-term unemploy-

ment – poverty, crime, employment in the grey economy, marginalisation, social exclusion etc. are some of the most distinctive and typical socio-demographic features of the GUS. From an ecological point of view, the studied GUS is characterised by high levels of pollution, as it is located near industrial areas and the residents generally have a low hygiene culture. High building density implies a lack of green and open spaces, which also has a negative impact on the qualities of the living microenvironment. Residents' access to opportunities, resources and services that are regarded as standard in other sections of the city is restricted by the cumulative effects of social, economic, urban planning and environmental issues. One could argue that a "city within a city" is developing, replicating the institutional framework of the Bulgarian State and growing more independent.

Additional information

Conflict of interest

The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

Ethical statement

No ethical statement was reported.

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Author contributions

All authors have contributed equally.

Author ORCIDs

Nadezhda Ilieva  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9553-2509>

Boris Kazakov  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7935-1409>

Desislava Varadzhakova  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6072-464X>

Data availability

All of the data that support the findings of this study are available in the main text or Supplementary Information.

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