

LOCATION AND INTERRELATIONS OF THE ROMA QUARTER OF HARMAN MAHALA WITH THE URBAN STRUCTURE OF THE CITY OF PLOVDIV, BULGARIA

Nadezhda ILIEVA

National Institute of Geophysics, Geodesy and Geography, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Department of Geography, Sofia, Bulgaria
nadeto.ilieva@abv.bg

Omar KOUWATLI

Arab International University (AIU), Department of Architecture and Urban Design, Damascus, Syria
kouwatli2@gmail.com

Krasimir ASENOV

Deputy Mayor, Plovdiv Municipality, North Administrative Region, Plovdiv, Bulgaria
krasimirasen@gmail.com

Boris KAZAKOV

National Institute of Geophysics, Geodesy and Geography, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Department of Geography, Sofia, Bulgaria
boriskazakov1@gmail.com

Abstract

The main objective of this study is to analyse the location and the spatial interrelations of the Roma-populated Harman Mahala quarter of the city of Plovdiv, Bulgaria. Three types of boundaries of the ghettoized urban structure (GUS) have been distinguished – "solid", "blurry" and "symbolic". The solid boundaries are outlined taking into account the urban space inhabited by the Roma ethnic community, i.e. from a "static" point of view. In defining the "blurry" boundaries of the GUS, the specifics of the residents' spatial behaviour were analyzed. Movement in space is closely linked to the following "functional spaces": labour, education, recreation and leisure, sports, commerce, healthcare, transport and commuting, with their inherent material and technical facilities, organizational structure and interactions. Through those interactions, the so-called "functional space" is outlined. The third aspect taken into consideration is the outlining of the so-called "symbolic space" of the GUS, the boundaries of which are dependent on how the local Roma population perceives the urban space.

Keywords: *spatial segregation, Roma population, ghettoized urban structure, Harman Mahala, urban, functional and symbolic space*

1. INTRODUCTION

According to Lefebvre (1968) cities can be considered spatial projections of society. In recent years, especially in post-communist countries, new models of social and spatial polarization have emerged, based mostly on income inequality (Weclawowitzs, 2002) and ethnicity (Ladanyi, 2002). Duncan and Lieberson (1959) demonstrate the inverse correlation between

spatial segregation and the degree of integration of the various minority ethnic groups. The predominant view is that spatial segregation reinforces the existing social inequalities and leads to many other negative consequences such as hampering the participation in social life, poor quality of education, low level of integration into the labor market, etc. The spatial proximity of a large number of disadvantaged households strengthens the negative features of spatial segregation and leads to the emergence of alternative forms of social interaction (Mirehei, M. et al, 2017).

Over the past two decades, a growing interest in the so-called ghettoized urban structures (GUS), in post-communist countries has been observed. The formation of such structures in Bulgaria is mostly associated with the spatial concentration of Roma population. The reasons for this process are various – the natural growth of the Roma population, the socio-economic transformation of the post-communist economies, the introduction of the neoliberal model of state development, the “withdrawal” of the “social state”, etc. Despite the observed interest in the Roma population, however, especially during the so-called “Decade of Roma inclusion”, the empirical studies of the Roma quarters themselves and their place in the urban area, are relatively scarce. In Bulgarian scientific literature, there has been a tendency of generalizing and automatic transferring of the specific features exhibited by one Roma group to all Roma, which leads to misleading results and poor effectiveness of the integration policies. The Roma groups are distinguished by their great cultural diversity, while the complex influence of various factors results in different specific features of the Roma quarters themselves.

The actual number of Roma in Bulgaria is estimated at about 720,000 (as of 2018) and although, according to official statistical data their number has been decreasing, the empirical research has proven a contradictory trend. The growing number of Roma is the result of relatively high natural growth rates (estimated at around 16‰) on the one hand, and – prior to Bulgaria's entry into the EU (2007) – of limited emigration. Since the end of World War II, there has been a clear trend of concentration of Roma in urban settlements, and today more than half of all Roma in Bulgaria reside in towns and cities. In most cases, the Roma people inhabit the existing Roma quarters (neighborhoods) or emerging new ones. In the city of Plovdiv, the number of Roma according to the official statistical data is just 9 438, or 3.1% of the city's population. According to unofficial data, however, based on the so-called expert assessment, the actual number of Roma in Plovdiv is no less than 55 000 (about 16% of the city's population), or some 7% of all Roma in Bulgaria.

The serious difficulties which Bulgaria has been going through in the overall process of Roma integration, together with the increasing ghettoization and the related possible social cataclysms, determine the necessity of carrying out a study, the main objective of which is to analyze the location and spatial interrelations of the Roma-populated Harman Mahala quarter with the urban structure of the city of Plovdiv.

2. THEORETICAL ASPECTS AND METHODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH

2.1. Theoretical aspects.

The spatial aspects of the social processes are theorized in the pioneering works of Harvey (1973, 1982) and Castells (1972). Harvey (2006) and also Simmel (1997) argue that space is never purely physical (absolute) or mathematical (geometric), but it is always social as well. Space is defined by Bourdieu (1989) as a "system of relations", and Massey (2005) defines space as a "product of relationships".

It is hard to find a clear and common definition of spatial segregation in scientific literature. There are different ways to perceive and address the problem. The definition of the term segregation in the “Dictionary of Human Geography” is brief, describing spatial

segregation as a division of a particular community into subgroups throughout the area of residence (Johnston et al., 1986). Despite the seemingly simple definition of spatial segregation, the term remains relatively unclear.

The study of spatial segregation by urban geography in recent decades has been strongly influenced by the metaphor of the "dual city," which in its essence describes the trends of polarization of urban societies. The relationships between individuals, the way they interact, the differences that exist between them, are at the basis of the concept of the dual city – a concept formulated by Mollenkopf and Castells (1991), and Sassen (1991), referred to as to the "divided city" by Fainstein et al. (1992). Van-Kempen (2007), on the other hand, makes the connection between the divided society and the divided city: if a society is divided, the city space will also be divided. According to Marcuse (2005) in cases where the structure of space does not reflect the interrelations between the various groups of residents, conflicts may arise, regarding both spatial disputes and inter-group relationships, while the erection of walls is a reflection of the instability of those groups' relationships and the existing differences between them. According to Kempen and Özüekren (1998), the opposite process of spatial segregation is the formation of so-called mixed residential areas, defined as a situation where representatives of various ethnic groups live together.

Research has shown that almost every criterion (social status, material status, ethnicity, mother tongue, race, religious beliefs, etc.) differentiating individuals and groups of individuals can become the basis for physical separation. A special feature of the Roma ethnic group is that spatial segregation in that case is not just ethnic and social, but also economic, cultural, and so forth. Depending on the spatial scale, different forms of segregation are observed: for example – segregation between the cities and their suburban belts; between individual neighborhoods within the city itself; between blocks of flats in a given neighborhood and even on a vertical scale (between the floors in a residential building).

Closely related to the theory of the divided city is the formation of various spatial urban structures such as ghettos, ethnic enclaves, etc. that are the product of spatial segregation. The term ghetto is related to forced separation of a group of individuals from the rest of the population. Therefore, that term is inappropriate nowadays and should be replaced by the term ethnic enclave. Marcuse (1997) distinguishes the enclave from the ghetto in the way those two emerge: the formation of the ghetto is the result of application of force, whereas in the case of the enclave the force element is missing. Another major difference is that in the case of the enclave it is the inhabitants who set the boundaries, or it is generated "from the inside", while in the case of the ghetto, the dividing line is imposed "from the outside". Wirth (1998) and Bauman (2001) refer to such areas (enclaves) as to voluntary ghettos – quarters which are formed in order to strengthen a shared (ethnic) identity.

In this study, the term ghettoized urban structure (GUS) is used. A distinctive feature of the studied Roma quarter is the long-term accumulation of interrelated problems of various nature: economic, social, urban, ecological, etc. In infrastructural terms, the GUSs are characterized by deteriorated housing, poor technical and social infrastructure, poor public transport access, chaotic planning of the housing units and so forth. Over time, the combination of interconnected and dynamically evolving problems impedes the sustainable development of the city as a whole. In most cases, GUSs in Bulgaria are the result of past failures of public intervention by national and local authorities. Very often GUSs are located in parts of the urban space which exhibit long-lasting negative trends in their socio-economic development, often near industrial sites or zones of high degree of environmental hazards. The spatial range of a GUS can vary greatly: it can cover a whole neighborhood, part of it or just a group of adjacent residential buildings. Over the last two decades there has been a significant expansion of the existing GUSs in the country, accompanied by the emergence of new ones.

The characteristics of Roma quarters vary greatly in terms of their location in the city, the form of land ownership, the level of social and ethnic homogeneity, the specifics of the housing problems, etc. The location of such neighborhoods determines the degree of segregation – often not just physically, but also socially. According to their location, the GUSs can be ones outside the main urban structure (those are usually the most isolated GUSs, almost entirely excluded from the city's life), GUSs located within the city limits but yet in its periphery, and ones located in the central city area.

One of the main goals in any geographic research is to delineate the boundaries of the studied object. Boundaries are normally outlined where the intensity of given properties exhibited by the studied object or process are diminishing. Lefebvre (1991) argues that “(social) space is a (social) product”. Taking into account that space can not be regarded in its physical or material representation alone, we can define three types, or three dialectical levels at which space can be interpreted:

1) "urban space" – the boundaries of an urban structure in this case are drawn, taking into account the specific morphological structure of the city with its inherent planning characteristics. In some cases, the boundaries of a GUS may coincide with the administrative boundaries of a neighborhood, may cover just a part of a neighborhood, etc.

2) "functional space" – since population is not static but is in constant movement, the outlining of the boundaries of the functional space requires taking into account also the spatial behavior of the ethnic community. The spatial scope of people's everyday activities often largely exceed the boundaries of the urban space – the movement of people is related to the main everyday activities such as habitation, labor, education, use of public services, leisure and recreation, commuting, etc.

3) "symbolic space" – the territorial scope of the GUS in this case is determined by the way in which space is mentally perceived by the ethnic community, whose perception is assessed through the so-called mental mapping. The methodological question in this case is to what extent the results obtained by mental mapping differ, or are consistent with the geographic reality. The symbolic space can also be outlined by the "external" residents – in our case – the Bulgarian ethnic majority living outside the GUS: the macro-society indicates the areas which they consider unsafe, and are excluded as areas for possible habitation, visiting, etc. Such areas are mapped as "white spots" on the mental map of the majority representatives and are excluded from the urban space.

4) "virtual space" – the emergence of the Internet has changed the boundaries of communication between people. The virtual space of the Internet allows families and friends to be in constant contact anywhere around the world. With regard to the development and the rapid spread of technology, we can now speak of a "virtual space", or a space without limits, in the case of Harman Mahala quarter as well. The use of the Internet is a positive indicator of the existence of close links between people and the existence of sustainable social networks without the need for geographic proximity (Graham, 2004). With the development of telecommunications, social contacts no longer require neighborhood proximity or physical communication, as “communities of no proximity” already exist. The boundaries, the scope, the intensity and the use of the virtual space by the Roma will be the subject of future research.

The urban space is usually characterized by clearly defined "solid" boundaries, while with the functional and the symbolic space boundaries are not clearly defined and have a blurry character. Therefore, the different functional spaces can be viewed from two aspects – from a “static” urban perspective (where the main objects of the individual functional spaces are located within the urban space, or the physical boundaries of the quarter) and from a "dynamic" one – to what extent those functional spaces are actually utilized by the population of a given residential quarter.

Cities should not be studied without taking into account the interrelations between their different districts. Massey and Denton (1988) create one of the first conceptual diagrams of spatial segregation that includes five dimensions: evenness (the differential distribution of two groups among areal units in a city), exposure (the degree of potential contact, or the possibility of interaction, between minority and majority group members within geographic areas of a city), concentration (the relative amount of physical space occupied by a minority group in the urban environment), centralization (the degree to which a group is spatially located near the center of an urban area), and clustering (the extent to which areal units inhabited by minority members adjoin one another, or cluster, in space.). It is possible for a certain ethnic or social group to exhibit strong degree of segregation by one or two of the above-mentioned dimensions, while in the same time to exhibit a low degree of segregation by other dimensions. A situation where high degree by all five dimensions of spatial segregation is exhibited, is defined by Massey and Denton (1989) as *hypersegregation*.

2.2. Methodology of the research

The conducted survey for the purposes of this study involved 500 inhabitants of Harman Mahala. Based on a specially designed questionnaire, *empirical data* has been gathered, concerning some ethno-demographic indicators, economic and housing conditions, degree of satisfaction with the quarter the respondents live in, the existing social networks, etc. Along with the questionnaires, interviews with local residents have also been conducted. The purpose of those interviews was to collect *quality data* about the preferences and desires of the inhabitants, as well as to find out about the reasons behind the results of the survey. By applying the above-mentioned methods of data collecting, we intended to give a complete picture of the situation of the Roma ethnic group, whose study normally is seriously hampered by the lack of data.

3. ANALYSIS

3.1 Urban space: location of Harman Mahala quarter in the urban structure of the city

The city of Plovdiv is featured by its circular urban structure. Four segments are clearly distinct – an urban core, or the "traditional" urban part, and three belts around it, the formation of which is closely related to the different construction periods. The first belt around the "traditional" urban area emerged between the two World Wars but underwent further construction interventions. The second belt was built mainly in the 1950s, while the third belt was formed by the residential apartment complexes, the construction of which began in the early 1970s. Harman Mahala is located in the Northern Administrative Region of Plovdiv (NAR), which is located to the north of the Maritsa River and extends to the northern city regulation limits. The total area of the NAR is 1380 ha, with a population of 48 000 inhabitants (as of 2013). The NAR includes the northern industrial zone of the city, which covers over 60% of the region's total area (Figure 1).

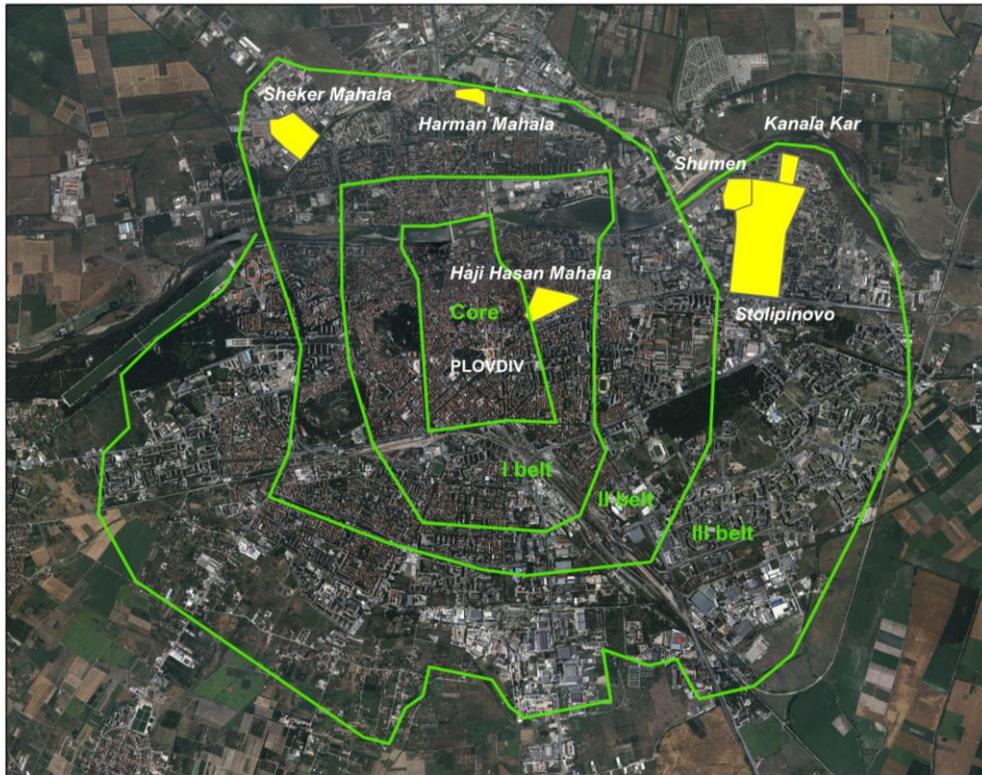


Figure 1. Location of the four Roma quarters of Plovdiv.

Four GUSs are formed within the city of Plovdiv, covering 1.7% of the city's urban space:

1) Stolipinovo (formally "Izgrevo") – situated in the Eastern Administrative Region of the city, over an area of 54 ha, formed around 1910-1915. According to unofficial data, some 45-50 000 people live in that neighborhood. The quarter emerged after the Roma residents were forced to leave the central areas of the city and were driven to the outskirts, to more disadvantaged areas, in obedience of a local authorities' resolution. Initially, those areas were beyond the administrative limits of the city, but due to its territorial expansion, the neighborhood was gradually "swallowed" by the city.

2) "Haji Hasan Mahala" – located within the Central Administrative Region of Plovdiv. Being a nicer residential area, the Roma from the other Roma neighborhoods strive to obtain property in this specific quarter due to the higher social status of its residents and its central location. Haji Hasan Mahala covers an area of about 9 ha and is inhabited by some 3000 to 4000 residents.

3) "Sheker Mahala" or "Todor Kableskov" – this is the second largest Roma quarter in Plovdiv (area: 10 ha, population: 5000-6000 residents) and is situated in the Northern Administrative Region of the city. After the great flooding of Harman Mahala quarter in 1957, people were relocated in to what is now Sheker Mahala quarter, for which purpose the government built massive, single-storey houses. Later, through illegal construction mostly, the quarter expanded to the northwest. Over the last years, many two- and three-storey houses were built in the area, while another fifty, maisonette-like houses were constructed (within a EU project) for those in extreme need.

4) „Harman Mahala quarter“ (area: 5 ha, formally known as "Hadzhi Dimitar") is also located in the Northern Administrative Region of the city, right next to the northern industrial zone of Plovdiv – until the beginning of the twentieth century – beyond the urbanized part of the city, which facilitated the adaptation of most of the migrants arriving from villages around Plovdiv. Asenov (2018) states that "although we have no reliable information about this, we

can assume that at the end of the nineteenth and in the early twentieth century, there is a "Roma" neighborhood in the Harmanite locality outside the city. Asenov justifies his assumption with conversations he had in the early 1990s with elderly inhabitants of the quarter, when those residents were already 75-80 years old: when asked about their place of birth, those people declared Harman Mahala as their birthplace. This suggests that by 1910-1915, the quarter had already existed. The urban space of Harman Mahala is clearly outlined in the urban fabric of the city. The quarter is located between "Severen" Blvd., "Nikola Belovezhdov" Str., "Velyu Voyvoda" Str. and "Belozem" Str., right next to the "Kaufland" hypermarket. The ghettoized structure is not effectively integrated into the surrounding urban space. Its existence repels investors from that part of the city and makes the area unattractive due to the bad reputation Roma neighborhoods generally have. The quarter is inhabited by 1800 residents (data obtained through the field survey) and is the smallest Roma quarter in Plovdiv in terms of both area and population.

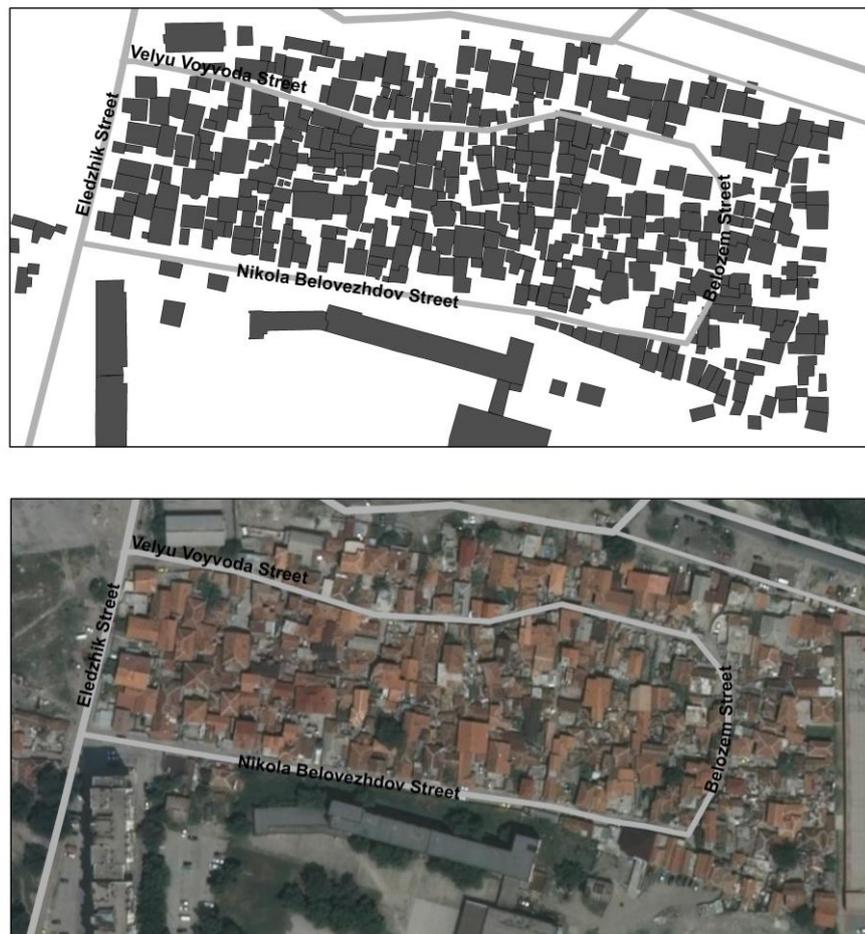


Figure 2. Schematic and actual aerial view of Harman Mahala quarter.

Since the beginning of the so-called transitional period in Bulgaria, as a result of the intra-migratory movements and the concentration of Roma population in urban settlements, the micro-quarters of Shumen and Kanali Kar emerged in the immediate vicinity of Stolipinovo quarter, becoming part of that ethnic megastructure, considered to be the largest Roma neighborhood in Europe (Figure 1).

If we look at Plovdiv's GUSs, it is clear that they are located along the edges of the urban fabric of the city (except for Haji Hasan Mahala). The sheer distance to the city center marginalizes the GUSs' residents and creates real problems in terms of access to public services. The distance to the city center hinders the mobility of the GUSs' residents,

considering that they can hardly afford (financially) the regular use of public transport which in most cases is the only way for them to access the city center.

Over the years, the only attempt to eliminate the unwanted spatial concentration of Roma population dates back from the 1960s and the 1970s when local authorities tried to expel the Roma from their neighborhoods and settle them in other districts of the city, mainly in the then newly built residential complex of Trakia. The attempt, however, failed and the reason for that was the fact that when it comes to cohabitation in ethnically mixed neighborhoods, the Roma feel insecure and despite the better overall living conditions in mixed residential areas, they prefer their neighborhoods.

The specific character of the GUSs in most cases makes the application of traditional urban planning tools impossible. The interference of local authorities is hampered by the fact that four to five consecutive generations of Roma have been residing in the neighborhood in discussion, which has led to a strong sense of belonging to the place. The Spatial Development Concept of Plovdiv Municipality states that "incorrectly implemented integration programs – from displacement of people to construction of alien to their (of the Roma) ethnic culture housing units – have not improved their (of the residents) condition. It has become clear that neither displacement nor housing construction can solve the problems, but rather the implementation of *micromanagement measures* so as to achieve a certain community standard, consistent with the local residents' cultural identity.

3.2 Functional space

3.2.1. Habitation

The housing situation can serve as an indicator of the degree of integration. The GUSs are regarded differently when addressing urban issues "from the inside" (by the residents of the GUS) and "from the outside" (by the macro-society) – from the outside, not much attention is paid to the internal structure of the GUS, which is rather perceived as a whole entity, most often as a burden to the city. From the inside, however, the residents perceive the quarter as a heterogeneous structure and are constantly searching for ways to improve their overall living conditions and quality of life.

Episodic actions towards tearing down of illegal constructions in Harman Mahala (and many other Roma quarters across the country) have been observed in recent years. The partial demolition of homes caused serious discontent, which the residents expressed through massive public protests. Since 2018 there has been an increase in the sense of fear and uncertainty about the future of the inhabitants' dwellings. The above-mentioned local authorities' actions were actually taken due to investing interests in the area, while the illegal building status was mainly used as an excuse. The impossibility to solve the problems which have been accumulated for decades, as well as the lack of a clear vision for future development of the neighborhood, has eventually led to a "withdrawal of the state". Although the Spatial Planning Act of Bulgaria clearly prohibits illegal construction, the authorities prefer to turn a blind eye to the irregularities taking place in the GUS. The illegal construction intensified dramatically after the socio-economic transformation of the early 1990s, and nearly 75% of the housing stock of Harman Mahala was built over the following three decades. Apart from two properties, all other buildings in the quarter are practically illegal and lack the required ownership documentation. Despite all that, horizontal and vertical (in height) expansion of the neighborhood has been observed as a response to the natural growth of the population, on the one hand, and on the other – due to the improvement of the residents' financial well-being as a result of the significant share of people working abroad.

Once the Roma see that they can not get support from the state in solving their housing problem, they start looking for solutions to their problems on their own. Who is going to build and where – are all matters solved by internal arrangements within the community. Random and unregulated construction of homes has made the housing infrastructure in the quarter insecure, given that the houses lack any building permits and were built without meeting the required standards. All these problems pose dangers related to the occupation of the buildings. The average household size in Harman Mahala is 5.2 people – there are hardly any households which consist of one nuclear family only – most often, 3 to 4 families occupy one building and overcrowding is common. The housing itself is diverse, represented by different construction approaches which basically reflect the different construction periods, while solid buildings, however, are the predominant type. Regardless of the worsened urban development characteristics, Harman Mahala stands out with better overall conditions compared to most other Roma quarters, given its relatively good household provision. The data show that almost all homes have access to tap water and sewage – 94% of all, while all buildings are electrified.

In conclusion to the habitation functional space, we can point out that the existing inequalities, combined with other forms of social exclusion, discrimination, the overall attitude of the macro-society, the “withdrawal of the state”, etc., have lead to the formation of a seemingly indestructible vicious circle, as a result of which the "gap" between the Roma and the ethnic majority has increased. Invisible walls have been erected between the two groups of population and the Roma have encapsulated themselves in their own living environment, looking for solutions to their problems on their own.

3.2.2. Recreation and Leisure

One of the important functional spaces in the urban structure concerns the recreation and leisure activities of the residents, often related to as the “green system”. The green system of Plovdiv is "mosaic", unevenly distributed and poorly integrated in the urban structure of the city, accounting for an insufficient share of the city’s total area. The fragmentation and the lack of connections between the individual “green islands” prevent the latter from playing their environmental role. The green system consists of: 1) green areas of wide public use, including parks and gardens, 2) green areas of specific use – cemetery parks, botanical gardens, plant nurseries, etc., and 3) green areas of limited public use – between-buildings green spaces.

Green areas for wide public use in the Northern Administrative Region of Plovdiv exhibit two significant functional weaknesses: they are extremely insufficient, while the only park in the area – “Ribnitsa” Park – lacks the required 15-minute-walking accessibility from the studied Roma quarter. There supply of green areas of wide public use per inhabitant in the NAR is three times lower than the city’s average (11.51 m²) and seven times lower than the requirements (20-28 m² per inhabitant) for cities of the rank of Plovdiv. These extremely low values of the parameters result from the fact that there is only one park in the NAR, the capacity of which is insufficient, making the NAR comparable only to industrial zones in that aspect.

Green areas with limited public use, on the other hand, although not subject to specific requirements, are vital to the green system of the city and its ecology. Those green areas only complement the green system and can not replace the areas for wide public use, which, besides their environmental role, have the duty of satisfying the needs of recreation, sports and leisure. The sports fields in the NAR are extremely insufficient, while the ones which do exist are mainly designed for professional use and not so much for public use.

The conducted survey shows that:

- Thirty-nine percent of the respondents consider the sports facilities in the area they live in to be sufficient, 29% declare that children's playground are sufficient and 23% believe that green areas are sufficient in the area
- Public spaces outside Harman Mahala are limitedly used: 47% of the residents declare they only stay in the neighborhood, 18% do visit "Ribnitsa" Park, while 7% only visit the adjacent to the quarter area.
- Only 6.4% of the respondents declare they do sports actively, 8.6% have been on a trip abroad, but mostly to visit relatives who work in Germany, only 25.5% of the respondents declare they can afford to go on holiday in Bulgaria and 15.8% go to the cinema, to the theater, attend concerts, etc.
- Some 20% of the quarter's residents do not recognize major, symbolic landmarks in the city of Plovdiv, while in the same time unmistakably recognize sites in other Roma neighborhoods in the city.

The results reveal the closed character of the lifestyle of the inhabitants of Harman Mahala in terms of recreation and leisure. This stereotype, however, has begun to break especially among the younger generation who increasingly copy the pattern of the majority's behavior. The Roma are becoming increasingly visible in the city center, the shopping malls, etc. The breaking of the "traditional" behavioral patterns are enhanced also by the fact that approximately 1/3rd of the inhabitants with a permanent residence in Harman Mahala actually live abroad, in ethnically mixed neighborhoods. Upon their return to Bulgaria, those emigrants bring their new lifestyles to the neighborhood, becoming more and more confident in their behavior. However, it is disturbing with regard to integration that 81% of the residents watch mainly Turkish television channels, to which they have access via satellite dishes. All these trends hamper the integration processes and facilitate their further isolation from the ethnic majority. Yet another example is the fact that a large percentage of the Roma children hardly ever speak Bulgarian at the time they start attending school – as established by interviews conducted among school teachers working with Roma children, who normally go to entirely segregated "Roma" schools. The insufficient or sometimes complete lack of Bulgarian language conduct is pointed out as one of the main reasons for unsatisfactory results of the Roma students at school.

3.2.3. Education and Healthcare.

Healthcare Subsystem.

This subsystem comprises two groups of facilities:

- Facilities that meet the daily needs of the residents;
- Facilities of a higher hierarchical level that meet the non-daily, casual needs of the residents.

The first group in Bulgaria is represented by the so-called Outpatient Centers (OC). As far as those are concerned, there is a clear spatial imbalance regarding their distribution throughout the city of Plovdiv. A total of three OCs operate in the NAR (out of thirteen OCs for the entire city). The regulations state that the OCs should have a radius of service of 800 meters. The two ghettoized structures in the NAR of Plovdiv are both located beyond that limit.

The supply with facilities of the second group is relatively high in the discussed administrative region due to "St. George" University Hospital located in the area. Nonetheless, the supply of services by healthcare institutions of a higher hierarchical level (hospitals) gradually decreases from the center to the periphery of the city, placing the GUSs of Harman Mahala, Sheker Mahala and Stolipinovo at a most disadvantaged position.

Pre-School and Education subsystem.

The number of existing nurseries in the city is insufficient – out of the existing sixteen nurseries, just three are located in the NAR, while of the provided thirteen additional nurseries to be built only two are to be located in the NAR. The situation with kindergardens is not much different – four new kindergardens are needed in the NAR, of which one in Sheker Mahala and one in Harman Mahala.

The pupils from the studied Roma quarter go to a typical segregated school. Accessibility standards for schools and kindergardens provide a service radius of 500 meters and 300 meters respectively, which standards are not met in the case of Harman Mahala.

The survey results show that:

- Twenty-six percent of the respondents indicate that their general practitioner (GP) is not in not anywhere near their neighborhood;
- Forty-six percent of the respondents believe that healthcare facilities are sufficient in the area;
- Fifty-seven percent believe that schools are sufficient in the area;
- Only 10% say they went or currently go to a mixed, non-segregated school;
- Less than half (41%) of the respondents say they have equal access to quality medical care and are happy with the health services they are provided with.

3.2.4. Labour.

Prior to the socio-economic transformations of the early 1990s, one of the most important positive features of the then system was the nearly full employment of the working-age Roma population of Bulgaria. As a result, the workspace had become a shared place for all ethnic groups. The Roma were not the hidden and the unknown "others", but were rather regarded as regular employees. Over the last decades, however, the opposite trend has been observed – 47% of the respondents declare they only speak Turkish or Romani language at work. After the restructuring of Bulgaria's economy, there has been a huge decrease of jobs for low-skilled workers – such as the vast majority of the Roma – and of the number of Roma who are involved in the formal economy in general. For example, the so-called "pavement vending" is a source of income for 1/3rd of the households in the studied Roma quarter, while some 30% of the working-age population is employed in various *grey economy* activities. With the beginning of the transitional period in Bulgaria, many Roma households became dependent on social welfare. Since the beginning of the twenty first century, however, there has been a clear trend of decreasing number of families dependent on social welfare, which is evidenced by the results of the survey (only 7% of the households rely on social welfare only). There has been improvement of the Roma financial well-being as many take advantage of newly emerged opportunities – some not entirely legal (production of illegal alcohol for example), but legal ones too – working in the field of construction for example, taxi driving, etc. The well-developed social networks for mutual assistance now extend not only beyond the borders of the neighborhood or even the city, but beyond the borders of the country as a whole. In recent years there has been an increase in the number of Roma working abroad and, respectively, in the number of households relying on financial support from outside the country: twenty-nine percent of the respondents say they have worked abroad at some point, 59% say at least one member of the household has worked or is currently working abroad, and half of them intend to go to work abroad for a few years at least. All and all, over half (56%) of the households in Harman Mahala rely on financial support from relatives working abroad.

According to the survey, 1/4th of the respondents who are employed work in the neighborhood or in the adjacent areas. The survey confirms that the majority of the Roma in Harman Mahala work either in the neighborhood (16%), or in close proximity (38%); twenty-

eight percent – in other parts of Plovdiv and 11% – outside the city (in other settlements in the region of Plovdiv, or in Bulgaria in general).

These processes speak of an increasing capsulation of the Roma community from the surrounding urban environment. The “autonomous” spatial unit is becoming increasingly remote and decreasingly reliant on the state, while at the same time the role of the internal social networks, loyalty to the place, long-standing coexistence (for more than a century), the internal rules, laws, and norms, are becoming more and more important.

3.3. Symbolic space: perception of Harman Mahala as a spatial entity by its residents.

Mental mapping is an individual empirical tool, a method that has been actively used for scientific purposes since the early 1960s. The creation of a mental map is a process in which the respondents, based on their memories, concepts and perceptions, build a visual image of the space and the objects located in that space. Often, the mental image created by the respondent is far from the objective spatial reality. The creation of a mental map is directly related to the respondents’ subjective state, their life experience, lifestyle, culture, age, education, religious affiliation, etc.

The mental maps of the respondents from Harman Mahala turned out to be very heterogeneous. Similar to a palimpsest, the mental maps of the elderly respondents exhibit several temporal and urban layers. The mental maps of the younger respondents, on the other hand, are lapidary and, naturally, with a significantly shorter temporal range. Another specific differentiating element in the mental maps of the elderly and younger respondents is the use of collective memory by the elderly – their mental maps often include non-existent geographic and urban sites: “... here, where the Fair is located now (meaning the International Plovdiv Fair site), I remember there used to be wetlands, gardens, woods ... and I know from my grandmother there used to be a Turkish cemetery with huge tombstones...” It is noteworthy that in most cases the neighborhood and the homes of the respondents occupy a significant, central part of the map sheet. The majority of respondents (79%) mention sites and objects related mainly to their everyday life and to the festive ritual calendar of their own ethnic community: mosques, other Roma quarters, grocery stores in or in close proximity to the neighborhood, old Muslim cemeteries, etc. The space of the “others” (the macro-society) is often invisible or too amorphous – that space seems to exist, but in another, parallel city decor, through which the Roma most often move in a transit mode. About 11% of the respondents (mostly young people) also mark sites that are outside the “traditional” Roma routes and loci – shopping centers, sports centers and stadiums, the Old town of Plovdiv, prestigious cafes, the University, etc. According to the results of the application of the mental mapping method in Harman Mahala, we can draw the following conclusions:

- Mental maps mostly reflect the impact of the urban environment on the respondents, rather than the real geographical situation;
- The bulk of the respondents depict their neighborhood and their homes as the center from which all routes go. The quarter itself is considered a kind of a separate “settlement”, which, although geographically is part of the city, mentally is not, hence – “We are going to the city” is a common expression among the residents of Harman Mahala. Despite the provided access to all parts of the city by public transport, the ordinary resident of the neighborhood still feels the rest of the city as a foreign, uncomfortable place to be;
- Although in the mental maps of the vast majority of the respondents the city exists as something vague and amorphous, to a certain part of the respondents the city is becoming more and more recognizable and a part of their daily routes;

- There is a clear differentiation between the mental maps of older respondents and those of the younger ones: the mental maps of the first group are multi-layered, taking into account a considerably longer temporal continuity and a significant mix of once existing and currently existing sites. The mental maps of younger respondents, on the other hand, are considerably less embossed, but in the same time they are more lapidary, while the city is more specific and visible, and a certain number of routes lead from the neighborhood to prestigious locations in the city center.

A significant factor for the strong affiliation of the Roma people to the quarter they live in is the highly developed sense of place (Steele, 1981), Hummon (1992) the residents have developed. The social networks, the relations, the length of residence, etc., are the key factors influencing that sense of place. Short-term, transitional, residents rarely develop feelings of affection and belonging to the quarter, as opposed to those who are long-term or permanent residents. Another factor is the sense of "security" the Roma experience in their quarter – strong social networks provide support and a safe environment to the members of the community, reduce their solitude, and help them solve their everyday problems. On the other hand, the acute need for solidarity also serves as a shield against discrimination and even provides certain advantages of economic, social and political nature. The Roma therefore most often refuse to live outside their neighborhood, becoming introverted about their way of life and preserving their Roma identity and culture. These close interactions between the residents of the Roma quarter can be confirmed by the survey: 92% declare that they know all the residents of the quarter, while 79 % say they get together with their neighbors on a daily basis.

The survey results also show that:

- Seventy-eight percent would not move to another neighborhood even if they had a choice
- Only 14% of the respondents declare they would to move to a council house if given the opportunity;
- Forty-two percent of the respondents say they are completely satisfied with their neighbors, and only 2% are completely dissatisfied with their neighbors;
- Forty-five percent of the respondents are satisfied with their dwelling place, 50% are mostly happy with their dwelling place, 4% are mostly dissatisfied and 1% are completely dissatisfied;
- Ninety-eight percent of the respondents rate the neighborly relations as good.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The socio-economic transformation of the early 1990s, the penetration of the neoliberal model of development, the withdrawal of the "social state" – all have influenced the growth of social polarization, which inevitably affects the development of the different parts of the cities. As far as the Bulgarian cities are concerned, both spatial expansion of the existing Roma quarters and the formation of new ones have been observed. The GUSs occupy an essential place in the functional structure of the city and have an impact on its development as a whole. GUSs are regarded as spatial and functional barriers in the urban space, which give a negative image of the city, representing a burden to the municipal budget and an exposing the inability of the authorities to cope with the accumulated problems.

Three types of boundaries of the GUS in discussion have been distinguished – "solid", "blurry" and "symbolic". The solid boundaries are outlined taking into account the urban space inhabited by the Roma ethnic community, i.e. from a "static" point of view. In defining the "blurry" boundaries of the GUS, the population and its spatial behavior were taken into account, considering the functional spaces of labor, education, recreation, sports, etc, with

their inherent infrastructure and mutual interactions. Through those interactions, the so-called “functional space” can be outlined – transformed and modified by ethnic communities according to their needs, ethno-cultural features, etc. The whole spectrum of activities ranging from production to trade and consumption of goods and services, shapes out the spatial scope of everyday activities and the territorial scope of the established social networks, which, to a large extent exceed the physical (“solid”) boundaries of the GUS. In this study, the individual functional spaces and subsystems have been examined in two aspects: 1) where exactly the main objects of the aforementioned functional spaces are located and 2) how often and to what extent the elements of the various functional spaces are used by the inhabitants of Harman Mahala. The third aspect taken into consideration in the study is related to the outlining of the so-called symbolic boundaries and the “symbolic space” of the GUS, which both are dependent on the way the local Roma population perceives the surrounding urban space.

Based on the conducted research, the following key conclusions can be drawn:

Following the withdrawal of the “social state”, a “return” of the Roma to their quarter took place in the early 1990s, which has led to even greater ghettoization of this community. The Roma now look for a solution to their numerous problems mostly on their own, increasingly becoming less reliant on the state in general.

Approximately 1/3rd of the residents with a permanent address in the studied Roma quarter actually live and work abroad, which greatly affects the overall well-being of the residents and the behavioral patterns of those working abroad.

There is a growing sense of insecurity, while the attitude of the ethnic majority is perceived as a personal encroachment on the residents’ Roma identity. As a result of that, higher “invisible walls” are being built between the Roma and the Bulgarians. This encapsulation is observed not only in the living environment aspect but also in other activities related to the all functional spaces, including the so-called symbolic space and the existing social networks.

It can be argued that a “city in the city” has been formed, which is becoming more and more autonomous, duplicating the institutional structure of the Bulgarian state. Wacquant and Wilson (1993) refer to these structures as to *hyperghettos*, adding that living in the hyperghetto is living outside the mainstream society.

Focusing the attention on such ghettoized urban structures is dictated not only by pure scientific interest, but also by the potential emergence of difficulties of various nature in the future.

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