



# **THE SOCIALIST HOUSING ESTATES**

## **A RESIDENTIAL PERSPECTIVE ON SOFIA'S SOCIALIST HOUSING ESTATES**

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This thesis is written as a final assignment for the master Landscape Architecture and Planning, specialisation in Spatial Planning, at Wageningen University.

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*To my father*

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# ABSTRACT

Post-socialist countries face significant economic, social and spatial transformation processes within the last twenty years since the fall of the Socialist regime. As a former member of the Socialist Block Bulgaria inherits the prefabricated housing estates, which accommodate more than 50% of the capital's population. These housing quarters are left to self-regulation and decay and their future is not strategically defined by the Government. The current study frames the perceptions and expectations of both the inhabitants and the ex-inhabitants of those quarters towards their living environment and the Governmental contribution around the problems of the neighbourhoods. In order to obtain information from the local people the author conducted 18 semi-structured interviews. The results of the interviews are thoroughly analyzed and structured. The study is grounds for further analysis for the regeneration of the socialist housing estates.

**Keywords:** socialist housing estates; post-socialist city; urban regeneration; local perceptions; living environment

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

CEE	Central and Eastern Europe
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
DA	Discourse Analysis
EU	European Union
PPP	Public-private Partnership
WWI	World War I
WWII	World War II

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# SUMMARY

The current study is a representation of the long-term interest of the author towards the Post-socialist city's premises and development and specifically the socialist prefabricated housing estates. The personal involvement of the author is used only to the extent that the researcher is a direct witness of the post-socialist environment and any emotional normativity is avoided.

The years following the change of the regime in 1989 are accompanied by economic, social and spatial transformations. The many spatial consequences which are result of the regime ruled by the Soviet Union encompass also the socialist housing estates (the prefabricated housing estates) which are home to more than 50% of the population of the capital today. Nowadays, these quarters are left to self-regulation and decay; the Government has not yet worked out a strategy for their regeneration.

Considering the life-expectancy of the pre-fabricated blocks, the open-spaces which are not maintained and the unpleasant partial renovations, an urban regeneration strategy is required. The initial phases of the research point out that no consistent actions are initiated by the Government with regards to the discussed quarters. Grounded on that, the study frames the perceptions and expectation of the local population with regards to their living environment and desired future of the housing estates. The research is centered on the author's perception of collaboration among not only planners and experts but also local people. Thus, according to the researcher, hearing local voices is an essential part of the planning process.

The researcher has chosen to study the perceptions and expectations of the (ex) residents as there is no vision defined for the future of the neighbourhoods yet. At this early stage, local people might provide planners with directions for future development as well as some valuable insights on the local situation. The initial steps of the research consisted of a stakeholder analysis which outlined the two stakeholders of the current study – the residents (Group 1) and the ex-residents (Group 2) of the socialist housing estates. The author frames the study by a collaborative approach and guiding concepts, such as urban regeneration and community development.

Aiming at presenting to the reader the contemporary city Sofia a brief historical overview of the structure of the city is presented, followed by a concise explanation of the contemporary planning system principles and changes that are at hand. In order to obtain information and answer the main research question,

***“What are the current perspectives and expectations of the residents and ex-residents of the socialist housing estates?”***

the author has conducted 18 semi-structured interviews with 9 representatives of Group 1 and 9 of Group 2. Being not a representative sample (18 interviewees in total), the interviews were ended once a saturation point was reached. Aiming at answering the main research question, the author structures the perceptions and expectation of the two Groups. Many similarities are encountered by the research in the perceptions of both Groups but also some differences. Importantly, all changes that the inhabitants desire and expect are realistic and no thorough interventions are expected. The study concludes with practical recommendations for further actions with regards to the regeneration process of the socialist housing estates.



# INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. THE ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER
- 1.2. PROBLEM DESCRIPTION
- 1.3. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY AND MAIN RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

### Bulgaria is part of the EU since 2007.



Source: Wikipedia

*“The urban development of the larger cities ... ha[ve] been subject to distinct changes in the first decade following the collapse of socialism. These changes are primarily the result of the complex interaction of inherited urban structures, market economy ideologies, new state institutional parameters and the general processes of transformation in the economy, politics and society.” (Sailer-Fliege, 1999)*

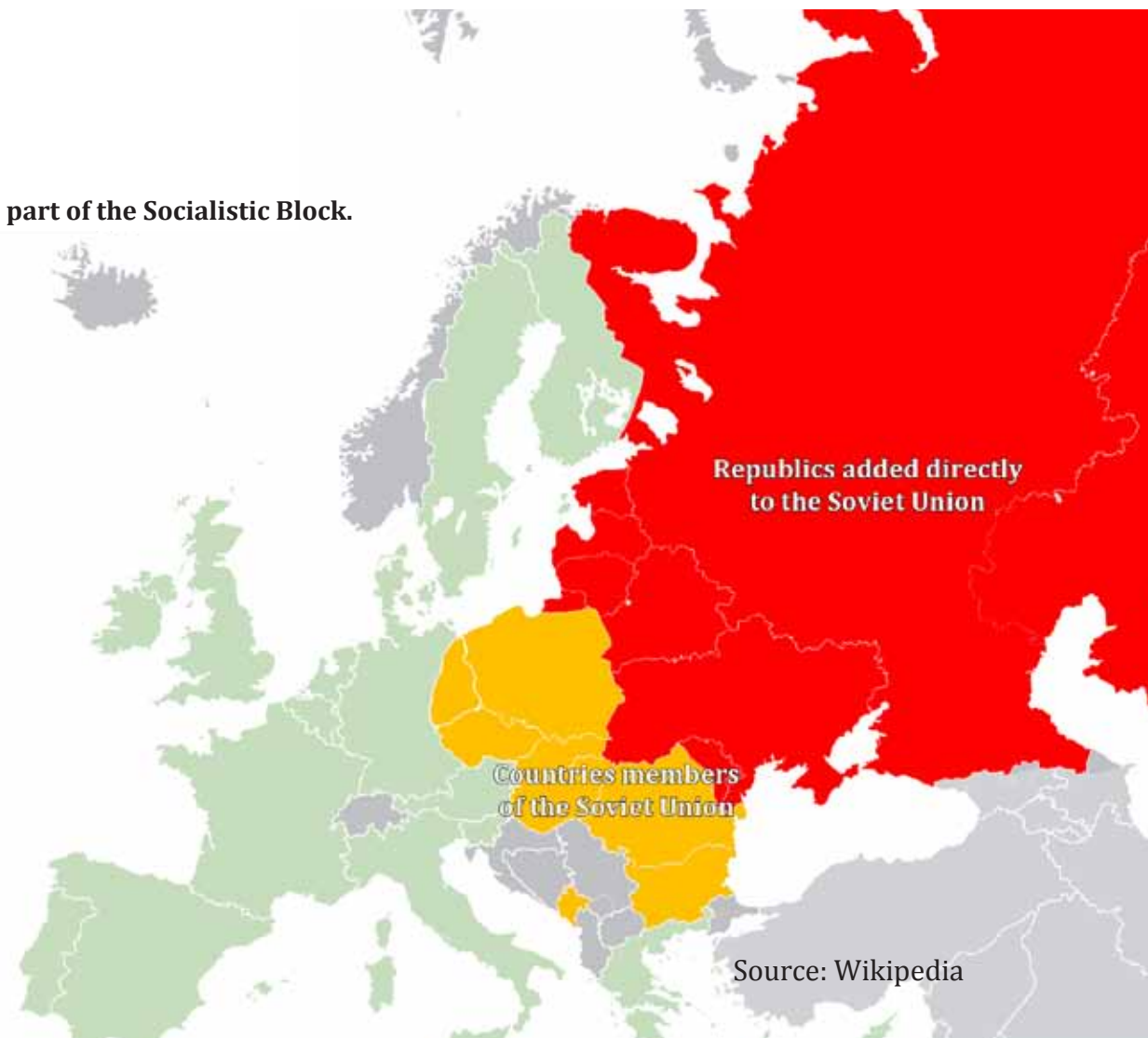
The last twenty years have been characterized by strong processes of change within the Eastern European countries and specifically in the case of Bulgaria. Following the socialistic era and the fall of the regime ruled by the Soviet Union, many economic, social and spatial transformations have been stimulated and acknowledged. Along with the many spatial consequences of the socialist period that developed in the capital of Bulgaria, namely Sofia, go the prefabricated housing estates. They accommodate more than 50% of the population of Sofia (The Master Plan, 2010). As will be further described, they are left to self-regulation and decay and their future has not been strategically defined by the Government. The current study frames the perceptions and experiences of the inhabitants of those housing quarters as the grounds for further strategic development. The research is grounded on the author’s perception of collaboration among not only planners and experts but also local people. Thus, according to the researcher, hearing local voices is an essential part of the planning process.

As argued by scholars, the changes in the economic and social status in the Central part of Europe have been faster, than those in the Eastern peripheries (Tsenkova, 2004; Stanilov 2007; Gürler and Gülersoy, 2010). Economy in this central part of the region has gradually revived to become, nowadays, close to the Western European if looked upon from the socio-economic status of the citizens. At the same time, “[i]n the eastern part of the region, changes on both the economic and political front have been more moderate, and progress uneven” (EBRD, 2004, cited in Tsenkova, 2004: 21 (1)).

One of the transition countries that went through all the problematic transformations typical of the ex-socialist countries and distinctive endeavors is Bulgaria. As a former member of the socialist block the country went through transformations “illustrated with large/small scale privatization, governance and enterprise restriction, price liberalisation ..., securities markets and non-bank financial institutions” along with “infrastructure reform” (e.g., see Figure 1.1). These changes were “a specific result of the interaction between the socialist mould, the subsequent introduction of the market economy, integration into the process of economic globalization and the transition towards a post-industrial society” (Sailer – Fliege, 1998: 7 (1)).

The changes that the country as a political unit encountered influenced all spheres of development. One of them was the planning system, or more specifically the spatial development and transformation of the country. As an example, during the socialist years the land-use plans were driven by the positioning of huge industrial zones, which required and thus were surrounded by newly built residential neighbourhoods. As a result, Bulgaria inherited the socialist housing estates. Those are large developments towards the suburbs of the city, which create a high density urban periphery, characterized by panel-flats, identical to one another, with low living qualities, lack of retail and employment opportunities (Tsenkova, 2004)(e.g., see Figure 1.2 and 1.3).

### Bulgaria as part of the Socialistic Block.



Republics added directly  
to the Soviet Union

Countries members  
of the Soviet Union

Source: Wikipedia

Figure 1.1 The pre-fabricated housing estates in the territory of Sofia

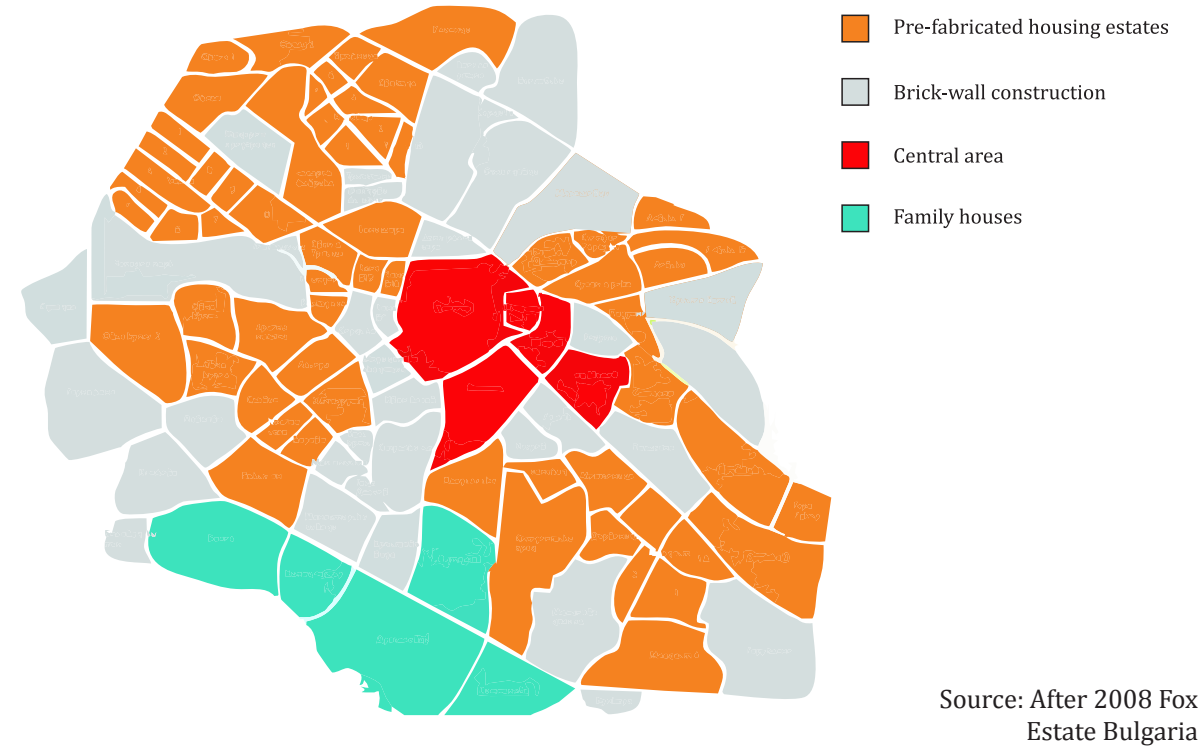


Figure 1.2 The categories of the neighbourhoods in Sofia as considered from the real estate companies

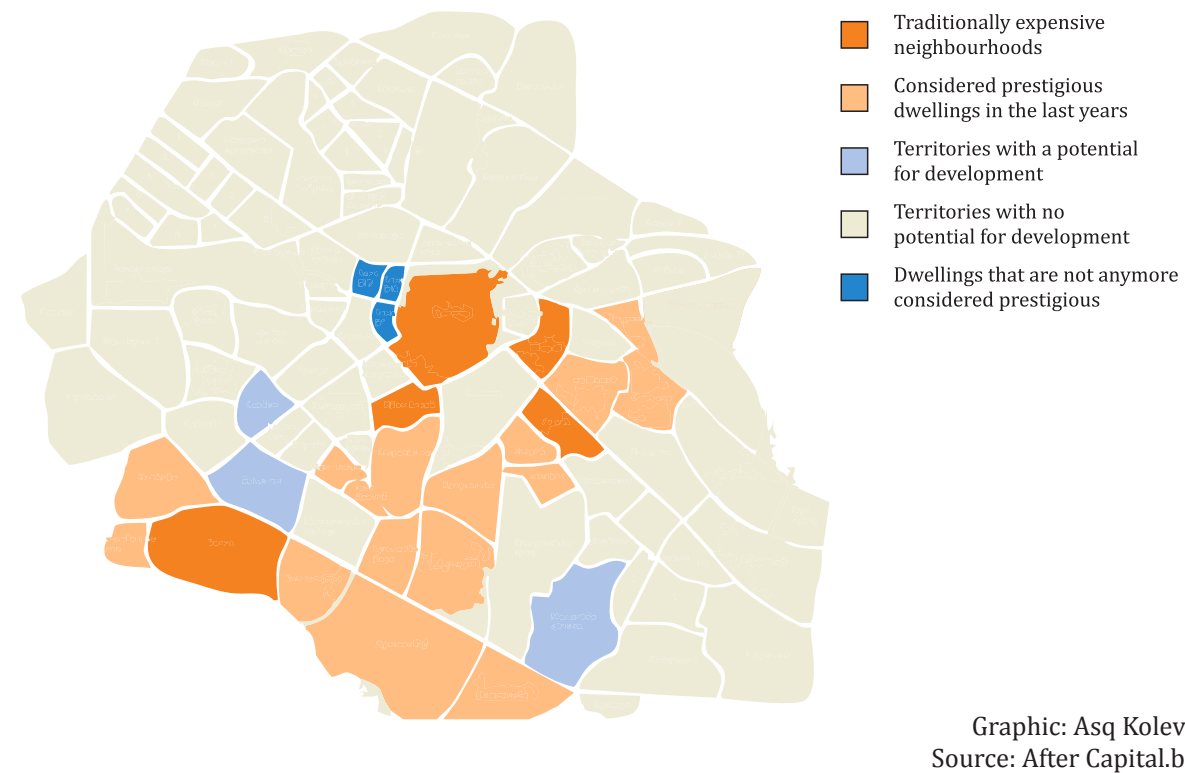
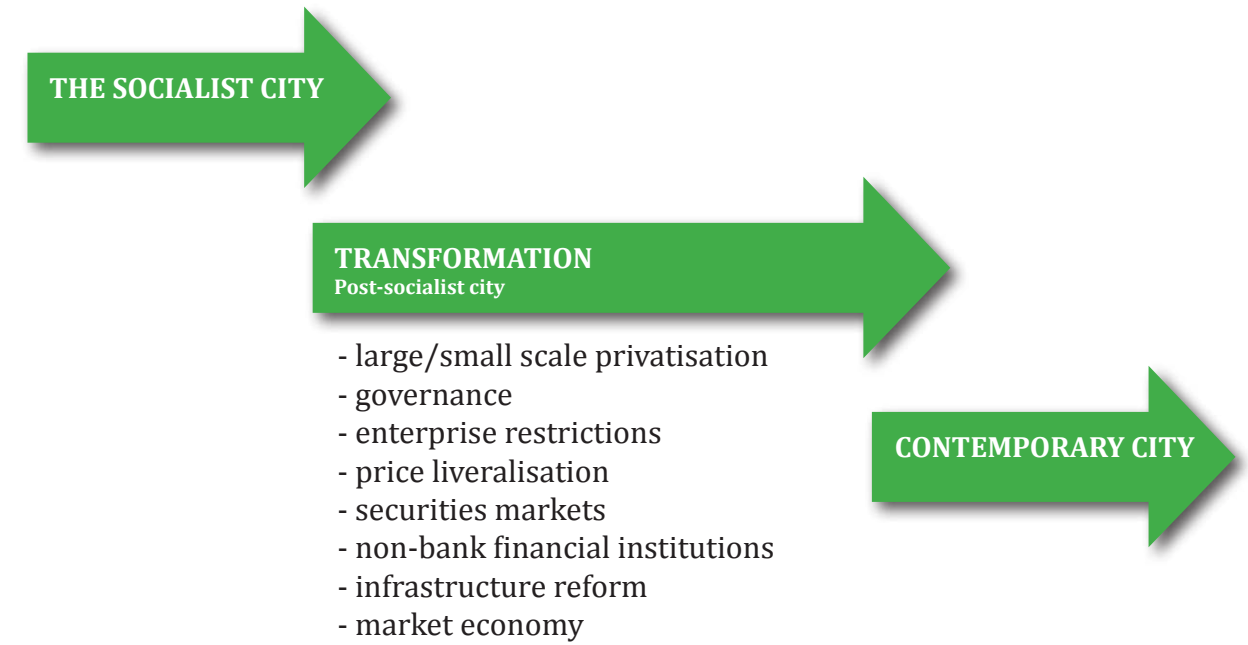
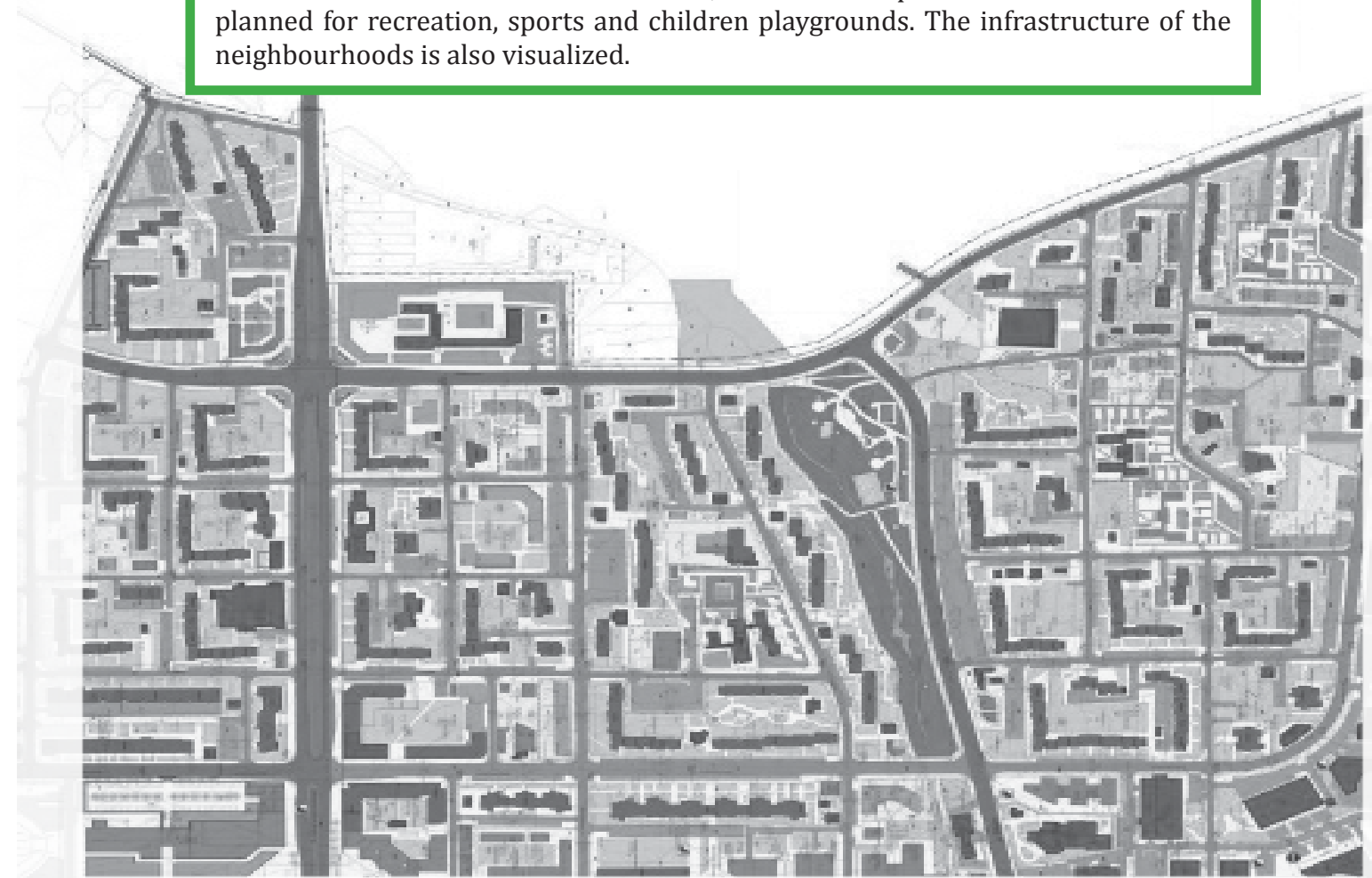


Figure 1.3 Transformation processes in the Post-socialist city.



The figure below represents the structure of the prefabricated housing estates. The identical structure of the flats can be seen, as well as the spaces in between the blocks planned for recreation, sports and children playgrounds. The infrastructure of the neighbourhoods is also visualized.







Today, those housing quarters are still characterized by their socialistic aim of providing equal standard for everyone: same flats, distributed among huge terrains with developed infrastructure but low-quality environment, due to lack of systemic maintenance. In a document by Tsenkova (2004) is argued that the socialist housing estates provide living places for more than 50% of the population of Sofia. In comparison, she states, less than 7% of the Western European inhabitants live in housing estates (EAUE, 2003, cited in Tsenkova, 2004: 44 (24)). The reasons for that low number for Western Europe are the physical and ecological problems that the discussed housing estates offer and also the social problems that follow their development. Although, many subsidies were available for the ones living in such neighbourhoods, the reality back in the 1960s was that the high construction costs for a newly built neighbourhood with all the necessary infrastructure lead to high rent costs. Additionally, the monotonous design of the buildings incurred high maintenance costs (Knorr-Siedow, 2003). As a result of all these issues compared also to the quality of life in smaller blocks or a house lead to people moving out of the described housing estates. This processes lead to social exclusion, as the estates remained a living environment of only low-class inhabitants, immigrants and ethnic minorities. Consequently, during the 1980s policies for rapid reconstruction of the estates were applied so that to lead to community development and transformation of the estates into a nice environment (EAUE, 2003). Temelová et al. (2010) argues that another reason for the low numbers of inhabitants in housing estates in Western Europe is due to the fact that in some countries those high-rise flats were built mainly for the immigrants.

Interestingly, in Bulgaria the private market existed during the socialist era as well, since the inhabitants bought their apartments, while in most of the other countries of the Socialist Block people received such dwellings from the state. In the same time the development under the socialist rule guaranteed “full domination of society by the almighty state” (Genov, 1998). In other words, it was the state which was able “to influence everything and everybody in the country” (Genov, 1998). As a result, “... post-socialist societies have inherited mistrust in institutions and social restructuring. People do not have a clear idea about their social identity and whom they must fight” (Petrovic, 2005). Arguably, it may be concluded that the socialist period tried to make the society uniform – equality, no rights and no voice – these are the characteristics of the socialist society. Following the restitution of land the Government announced that they do not have the resources to manage those huge estates; especially, when it comes to the free public space in between the flats (Harloe, 1996, cited in Petrovic, 2005). This is specifically the case of Sofia and the governance of the discussed estates.


### 1.1. The role of the researcher

*“Particularly in qualitative research, the role of the researcher as the primary data collection instruments necessitates the identification of personal values” (Creswell, 2008: 196).*

The current study is conducted for Bulgaria – the country of origin of the researcher. The author is a direct witness of the development of the post-socialist city of Sofia in the transition years. Born in 1986, all of her conscious life was structured around the consequences of the change of the regime: economic, social and spatial consequences.

As a result of this personal involvement of the researcher, along with the scientific knowledge that





As visualized on the picture, the structure of the panel-flats have not changed. However, some new constructions emerged in between the existing flats. This has changed the overall picture of the surrounding space as the open-spaces initially planned for recreation, places and sports have been taken by the new constructions.

the study shall produce it brings with itself the emotional involvement of the author which has two sides: on the one hand, it makes the researcher more enthusiastic and idealistic; on the other hand, an emotion might lead to normativity, expression of personal views, opinions, and values. The author's intention is to avoid this as much as possible by strictly considering the chosen perspective of the study and avoiding personal normativity.

## 1.2. Problem description

*"In view of their tight financial situation, most local authorities are currently not in a position to carry out the necessary time- and costintensive redevelopment measures" (Sailer-Fliege, 1999)*

As a post-Socialist country Bulgaria develops in not an easy environment. Since 1989 a lot of things have changed but also a lot have remained the same (Stanilov, 2007, Tsenkova, 2006). As a result of the disappointment which was caused by the fact that with the change of the regime people (Bulgarians) expected everything to change within a day or a year but it did not happen that way, they are now used to expect something to be done by someone. People stopped caring about their environment. The cities are ruled by the rich who can afford anything. Consequently, people are witnessing a downgrading of the environment. Additionally, the financial situation on a local level is below the level of considering the described housing areas as a problem that can be dealt with at this stage (Stanilov, 2007). A lot of resources are needed so that the cityscapes could be turned back into a nice living environment. With respect to the financial situation of the country, resources are being used mainly for the renovation of the central areas of the city. Moreover, with the restitution of land after the fall of the socialist regime, many people were disappointed. Restitution affected mainly the suburbs which were developed during the socialist times and turned into housing districts (those were arable lands prior to the development of residential and industrial zones on those lands).

## THE TRANSFORMATIONS

The transition years, since the fall of the socialist regime in 1989 up to the current day, brought many challenges for post-socialist Bulgaria. Among them a key challenge is the predominant tier of planning governance, which changed from the national to the current national and local level, depending on the plans and strategies that shall be prepared. This transition from national to regional and local level has consequences. The shift results in unclear responsibilities in the different governmental levels and institutions, which are responsible for the planning process. The main problem is caused by the new institutions which have to act with older laws and regulations. Public-private partnerships are created and private initiatives are taken but not to the point of considering the socialist housing estates as a resource to invest in. Lorens (2008) states that "there should be made some policy adjustments leading to a promotion of the regeneration projects. And the free market – driven by the consumers' desires – will do the rest of the job." Some authors have also commented that those neighborhoods will turn into the slums of 21st century (Szelenyi, 1996: 315, cited in Sailer – Fliege, 1998).





The pictures on both pages represent the downgrading of the environment due to the fact that the neighbourhoods were planned and constructed, however they are not maintained and additionally, partly not finished. Especially, the blocks and the surrounding space of the housing estates built at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s.







Both pictures represent the downgrading of the environment and the urgent need for actions to be taken by the Government, the inhabitants and the private sector.



## THE PROBLEM

The transition-to-democracy has brought many changes in the environment that the people that are experiencing the post-socialist city live in. Consequently, the inhabitants of the post-socialist cities have inherited many of the long-lasting implications of the previous times – one of them is the socialist housing estates.

Research on the transformation processes of the post-socialist countries and the developed socialist housing estates has been carried out extensively (Sailer-Fliege 1999, Troeva, 2002, Tsenkova 2004, Stanilov 2007). The problems have been investigated but to the knowledge of the author, no thorough research has been done for the housing estates in the specific setting of Sofia. The relevant contextual implications were so far neglected and as a consequence its future possibilities have not been strategically defined. Based on the difficulties that the country encountered during the transition period – political, economic and social – Bulgaria does not yet have a strategy on how to deal with those “inherited quarters”.

Defined by the regular path of developing the city territory, the Government needs to define a vision for their (re)development. Thus, start a process of urban regeneration. The researcher refers here to the Government in general, because it is in the responsibility of the National government (The Ministry of Regional Affairs) to work out the National Housing Reform and the responsibility of the local administration (the local Municipalities) to work with it further on a micro level. Moreover, as emphasized by many real estate companies (Mirella, ImotiBG, etc.), a lot of people who have lived in the socialist quarters move now to the newly constructed dwelling areas, which are a part of the process of urban sprawl. Paradoxically, those new quarters are characterized by lack of infrastructure, lack of public services – transport, kinder gardens, schools, etc., as opposed to the socialist neighbourhoods, which rely on a functioning infrastructure. Additionally, within the last 20 years, supermarkets, banks, shopping malls and employment areas have developed within the boundaries of the researched neighbourhoods. Consequently, socialist districts are developing as a city on their own providing everyday needs.

The personal experience of the author shows that there are many people who dislike living in those quarters. That is mainly because they are not maintained – from the municipality, or from the inhabitants. What the researcher grew up with is the idea that after the fall of the socialist regime, the government presented that it is the role of the inhabitants to maintain those areas. However, the documents for ownership state that the owners possess their flats only (and a certain part of the common spaces – elevators, stairs, etc.) and not even the land below the panel flats. That makes the located in-between the blocks open-spaces municipal and not private. That is also what the current master plan states (Master plan, 2009).

## THE SCOPE OF THE STUDY

After a thorough research on available institutional documents and strategies, programs and policies, which is described in depth in Chapter 3 Research methodology, the researcher has taken a sound scientific perspective and also a viewpoint. The result of this preliminary search positioned the author and encouraged her to take the perspective of the citizens and talk to them aiming at





structuring the wishes and expectations of the inhabitants for the socialist dwelling estates. That is an important step in the strategic planning, as people possess wisdom and knowledge. Besides, happy people make lively environments. As a planner following a collaborative approach (to be explained further in Chapter 2 Theoretical framework), the researcher believes that it is important prior to working with a specific problem to have an insight into the inhabitants’ views upon the problem. Consequently, the perspective of the local people is chosen.

1.3. Purpose of the study and main research objectives

The study will attempt to contribute to the knowledge base for enhancing the process of urban regeneration of the socialist housing estates. An analysis of the current situation will provide the reader with the characteristic features of these specific residential estates and the processes that accompany the development of the neighbourhoods today. The aim of the study is to look through the eyes of the citizens and define the meaning and values that the inhabitants attach to the neighbourhoods.

1.3.1. Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to investigate what the future of the socialist housing estates should be by considering the perspectives of the (ex) residents. The researcher has chosen to study the views of the (ex) residents as there is no vision defined for the future of the neighbourhoods yet. At this early stage, local people might provide planners with directions for future development as

Table 1.1 Stakeholder analysis

SECTOR	STAKEHOLDERS
Public sector	Ministries
	The Municipality
	Directorat Architecture and Planning
	The cadaster
Private sector	Investment companies
	Construction companies
	Real estate companies
	Architects
	Planners
	The media
NGOs	Differen NGO's related to the housing estates
Civil society	The inhabitants of the socialist housing estates (GROUP 1)
	People that have never lived in socialist housing estates
	People that have left the socialist housing estates and live somewhere else now (GROUP 2)



The researcher identifies the inhabitants as an assistant in the planning process. People need to be a part of the regeneration processes for their living environment.

well as some valuable insights from the people that live there on the local situation. Besides, those neighbourhoods will be regenerated for the people that inhabit them. Working with local opinions prior to starting the planning process is important, the researcher believes, as future conflicts could be avoided.

A stakeholder analysis meant to outline the involved stakeholders was part of the preliminary phase of investigation once the purpose of the study has been defined. Based on this analysis the actors affecting the current research have been sifted out. Those are further labeled as Group 1 and Group 2, having the following characteristics: Group 1 – people that live in socialist housing estates and Group 2 - people that have moved out to live in newly constructed flats (e.g., see Table 1.1). Information about the selected stakeholders and their experiences within and perceptions of their specific living environment will be gathered through semi-structured interviews. The intention of this research, and the expected outcome of these interviews, is providing a systematic overview of the reasons leading these people to move out of the socialist neighbourhoods or remain there.

### 1.3.2. Research objectives

As was previously explained the research aims at analyzing the current situation of the socialist housing estates with regards to their future (re)development, as perceived and experienced by the residents. Thus, the study aims at answering the following central research question:

**What are the current perspectives and expectations of the (ex) residents of the socialist housing estates?**

In order to answer the main research question stated and analyze the current situation, the researcher formulated a set of sub-research questions, which aim at contributing to the outcome of the research:

- 1. What kind of meanings and values do the (ex) residents attach to the socialist neighbourhoods?*
- 2. What are the expectations of the (ex) residents towards the future development of the socialist neighbourhoods?*
- 3. What are the wishes of the (ex) residents towards the future development of the socialist neighbourhoods?*

# THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

## APPROACHES AND MAIN CONCEPTS FRAMING THE STUDY

- 2.1. COLLABORATIVE PLANNING APPROACHES AS GUIDELINES
- 2.2. CONCEPTS FRAMING THE STUDY





*“Appropriate planning action cannot be prescribed from a position of value neutrality, for prescriptions are based on desire functions” (Davidoff, 1965, cited in Allmendinger, 2009).*

“Spatial planning comprises a set of concepts, procedures, and tools that must be tailored carefully to the situation at hand if any meaningful results are to be generated” (Bryson and Roering, 1996, cited in Stremke, 2010). Stremke (2010) quotes Healey (2009) who “highlights that strategic spatial planners should strive to understand the complexities of the study area, be sensitive to the location, embrace synthetic thinking, and be imaginative.” Consequently, as the researcher conducts the study through the prism of society, she chooses to follow these guidelines.

## **2.1. Collaborative planning approaches as guidelines**

According to Creswell (2008), holders of a participatory worldview often follow collaborative approaches in their studies (to be further explained in Chapter 3 Research methodology). Such is the case of this research. Using a collaborative approach is a famous method used in the contemporary planning practice and process. It is referred to as a post-modern method, as its main idea is to involve ‘civilians’ in the planning process (Allmendinger, 2009). That approach is important in the formation of future policy-oriented mechanisms as planning is a profession for the people. Thus, the researcher believes that residents should not be disregarded or left aside. They have the right to communicate with professionals and be involved in the process. Moreover, focusing on the current study, the inhabitants of the socialist housing estates possess local wisdom. That means that their involvement can provide the professional with ideas which are inspired from the desires of the inhabitants.

Another important characteristic is the discourse theory, as mainly, best results are achieved when there is a possibility for discussion. This would gather different ideas together. Moreover, they need to be integrated and co-existing. For the aim of the current study the researcher chooses to gather information through interviewing people. This method best fits the worldview of the author and her vision about the planning process. Moreover, as explained by Allmendinger (2009) the followed in the current study collaborative approach allows planners to work with a free and open discourse. Additionally, alternative ways of thinking about a problem stand in the core of the approach allowing the planners to be creative and work with new methods that they find appropriate and suitable (Allmendinger, 2009). Importantly, the author of the current study uses not collaborative planning and discourse analysis as means for granting power to a particular stakeholder group. Rather, the aim of the research is to provide insights into the studied territory and to structure the (ex) residents’ visions and wishes for the future development.

Information gathered by interviews will be analyzed by means of discourse analysis (DA), which will be thoroughly discussed in the next sub-section. Generally, DA is chosen as a method to analyze the data in the current study because its idea is to understand the reasons leading to a specific problem and get an insight into it. Similar is the aim of the current study.

It is important to mention that the current research does not aim at constructing a planning code or defining the planning process. It aims at structuring the inhabitants’ perceptions and visions (wishes) for the future of the socialist housing estates. The latter defines the researcher’s wish to



frame the study by a collaborative approach, rather than framing it strictly by the collaborative theory.

To frame the collaborative approach used in the current study, the researcher shall:

- Collect information herself by conducting interviews;
- Try to understand the phenomenon of the socialistic housing estates seen through the prism of the inhabitants;
- Present the results in a narrative way.

### 2.1.1. Discourse analysis

*Discourse is an inherent part of society, and partakes in all society's injustices, as well as in the struggles against them (van Dijk, 1997:23, cited in Hastings, 2010).*

The current study aims at structuring the (ex) residents' perceptions and visions of the socialist housing estates. In order to accomplish that, the author has done, as already explained, a preliminary stakeholder analysis, which sifted out the two main Groups, which are important for the current study- Group 1 of the people who actually live in socialist housing estates today and Group 2 of the people that have left them in order to move elsewhere. The approach chosen to provide an insight into those opinions is Discourse Analysis. The following lines will provide an overview of why DA is chosen as a method and as means to get an insight into the local marginal discourses; what are the characteristic features of DA; what are the critiques and to what extent it can be of assistance to the researcher.

#### 2.1.1.1. Overview

Discourse analysis emerged as a scientific method for analyzing information with the rise of the post-modern period. It came to existence together with the new period as the main idea behind the post-modernist movement is that there is no single truth and there could be multiple interpretations. „The term ‘discourse’ clearly means different things to different researchers, and to their audiences, varying from strictly linguistic approaches that focus on communication to approaches that embrace ideas and actions as integral to discourse” (Sharp and Richardson, 2001). With this new approach to the world DA attempts to deconstruct concepts, beliefs, values or assumptions by understanding the social surrounding around them (Dewey, 1933 and Palmquist, 2011). Additionally, the author of the study supports Richardson's (2002) idea that “[p]lanning takes place in a complex discursive environment”.

No single definition of Discourse Analysis can be given with regards of it as a research method. However, as a general tendency it refers to the “complexity of communication in achieving social change” (Sharp and Richardson, 2001). It “can be characterized as a way of approaching and thinking about a problem” (Palmquist, 2011). Consequently, “DA will, ... not provide absolute answers to a specific problem, but enable us to understand the conditions behind a specific “problem” and make us realize that the essence of that “problem”, and its resolution, lie in its assumptions; the very assumptions that enable the existence of that “problem” (Palmquist, 2011). Additionally, Burr



A decision about the future of the prefabricated socialist housing estates needs to be taken. A strategy for the development shall be developed by the Government.







(1995, cited in Sharp and Richardson, 2001) summarizes the elements he finds important in DA:

- A critical stance towards taken-for-granted knowledge;
- Historical and cultural specificity;
- Knowledge is sustained by social processes;
- Knowledge and action go together.


Influenced by those approaches and visions, further developed in the following lines, the researcher uses DA for the current study aiming at providing a vision for the socialist housing estates – a vision encompassing the current situation, together with the ups and downs of the neighborhoods as perceived and visualized by the two interviewed groups – Group 1 and 2, elaborated in Chapter 1 Introduction.

The different approaches to the use of DA are based on the understandings of the scholars that developed them and the depth in the analysis. According to Habermas for example the discourse is involved around winning arguments; others support the idea that it works best when a linguistic analysis of the text and talk is presented. Some approaches lead to the micro/macro level, while others address ideologies and knowledge production. Among all these, the researcher frames her own vision about DA which will be explained further in the following lines but is based on Keller's (2005) understanding that "discourse research always has to be considered as a process of data construction and interpretation" (Keller, 2005) and it "studies practices of producing knowledge and meanings in concrete contexts and institutions" (Talja, unknown).

The researcher follows the Foucaultian understanding that the significance of discourse is strategic; it is the means by which social groups exercise power; hence his view that the relationship between discourse and power is unidirectional. Fairclough, on the other hand, argues that the relationship between language and power is more complex; discourse both shapes and is shaped by wider social relations (Watt, 2010). For Foucault, "[l]inguistic expressions are not necessarily central ... rather, they are considered part of the many practices that make up a certain discourse" (Duineveld and Dix, 2011). Moreover, according to Jacobs (1999, cited in Sharp and Richardson, 2001) DA analysis does not aim at reaching the absolute truth but is "rather a means of 'providing coherent and consistent explanations for events'" (Jacobs, 1999, cited in Sharp and Richardson, 2001). To explain that Duineveld and Dix (2011) give a good example: "Foucault did not propose plans for renovating buildings; rather he provided detailed analyses of the state they were in." Additionally, according to Keller (2005) Foucault rejects "any kind of interpretation that aims to discover the one and true meaning". These explanations for DA link perfectly with the idea behind the current study and the discourse analysis chosen as a method for the aims of the current study. A main critique to DA is that "[t]here is a tendency for some researchers who use a discourse-based approach to over-generalise ..." (Jacobs, 2006). But important for the current study is that the approach aims at providing "higher awareness of the hidden motivations in others and ourselves and, therefore, enable us to solve concrete problems - not by providing unequivocal answers, but by making us ask ontological and epistemological questions" (Palmquist, 2011).

Of main importance to the current study is that DA cannot provide the researcher with a thorough solution to the specific problem being researched. Most importantly, for the aim of the current





Identical to one another or not, the technically renovated prefabricated panel-flats look nice. Especially when maintenance of the surrounding space take place.

study DA is used as means to provide an insight into the local discourses, to understand how do the local inhabitants visualize the researched neighbourhoods and get an insight into the stimuli to move out of them or remain living there. This approach follows Foucault's idea about discourses and knowledge, which is not static but dynamic to time and stakeholder perceptions. In addition, "[i]f practitioners engage with discourse thinking ... they are likely to gain some very useful perspectives and insights ..." (Richardson, 2002)

It is important to be considered that since DA is not an approach that leads to precise results but is used to validate findings, usually there is no specific theory that leads the research.

Please note, that the current study follows van Dijk's (1997) definition of "discourse" and "discourse analysis", defining "discourse" as "language use" and "discourse analysis" as "the study of talk and text in context".

#### ***2.1.1.2. Advantages and disadvantages of discourse analysis***

In the scientific world there are many scientist supporting discourse analysis (Dijk, 1997, etc.) as a scientific tool and many others criticizing it (Imrie, 1996, Jacobs, 2006, Hastings, 2010, etc.). The aim of this sub-section is to structure them into two main directions as those were already elaborated in the previous overview sub-section.

The proponents of the method define it as a widely applicable approach aiming at getting an insight into a specific context or situation by means of analyzing local discourses, as in the current study, or analyzing the different stakeholders' discourses. What is more, it provides the researcher with the possibility to be more creative and enables her to get an insight into the existence of the researched problem.

On the other hand, a main critique according to Jacobs (2006) is that there are multiple interpretations of what discourse actually is. Moreover, Imrie et.al (1996, cited in Hastings, 2010) see it as a distraction from doing real research.

#### ***2.1.1.3. Discourse Analysis and housing studies***

*Housing studies has largely embraced discourse analysis as an additional approach to carrying out applied research, contrary perhaps to some expectations that it would lead to a disengagement with the substantive issues in housing policy and practice (Jacobs, 1999, cited in Hastings, 2010).*

Hastings (2010) argues that discourse opens up the possibility within the housing studies to enhance the communication among the stakeholders. Moreover, she claims, due to the established communication there is a much better possibility to get an insight into the capacity of the possibilities for change if such is needed. That way, the current study shall understand how the socialist housing estates are experienced by the two groups to be interviewed. Both Hastings (2010) as well as Palmquist (2011) claim that discourse analysis of conversations is more useful when analyzing at the micro level – such as the current research frame. It aims at understanding both "how housing is experienced and how meaning is produced about housing studies" (Hastings, 2010).

Table 2.1 The evolution of urban regeneration

Period	1950s	1960s	1970s	1980s	1990s
Policy type	RECONSTRUCTION	REVITALISATION	RENEWAL	REDEVELOPMENT	REGENERATION
Major strategy and orientation	Reconstruction and extension of older areas of towns and cities often based on a "masterplan"; suburban growth.	Continuation of 1950s theme; suburban and peripheral growth; some early attempts as rehabilitation.	Focus on <i>insitu</i> renewal and neighbourhood schemes; still development at periphery.	Many major schemes of development and redevelopment; flagship projects; out of town projects.	Move towards a more comprehensive form of policy and practice; more emphasis on integrated treatements.
Key actors and stakeholders	National and local government; private sector development and contractors.	Move towards greated balance between public and private sectors.	Growing role of private sector and decentralisation in local government.	Emphasis on private sector and special agencies; growth of partnerships.	Partnership the dominant approach.
Spatial level of activity	Emphasis on local and site levels.	Regional level of activity emerged.	Regional and local levels initially; later more local emphasis.	In early 1980s focus on site; later emphasis on local level.	Reintroduction of strategic perspective; growth of regional activity.
Economic focus	Public sector investment with some private sector involvement	Continuing from 1950s with growing influence of private investment.	Resource constraints in public sector and growth of private investment.	Private sector dominant with selective public funds.	Greater balance between public, private and voluntary funding.
Social content	Improvement of housing and living standards.	Social and welfare improvement.	Community based action and greater empowerment.	Community self-help with very selective state support.	Emphasis on the role of community.
Physical emphasis	Replacement of inner areas and peripheral development.	Some continuation from 1950s with parallel rehabilitation of existing areas.	More extensive renewal of older urban areas.	Major schemes of replacement and new development; "flagship schemes".	More modest than 1980s'heritage and retention.
Environmental approach	Landscaping and some greening.	Selective improvements.	Environmental improvement with some innovations.	Growth of concern for wider approach to environment.	Introduction of broader idea of environmental sustainability.

Source: After Stohr (1989) and Lichfield (1992), cited in Roberts and Sykes, 2005.

2.2. Concepts framing the study

The author develops the current study influenced by largely studied concepts of urban regenera- tion and community involvement in urban projects. Those are concepts with scholarly developed principles that are guiding to the researcher and are used as a basis for the analysis of the study on Sofia’s prefabricated housing estates.

2.2.1. Urban regeneration

*Urban regeneration is the world-wide phenomenon, associated with reuse of the distressed urban areas and structures (Lorens, 2008).*

In this study urban regeneration is looked upon as an approach to dealing with existing territories which need maintenance. As shall be further described “urban regeneration” is chosen as an ap- proach as it involves the community, it is comprehensive and suggests a vision for development, which is balanced and strategic.

Urban regeneration is a process that follows urban renewal for reasons that besides the physical change that urban renewal provides a city needs a more in-depth analysis, cooperation of stake- holders and a long-term strategy for development (Roberts and Sykes, 2005: 11). Table 2.1 shows the evolution of the process of urban regeneration (cited in Roberts and Sykes, 2005: 11)

Additionally, according to Roberts and Sykes (2005) urban regeneration is a “comprehensive and integrated vision and action which leads to the resolution of urban problems and seeks to bring about a lasting improvement in the economic, physical, social and environmental condition of an area that has been subject to change”.

Moreover, Tsenkova (2002) states that “urban regeneration has been and is one of the most im- portant strategies to address inner city decline and deprivation. She (Tsenkova, 2002) also sup- ports the idea that urban regeneration goes beyond the boundaries of urban renewal and quotes Couch (1990) who summarizes this transition (from urban renewal and revitalization to urban regeneration):

*Urban regeneration moves beyond the aims, aspirations, and achievements of urban renewal, which is seen as a process of essentially physical change, urban development (or redevelopment), with its general mission and less well-defined purpose, and urban revitalization (or rehabilitation), which whilst suggests the need for action, fails to specify a precise method of approach (Coach, 1990: 2, cited in Tsenkova, 2002)*

In her article “Beyond transitions: Understanding urban change in post –socialist cities” Tsenkova defines what the changes in the cities development consequence in. The transitions to democracy (systemic political change); to markets (systemic economic change); and to decentralized system of governance have their consequences in the responses of the city in four domains – economic





A detailed analysis of the environment and its characteristics, problems and necessities shall take place prior to the plan making.



change, social change, changes in the urban governance and spatial change. That explains the need of a process of urban regeneration being an integrated approach aiming not at physical change but in a strategic vision. Roberts and Sykes (2005) conclude that "... the very existence if these substantial forces of change creates opportunities to adjust and improve the conditions of urban areas".

Below is a list, published in "Urban regeneration: a handbook" (Roberts and Sykes, 2005), which summarizes the distinguishing characteristics of urban regeneration, compared to other forms of urban interventions:

- Essentially a strategic activity;
- Focused around developing and achieving a clear vision of what action should take place;
- Concerned with the totality of the urban scene;
- Engaged in the search for both short-term solutions to immediate difficulties and long-term approaches that anticipate and avoid potential problems;
- Interventionist in approach, but not dirigiste by nature;
- Best achieved through a partnership approach;
- Concerned with setting priorities and allowing for their achievement;
- Intended to benefit a range of organisations, agencies and communities;
- Supported by various sources of skill and finance;
- Capable of being measured, evaluated and reviewed;
- Related to the specific needs and opportunities present in an individual region, city, town or neighbourhood;
- Linked to other appropriate policy areas and programmes.

#### ***2.2.1.1. Kinds of urban regeneration and principles to be followed***

Urban regeneration is an approach used to rehabilitate existing territories, following the principles, as suggested by Roberts and Sykes (2005). Those principles are used as guidelines. Different territories of the city area follow them in a separate manner. Characteristics of the types of regeneration practices may cover each one. In general, there are urban regeneration processes differing by the territory to which they are assigned: inner city areas; old towns; cultural areas; dwelling neighbourhoods; suburb territories, etc. All of them are different by means of values and heritage, stakeholder groups and their involvement; policies and norms in charge; involvement of formal and informal practices, etc. Common validity is applicable to the following rules (Robert and Sykes, 2005) which shall be followed when processes of urban regeneration are at hand:

- Be based upon a detailed analysis of the condition of an urban area;
- Be aimed at the simultaneous adaptation of the physical fabric, social structures, economic base and environmental condition of an urban area;
- Attempt to achieve this task of simultaneous adaptation through the generation and implementation of a comprehensive and integrated strategy that deals with the resolution of problems in a balanced, ordered and positive manner;
- Ensure that a strategy and the resulting programmes of implementation are developed in accord with the aims of sustainable development;





- Set clear operational objectives which should, wherever possible, be quantified;
- Make the best possible use of natural, economic, human and other resources, including land and existing features of the built environment;
- Seeks to ensure consensus through the fullest possible participation and co-operation of all stakeholders with a legitimate interest in the regeneration of an urban area; this may be achieved through partnership or other modes of working;
- Recognize the importance of measuring the progress of strategy towards the achievement of specific objectives and monitoring the changing nature and influence of the internal and external forces which act upon urban areas;
- Accept the likelihood that initial programmes of implementation will need to be revised in-line with such changes as occur;
- Recognize the reality that the various elements of a strategy are likely to make progress at different speeds; this may require the redirection of resources or the provision of additional resources in order to maintain a broad balance between the aims encompassed in a scheme of urban regeneration and to allow for the achievement of all of the strategic objectives.

### 2.2.2. Community involvement

*“Planning is a future-oriented activity for managing urban development and change. As such it is inseparable from the societal context and the circumstances in which it is practiced.” (Vujošević and Nedovic-Budic, 2006)*

The goal of this study is to identify the (ex) residents’ needs, visions, wishes and expectations towards to socialist housing estates.

The research follows a definition of community which describes it as a part of society, closely involved with a certain territory, having a feeling of attachment and covered by regeneration programs (after Jacobs and Dutton, 2000).

#### 2.2.2.1. Why community involvement?

*“... [The] ability of ... communities to manage their own affairs and to work collectively to foster and sustain positive change.” (Howe and Cleary, 2001, cited in Bullen, 2007)*

The author sees the planning process as a collaborative approach which permits the involvement of all possible stakeholders as planning is not only a profession for people but because the urbanized areas are dynamic structures which change and evolve over time. Thus, one of the partners in this process of studying the socialist neighbourhoods is the citizens.

Williams (2004), who refer to Reid (2000), states that communities often understand their problems better. Additionally, local knowledge and wisdom are an extraordinary good. Those are only two reasons, guiding the author in the research about the discourses among the (ex) inhabitants of the socialist housing estates. What is not part of the current study is to research on the collaborative planning approaches in the planning process itself. Innes and Booher (2004) summarize



five reasons of why public participation shall be considered:

- For decision makers to find out what the public's preferences are;
- Improve decisions by incorporating local knowledge;
- Public participation advances fairness and justice;
- Public participation for getting legitimacy for public decisions;
- Public participation is something that happens because the law requires it.

The author sees an importance in studying local visions and ideas because the post-Soviet city evolves over time and so do people. Consequently, "...socio-economic change and the emergence of new living ideals have given rise to novel demand patterns on the housing markets" (Brade et al., 2009). To confirm that, Brade et al. (2009) comment: "There is a consensus among scholars that the privatization of the housing stock, the gradual emergence of a housing market, and increasing socio-economic differences in society have augmented socio-spatial differentiation among the residential population" (Lee and Struyk, 1996; Struyk and Romanik, 1995). "Thus, before any regeneration strategy is undertaken, there needs to be full dialogue with community groups to ensure, as much as possible, that any "regeneration" initiatives aim to meet the diversity of local and community needs, rather than just those of the property sector" (Robinson and Shaw, 1991).

#### 2.2.2.2. Sofia's experiences

Brade et al. (2009) researched the post-socialist city and the preferences of households to move out or remain in the socialist flats. Interestingly, the interviews that he conducted showed that the number of citizens of Sofia (and St. Petersburg), who reject living in renovated large-scale housing estates is much lower (37%) than the respondents from St. Petersburg, Vilnius, Budapest and Leipzig. The same group of researchers (Brade et al., 2009) emphasized on the fact that an important factor influencing the desires of the inhabitants is their constraints to move out and fulfill their housing ideals.

Additionally, as will be discussed in Chapter 5, the local inhabitants are envisioned to be included in the regeneration processes which are envisioned in some documents of the Government only as parts of common discussions. That is also because this is required by the law (The Law for Land-use management). That further results in a discussion, which is not a part of the current study, of what are top-down and bottom-up approaches of citizens' inclusion. Namely, is the formal regulation of citizen inclusion making the planning process a bottom-up initiative?

Civilians need to be active in managing the space, take place in public hearings and discussions, be initiative. If the residents await somebody else to take care about their environment, the time frame gets prolonged. Also, problems are not to be passed by. Active participation might be initiated from both the side of the Government and the side of the people.

# RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

- 3.1. DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES
- 3.2. DATA ANALYSIS
- 3.3. THE INITIAL PHASES OF THE RESEARCH
- 3.4. ETHICAL ISSUES
- 3.5. DIFFICULTIES AND BARRIERS IN CONDUCTING THE RESEARCH





*“The aim of planning is about balancing different voices and actors, not choosing between them but finding the right combination of viewpoints and suggestions for how urban development should occur.” (Rydin, 2011)*

A definition of interview followed in this study:

*“... a form of conversation in which one person – the interviewer - restricts oneself to posing questions concerning behaviors, ideas, attitudes, and experiences with regard to social phenomena, to one or more others – the participants or interviewees – who mainly limit themselves to providing answers to these questions” (Maso, 1987, cited in Boeije, 2009)*

Prior to explaining the research methodology, the framework of the study and the data analysis method, the author would like to make an important note: The study does not cover 100% of the population, nor a representative number of people have been interviewed. However, it shows a multiplicity as the interviews were seized once a saturation point is reached.

The current study follows Creswell’s (2008) idea of the philosophical worldview of the researcher and its influence upon the researched issue. Even though in many studies worldviews are tried to be hidden so that subjectivity is avoided, the researcher believes that to a certain extent they play a role and bias the research. Holding a specific worldview will also explain the selected methods for collecting and analyzing data (after Roodbol-Mekkes, 2011).

The study is also framed by the personal and educational background of the author, which also influenced the choice of a research subject. The author of the current study holds a participatory worldview. Importantly, according to Creswell (2008), when a participatory worldview is at hand, the research shall contain an action agenda for reform that may change the lives of the participants. That is closely related to the current study aiming at investigating the discourses among the two specified groups and their views upon the socialist housing estates, which may play a role for further development of those estates. This study is also defined by the aim of the author to raise the participants’ consciousness. “In this sense, the participants may help design questions, collect data, analyze information, or reap the rewards of the research” (Creswell, 2008). Most importantly, the participatory research “provides opportunities for reform and change” (Creswell, 2008). Moreover, it includes others (as in other participants) actively and unshackles people “from the constraints of irrational and unjust structures” (Kemmis and Wilkinson, 1998, cited in Creswell, 2008)

The current research follows a collaborative approach for the aim of analyzing the perceptions of the inhabitants of the socialist housing estates in a post-socialist environment. DA can be used when analyzing conversations and written documents; or as van Dijk (1997, cited in Jacobs, 2006) defines it – DA is “the study of talk and text in context”. In the current research the author focuses at analyzing interviews (talk) with Group 1 and 2 of the inhabitants aiming at structuring their motivations, feeling of belonging and attachment to the environment and social sense to the neighbourhoods. Importantly, DA “makes visible the ‘ongoing conversations’, important debates, and interpretative conflicts existing in the society” (Talja, unknown). Additionally, it “focuses on the variability of interpretations, and brings out the starting points and background assumptions



which are rarely voiced, but which is implicitly part of a particular way of talking about things (Parker, 1992, cited in Talja, unknown). By using DA for the analysis of the interviews the author aims at gaining an insight and a better understanding of the context of the territory that needs to be strategically developed.

### 3.1. Data collection procedures

For the aim of the current study several different methods for data collection and data analysis are used. In the lines below each method will be described separately. Discussing the chosen methods will provide the reader with an overview of what has been done while conducting the research but also an outline of the expected results.

#### POLICY DOCUMENTS

The initial phases of the research comprise of reading and analyzing policy documents issued by the Bulgarian Government with the aim of getting an insight of what is the current status of the neighbourhoods within the Governmental programs and visions for development. Additionally, institutions and responsible departments are summarized as an outcome of this part of the study.


#### LITERATURE AND CASE STUDIES

The author of the current research has done a literature study of scientific and professional articles and books. Reliable sources have been sifted out by reading mainly scholarly reviewed articles and books.

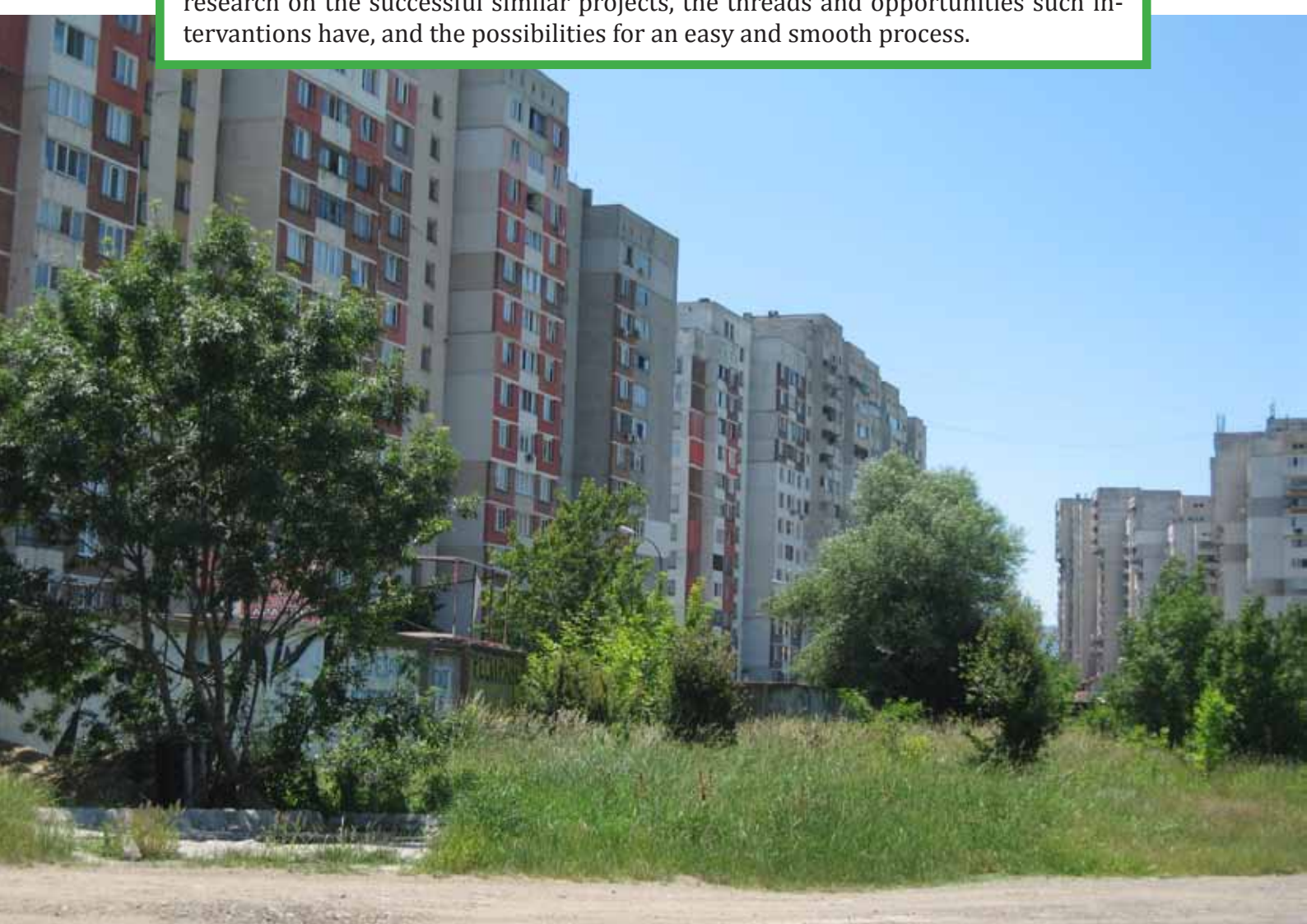
The scientific literature is used to provide the author with insights into the researched problem and what has already been achieved, what issues are discussed between the scholars and what are the definitions of the different concepts the author is interested in. Also, the literature study provides the author with the possibility to understand the researched problem better and to get an insight into its context. Additionally, case studies of other post-socialist cities working with the problem of the socialist neighborhoods are reviewed so that the researcher gets an insight into what has already been achieved, and how the different methods for renovation, regeneration and revitalization work in reality.

#### INTERVIEWS

Interviewing residents and ex-residents of the socialist housing estates allows the author to get an insight into their perceptions and expectations towards the researched environment. The form of semi-structured and open-ended interviews with grouped guiding questions is chosen as it allows the interviewer to use guiding questions and lead the conversation into different directions, depending on the interviewee. The chosen interview method is ideally suitable, according to the researcher, for the aim of the current study as it allows adding questions, which follow the answers of the respondents. The chosen structure of the interviews defines a deeper insight into people's visions and ideas as they will have freedom of sharing.



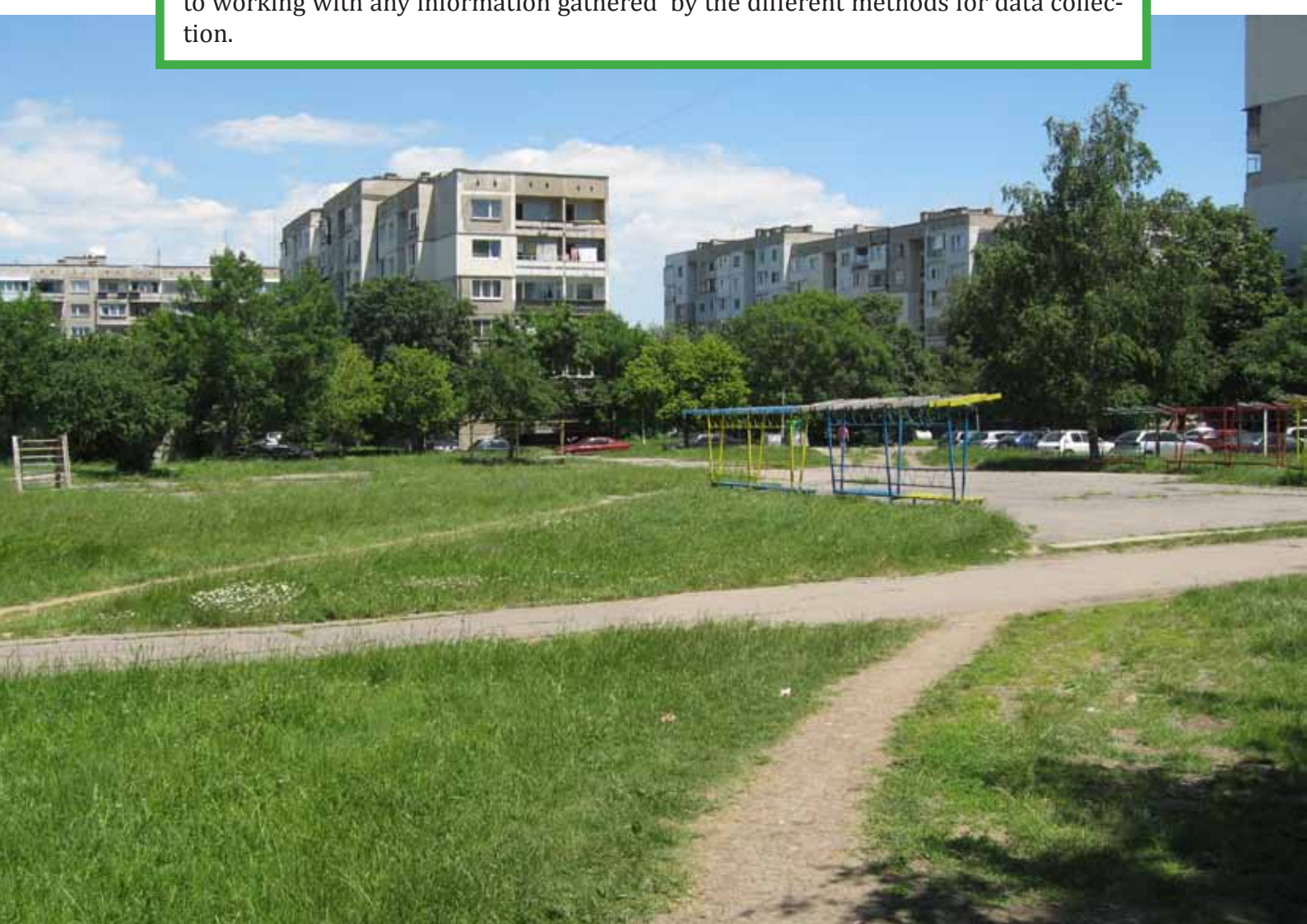
Not only a study of the environment to be planned needs to be done but also a research on the successful similar projects, the threads and opportunities such interventions have, and the possibilities for an easy and smooth process.







Analysis of the possible interventions and the important findings shall be done prior to working with any information gathered by the different methods for data collection.



Additionally, the interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Moreover, the researcher will take notes and a summary of each interview will also be provided to the reader. Also, the interviewer will take notes on the behavior of the interviewee in case applicable for further analysis, and notes on his/her reactions to specific questions, etc. Following the process of transcribing the recorded interviews, the author will send them for approval to the interviewees.

The author acknowledges a downside of conducting interviews as some people do not like to talk much or do not have an understandable way of expressing themselves. Others are disturbed by the presence of a researcher and hide or dismiss important information (Creswell, 2008).

NOTES

A diary is to be kept by the researcher of any encountered information, meeting held, interview taken, or any source of information that is applicable to the research. That kind of “data collection” is applicable as times goes on and important information might be dismissed on a later stage of the research.

SITE VISIT

A site visit allows the author to get an insight into the researched territory. Photos of the neighbourhoods can be taken and the advantages and disadvantages that the people pointed are visualized to the reader. The author’s opinion is that the site visit shall be done following the interviews with the inhabitants and the ex-inhabitants as otherwise the research could be biased by the personal opinion and emotional experiences of the author.

3.2. Data analysis

Having collected the data, the author will analyze it in several different ways (e.g., see Table 3.1), depending on the type of the data. The following table describes the manners in which the data will be explored.

The literature review will be analyzed on the basis of the theoretical framework and the common knowledge of the author. Specific methods will be applied to the stakeholder analysis and the interviews.

The interviews will be analyzed by means of narrative analysis (Boeije, 2010). The qualitative data gathered is not to be considered as a representative sample. The analysis of the data will also be shown as percentage only for the aim of better visualizing the information and does not aim at

Table 3.1 Analytical methods

DATA TYPE	ANALYSIS (by means of)
Literature review	Based on the theoretical framework and the knowledge of the researcher
Stakeholders	Preliminary stakeholder analysis
Interviews	Narrative analysis





giving absolute numbers.

### 3.3. The initial phases of the research

The initial phases of the research comprised of a literature review on the post-socialist cities and the processes of urban regeneration within them. That search provided the researcher with an overview on what has been achieved and what are the general tendencies for development within post-socialist cities. Some case studies on Eastern-European cities (Budapest, Prague, etc.) were helpful to read to see what happens in reality and what has been achieved. Following this research a set of general questions were formed:

- What is the importance of the process of urban regeneration for the development of post-socialist Sofia, within the context of the socialist housing estates?
- Shall urban regeneration be included in the strategy for development and thus in strategic planning in Bulgaria?
- Who shall be involved in the process?
- What kind of partnerships shall be established? What are the main elements of a successful PPT in such a process?
- Is there a need for such regeneration – what do these neighborhoods offer and to what extent shall we leave them as they are?
- What are the challenges and responses for such a process in Sofia?

At this stage of the research too many questions were with unclear answers. That phase lead to exploring the available documents playing a role in the planning in Bulgaria, and specifically for Sofia – plans of the Government, strategic documents, visions for development, master plans, etc.

#### ANALYSIS OF THE GOVERNMENTAL PERSPECTIVE TOWARDS THE POST-SOCIALIST HOUSING ESTATES

Reading the Governmental documents provided the researcher with valuable insights for the study. Interestingly, those strategies and plans envision the regeneration of the socialist dwelling estates. However, as it may be further noticed in the provided overviews of the main aims of the documents where the focus is on the researched neighbourhoods in Appendix 1, the regeneration process is considered important. However, even though most of the documents are issued about five years ago nothing has been accomplished until the recent day. That is because neither of those documents provides a structured vision for development. Pilot projects have not happened. The inhabitants or the private sector are envisioned to be included. However, they have not been encouraged to start restructuring the panel-flats or the in-between spaces. Public meetings and hearings or debates have not been organized on the topic. Below is a list of the reviewed documents, summarized and analyzed in Appendix I:

- National Housing Strategy (year unknown);
- National Program for Renovation of the Housing Estates in Bulgaria (2005);
- Strategy for the development of the municipality of Sofia (2001)
- Strategy for the development of the municipality of Sofia (2009);





- The Master Plan (2009):
  - Integrated plan for urban regeneration: to be accomplished
- The researcher also structured the institutions involved with spatial planning and specifically with the development of the urban territory. Those are as follows:
- Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works;
  - Directorate Architecture and Urban Planning;
  - National Center for Spatial Planning;
  - National statistics institute;
  - Local municipalities.

Interestingly, the insight of the available documents positioned the researcher around the idea of defining the role of the local administration in the process of urban regeneration with regards to the socialist housing estates. The intention was to find out what causes the fact that those documents provide the basis but are not followed-up by implementation. As it is further described in Appendix I the planning task on the implementation is assigned to the local administrations. Additionally, at this stage it was interesting for the researcher to investigate what is the role of the private sector and how a residential renovation can be interesting and attractive for the private sector. At this stage, a contact with the people responsible for the planning process from all the institutions listed above was tried to be made: e-mails were sent out and planners from municipalities with panel-flats called; establishing contact with several NGOs which are recognized as organizations aiming at enhancing a more livable environment in between the residential flat districts was attempted as well as with planners from the National Center for Spatial Planning. This phase of the research took place in early September, 2011. A contact back is still expected. The outcome of the despondence that was received lead the researcher to believe that there is a problem with the communication among the stakeholders.

Despite based on personal feeling only, the idea of a possible communication gap was a valuable step in the research process. Tired of the fact of getting no response from the side of civil servants whose duty is to provide information to citizens, the researcher envisioned this as a general problem: there is little or no communication possible. This position, too naïve as recalled, was that if the government would establish a good communication practice, the problem would be solved. The main outcome of this is the fact that at this stage the study took a too normative of a position – the researcher considered that the problem is that there is no communication.

At this point of the study the researcher needed to take a sound scientific perspective but also a viewpoint. The situation in which the researcher was positioned encouraged her to take the perspective of the citizens and talk to them aiming at seeing what are the wishes and expectations of the inhabitants for the socialist dwelling estates. Having chosen her perspective, the researcher deepened the study leading it forward.

### 3.4. Ethical issues

The current research focuses on the analysis of the current situation of the socialist housing estates and analyses the opinion of the residents (Group 1 and 2) about those housing estates. No personal topics are discussed that would be against the ethical code. However, privacy and ano-



nymity are ensured. Considering privacy the researcher make observations or collected data only with the knowledge of the ones that are involved or concerned. No secret actions are taken or data collected anonymously. Participants are informed about the research, as they need to be completely aware of what is being researched and for what purposes, so that they themselves are able to decide what information to share and in what way (Endacott, 2004, cited in Boeije, 2010). Moreover, people/interviewees are not referred to with their real names. They are referred to by initials wherever necessary. Only when desired by the participant himself/herself is he/she to be announced with his/her real name. Some of the interviewees for example wished to be noted with initials selected by them.

Generally, the author has not encountered any ethical misunderstandings during the research as the topic is not personal or secret.

### 3.5. Difficulties and barriers in conducting the research

The author encountered many difficulties and barriers in conducting this research. In relation to that the study was at times slow and multidirectional. The main obstacle in the first place was the despondence that the researcher faced when contacting institutions, research organizations, NGOs and private companies related to the topic of the prefabricated housing estates. This lead the author to normativity and conclusions, which faced at an early stage of the study caused insecurity and normativity. By means of a web-research and available documents and programs of the Government a successful way forward was found which lead the researcher to framing the current study.

Together with the recommendations the author gives for future studies and research on the topic of the pre-fabricated housing estates in Chapter 6 Discussion, the researcher finds the following topics for future research interesting as well:

- Research on the Government and its involvement in working for the future of the socialist housing estates;
- Research on the interest of private stakeholders and their involvement in the regeneration processes possible for the socialist housing estates – renovation of blocks and inner spaces, etc.;
- Research on PPPs;
- Further research with the local inhabitants, etc.

Still, not everything depends on the strategies of the Government. The inhabitants shall be respectfull and caring towards their environmnet as well. Their task is to make it livable and nice.



# THE LOCAL CONTEXT

## THE POST-SOCIALIST CITY OF SOFIA

- 4.1. HISTORY OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOFIA
- 4.2. THE POST-SOCIALIST CITY
- 4.3. THE PLANNING SYSTEM





*“Towns and cities change over time, and this process of change is both inevitable and can be viewed as beneficial” (Roberts and Sykes, 2005: 11).*

The current Chapter tracks the development of Sofia through the centuries with regards to the important processes in the formation of the contemporary city. The reader is introduced to the post-socialist city and its premises. Additionally, insight in the transformations related to the planning processes are systemized.

## 4.1. History of the development of Sofia

The territory of the city of Sofia developed rapidly through the centuries. It evolved and was regulated by many different rulers of diverse cultures. The next sections will provide an overview of the most important periods of the development of the city, which influenced its contemporary structure and vision. The overview of the Chapter is based on the knowledge of the author and the book: “History of the Bulgarian urban planning XIX – XX century, First Part – diachronic analysis”.

### 4.1.1. Until the 19<sup>th</sup> century

The territory of Sofia is known for its dwelling qualities back from the neolith times. A prove of that are the found remains in the contemporary city-center. The development in the bronze times was framed by the mineral waters (still existing in the center of Sofia) and the cross-road position of the city. In addition, Serdika lays on of the most ancient roads connecting the continental part of Europe, with Byzantion and the Near East.

The development of the ancient city of Sofia was influenced extremely in the 1<sup>st</sup> century with the Roma reign. The city was than structured from *cardo maximus* and *cardo decumanos*, which are still big boulevards in the contemporary city center of Sofia. The city was following the Hypodamus’s structure of perpendicularity. During those times the city developed as an important trade, economic and social center. Moreover, during the reign of emperor Trayan, Sofia was labeled with the name “*ulpia*” Serdika – a status of “*municipia*”, or in other words – a place of high importance in the Roman Empire. The city was even granted with permission to coin money. During the reign of Constantin the Great, the city was chosen for his residence for a period of 13 years which were highly influential for the development of the city – it became an international center of Christianity.

Later in the 4<sup>th</sup> century – already a Byzantian city with the name Triaditza – the city was a symbol of prosperity and construction. From that period remain the churches famous today – The Rotunda St. George, the church St. Sofia and other ones.

Sofia is a part of the Bulgarian country from 809 when Chan Krum conquered the city. At that time the city remained an important strategic and administrative center. An important period from its development is from the 14<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the city was conquered by the Ottoman Empire (1382 – 1878). That period of development signed the city with Turkish characteristics – cupolas and minarets, narrow and winding streets – typical for all Turkish cities. Not much literature is available from these times which would show the whereabouts of the city. No massive





Source: [www.stara-sofia.com](http://www.stara-sofia.com)



Source: [www.stara-sofia.com](http://www.stara-sofia.com)





Source: [www.stara-sofia.com](http://www.stara-sofia.com)

construction or deconstructions are known, related to the urban areas. What is already known are the developed “mahali” (neighbourhoods) around the center with the mineral springs. A sign of the Ottoman Empire are the narrow winding streets typical for the Middle Ages and the Ottoman empire – spontaneous structure, with free, unregulated development.

Writings about the city are available from the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century – also drawings and pictures, cadastral photos and street plans. The political conditions signed the architectural and urban structure of the city. According to some sources, during the reign of Midhat pasha (19<sup>th</sup> century) there were Western architects and planners invited to assist with the planning of the city. There is no plan found from that period, but the information is available from texts written during that time and from stories of contemporaries. What is known is that the city structure during that time was defined by five ray-like streets leading to important places during that time. All of the streets were starting from the above-described mineral springs in the center of the city. Those were leading to (and named after) Lom-Vidin, Nish-Beograd, Tzarigrad and Rousse. Importantly, in the period 1860-1870, when those five streets were constructed, everything on their way was ruined. Also, following the Western standards, the streets were planted with trees.

#### **4.1.2. 19<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup> century – the Independence of Bulgaria from the rule of the Ottoman Empire**

A milestone with regards to the development of the city of Sofia is the picturing of the city which was done right after the Liberation in 1878 (the end of the Ottoman rule in Bulgaria) with the aim of planning – a cadastral map and a street picturing of the city were done for that reason. For an unknown reason, originals of those are not available today. Those plans and picture, together with the drawings of Oberbauer, Zeelos and Mitov are a source of adaptation showing us what was the city like back in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The Liberation in 1878 meets Sofia with around 20 “mahali” and a population of 20 501 people (31.12.1880). In 1879 architect Kolar was chosen to be the city architect of Sofia. In 1892, the city structure was already with a clear radially circular form, adopted from the visions of arch. Kolar. Additionally, street ensembles and gardens are noticed in the city structure. The first regulation plan of Sofia is available from 1897 – “Law of public works for the urbanized territories of the Principality Bulgaria”. Importantly, in 1899 the population of Sofia has tripled accounting 61 000 inhabitants.

After its Liberation from the Ottoman rule Sofia develops in four main periods:

- From the Independence to the First World War;
- Between the First and Second World Wars;
- The Socialist Years – 1946 – 1989;
- After 1990.

##### **4.1.2.1. From the Independence to the First World War**

The years prior to World War I left in the structure of the city a lot of cultural buildings along





Source: [www.sofia-sofia.com](http://www.sofia-sofia.com)

with the National Theater, banks, Cinema theaters, churches and other important buildings. It is known as a period of city – blossoming which developed mainly the contemporary city center and made it green, structured and classic. The population was continuing to grow which lead to new quarters, embedding some problems with lack of regulation and infrastructure. Thus, in 1913, a plan-making was assigned to eng. Peshel (most probably from Vienna). With the beginning of World War I (WWI) in 1914 the plan was left aside and there are discussions as to whether the plan is finalized or not.

#### ***4.1.2.2. Between the First and Second World Wars:***

There was a tendency of plan-making continuing after WWI. There are signs from plans of 1919, 1924 – new quarters are filled with inhabitants and the city continues to grow - the population is already about 200 000. A lot of refugees also needed dwellings. That resulted in chaotic building and the well-organized structure of the city was ruined. However, the 1920s are also the years of growth and the appearance of some important even today buildings – The Sofia University, some hospitals, The University Library, Culture homes, The Jewish cultural place, A place of Bulgarian Engineers and Architects, some hotels and cinemas. 1934 is the year which marked the development of the city and the famous Moussmann plan (also known for his plans for Düsseldorf and Stuttgart). The Moussmann plan was considered a radical way to regulate the city which was following a dynamic structure of development. The plan has been discussed and disregarded by many. However, it is still recognized as a big step in the contemporary planning processes in Sofia (and Bulgaria). Having a population as many of the big European cities (300 000 people) Moussmann suggested a plan with wide boulevards and structured neighbourhoods. The aim of the plan was to make Sofia a modern, hygienic, public and socially developed city. The plan was also influenced from Howards's garden-city. Although having never fully accomplished the development as suggested by the Moussmann's plan the city embeds partially its suggestions. Prior to World War II the city had some gardens and had constructed most of the label buildings – The Parliament, some Museums, The Bulgarian National Bank building, The Hall of Invalids, and other noticeable buildings.

#### ***4.1.2.3. The Socialist Years – 1946 – 1989:***

The development of the city during the Socialist Years was influenced mainly by the industrial zones and the zoning principle, suggested also by the Athens hart. The period is labeled with a lot of buildings like sport halls, Telegraph agencies, the TV tower, the Students complex, some hotels and others – in a typical soviet style.

Having a socialist government, the period of the 1960s is labeled with the development of the first neighbourhoods – arch. Bogdanov creates a dwelling environment with optimal demographic characteristics. Indeed, these are 3 to 4 storey-buildings and the space between the buildings is planted with trees, making it park-like.

However, those neighbourhoods were not covering the demographic needs. Thus, in the 1970s the panel-flats started to be constructed. Those were also built with huge spaces in between the flats. However, they were never planted with trees. Consequently, huge empty spaces are seen from above, making the environment unpleasant and unwelcoming. The socialist neighbourhoods are





currently located in the periphery of the city, known as the peripheral city. The huge residential formations with around 120 000 inhabitants each are marked with undistinguished and simplistic treating of the different elements. The idea of the blocks was that translated a number of times a neighbourhood will be created – “bedroom complexes” (Sofia Municipality, 2010). The Municipality of Sofia also describes the blocks as elements with poor architecture qualities, friendly outlook for the inhabitants and human-scale (Sofia Municipality, 2010).

#### **4.1.2.4. After 1990**

After the fall of the Socialist regime, the tendency for the development of Sofia is following the European standards. Thus, some changes in the urban structures are seen. A main actor in the development of the city and the city-planning is the private sector, guiding the tendencies and the land development. Interestingly, the industrial zones, abandoned after the fall of the socialist regime are now used by some private companies, being turned into industrial complexes, accommodating both the production and administrations of the companies; also, some business parks are turned into such form old industrial zones. Key places from the city territory are used for the construction of Malls and Cinemas.

With regards to the peripheral city – the socialist neighbourhoods – it shall be noted that until 1989 the environment remained unmaintained, lacking basic needs – green spaces, trade and social services, inter-residential transport infrastructure, etc. In the years after 2000 the socialist neighbourhoods, located near and around the main entrances of the city developed by incorporating services and service-providers on key places into their structure – there are now supermarkets, banks, service-providers and other services developed on the line of some important cross-roads. Still, a main problem remain the status, maintenance and pre-structuring of the inner spaces in between the panel-flats.

## **4.2. The post-socialist city**

*“The political change took only a few weeks and the core institutional transformations of economic system were accomplished within a few years, however, the change of settlement structures will take many years or decades” (Sýkora, 1999: 79, cited in Stanilov, 2007: 4).*

The development of the post-Soviet city shall be tracked as the researcher believes it is important to structure the characteristics and the development of the city prior to exploring any potential for change (after Robinson, 2009).

Interestingly, the topic of the post-socialist cities and the socialist housing estates has been discussed in the recent decades by many scholars. Many of them are from the ex-socialist countries, but western European or American ones are the majority. However, Petrovic (2005) argues that “in spite of their analytical importance, post-socialist cities are still a neglected research subject.” Lorens (2008) discusses the process of urban regeneration as a contradiction to urban sprawl. He focuses on the characteristics of the post-socialist cities and the problems leading to urban expand. Similarly, Sailer-Fliege (1999) researches the characteristics of the post-socialist urban transformation in Central and East Europe. To a great extend the research is applicable to the



**Table 4.1 The trajectory of urban change in post-socialist cities.**

MAJOR DRIVERS OF URBAN CHANGE: Transition to democracy (Systemic Political Change), Markets (Systemic Economic Change), Decentralised System of Local Governance		
Domain	From 'socialist' city: Outcomes	To 'post-socialist' or to 'capitalist' city?: Outcomes
<b>National urban system</b>	Centrally planned population growth investment, economic development and job creation;  Stable increases in the level of urbanization, sustained concentration in large metropolitan areas - economies of scale in production.	Market-based restructuring of the urban system, integration in the global economic hierarchy of cities, service-led growth, core vs. periphery; Selective growth of cities, population decline in most urban centers.
<b>Urban economic change</b>	Macroeconomic control through central planning regulation, collective bargaining and control of markets through income and price policies.	Deregulation of markets, <i>laissez faire</i> approach to economic development, growing competition, decline of manufacturing, unemployment, opening up of sheltered markets.
<b>Urban social change</b>	Stronger welfare state, universal subsidies, moderate (controlled) urban growth, relatively homogeneous social structure, egalitarian income distribution.	Retrenchment of the welfare state, socially polarized societies, poverty marginalisation, declining and aging population, high economic dependency.
<b>Change in urban governance and provision of urban services</b>	Dominated by central government decision making appointment officials; little autonomy;  Relative informality, provided by the state, largely funded by central governments, universal access to education and health care, investment in water and sewer networks, strong emphasis on public transport.	Democratically elected, decentralised, fragmented structure, fiscally dependent on central transfers, entrepreneurial approaches to planning and city marketing.  Privatisation and marketisation in the provision of urban services, unfunded social mandates, growing inequalities in provision of water, sewer and public transport.
<b>Urban spatial change: production</b>	Dominated by manufacturing and responsive needs of large-scale state producers located in urban areas according to planning norms.	Growing percentage of obsolete, manufacturing facilities, new spaces for private small and medium production, suburbanization of offices and retail.
<b>Urban spatial change: consumption</b>	Relatively uniform social housing provision allocated by state institutions, universally affordable, built according to planning norms, mix of tenure types.	Increasingly polarized social areas and housing markets, gentrified housing enclaves vs. problematic housing estates, predominantly owner-occupied.

Source: Tsenkova (2004: 47)

Eastern European context as well. Stanilov (2007) focuses on the challenges of the post-socialist transformations, referring to the changed spatial context and requirements.

Interestingly, to the attention of the author, scientific research on the studied topic was elevated by Turkey, within the context of Istanbul. Cetindag, Morad and Parsa (2010) provide a comparative analysis of Istanbul and Budapest, while Gürlér and Gülersoy discuss and analyze the paradigm shift and the urban regeneration process in the history of planning. Similar research has been done for the Czech Republic (Temelov and Puldova, 2010).

Public participation and the involvement of the private sector have been discussed and studied. Williams (2004) discusses different models of participation processes. Jacobs and Dutton (2000) discuss the influence that local people have on the process of communication, economic viability and success. And also, “partnerships are the organizational vehicles of community regeneration and empowerment (Jacobs and Dutton, 2000). Roy (2007) exercises a connection between the civil society and good governance.

#### 4.2.1. The post-socialist city and its characteristics

The countries members of the ex-Socialist block have already survived two decades after its collapse. During those transition-to-capitalism years the main attention in the transformations taking place in the post-socialist cities is focused on the political and economic changes. Having the focus of the study being on the socialist structures and the development process within the boundaries of the city, the current Chapter will provide an overview of the post-socialist city with a focus on the spatial transformations.

Spatial transformations have been less discussed and argued upon as transformations in the city structures take relatively longer periods of time. Stanilov (2007) argues that the main parameters of urban transformations in the post-socialist city are framed by neo-liberal environment of reforms. That reform, he states, is also under the strong influence of major international institutions. Additionally, policies from different levels – local, national and international, along with the path-dependency are impacting spatial transformations. Privatization has become “the leitmotiv of post-socialist urban change” (Bodnar, 2001, cited in Stanilov, 2007).

The socialist city development, which follows the zoning principle suggested by the Athens Charter, does not answer the market needs of the modern cities. Also,

*“[f]rom high-density, mono-centric settlements, dominated by high-rise public housing and communal modes of transportation, the CEE cities are being transformed into sprawling, multi-nodal metropolitan areas reaching extreme levels of privatization of housing, services, transportation, and public space.” (Stanilov, 2007)*

The main change within the post-socialist city is the introduction of the private sector and the new challenges, traditions and possibilities that it arises. Along with the possibility to travel outside the boundaries of the Soviet Block the people are able to see the city transformation inside their





The socialist city followed a monocentric development. Different zones of the city were used at different times of the day. The post-socialist city followed another ray - the one of the polycentric city with mixed-used territories.

cities as well. Notably, not only the housing but also other sectors and structures are already seen through a different prism. The shift from industry to technology and communication has had its impacts on the spatial structures. Large industrial zones are thus abandoned (mainly from heavy industries, developed during the socialist era) and turned into “ghost cities”. Some private investors are now interested in those areas, however a huge part of them are empty and deprived. Consequently, “[w]ith the new market orientation urban development has ridden a wave of investment in those land uses offering the highest returns, and selective redevelopment by the private sector” (Tsenkova, 2006).

What keeps the motivation in the transition years, which are still at hand, but also arises the idea that the countries of the Eastern part of Europe have already arrived at a level that can be considered near the contemporary development, is the EU membership. As part of the EU, the transition is assisted by means of EU help and assistance. But also, the level is higher, the expectations are higher and the demands are higher. There is a competition among the new members of better performance so that the standards are slowly moving up.

#### 4.2.2. The housing estates in the transition years

*“... post-socialist cities need to enhance the capacity of institutions and other actors, including strong civil societies, which are considered a potential complement to the expansion of the global economy and weakening the role of the national state and/or of the creation of the supranational institutions” (Castells 1994: 32; McNeill 1999, cited in Petrovic, 2005)*

Through the socialist years the provision of housing was perceived as simply a social good, while for the Western societies housing is a commodity. Socialist housing estates dominated the dwellings provided during socialism. It comprises of 20-40% of the housing stock in Central and Eastern Europe. In comparison, in Western Europe those are only 3-7% (Enyedi, 1998; Tosics, 2004; Dimitrovska-Andrews, 2005, Temelová et. al., 2010). According to Brade et.al (2009) approximately 60% of the population of Sofia lives in housing estates. On the other hand, along with the goods that the change brought there should also be added that people now –within the democracy – shall be fighting for the roof above their heads – a dwelling place is not provided by the country. Thus, the people buy whatever they can afford. However, it should be noted, that contrary to other socialist countries, “an owners’ market already existed in Bulgaria during the era of centralized planning” (Brade et al., 2009). And since such a large number of people live in housing estates nowadays, it is important to investigate their development trajectories and transformations (Temelová et. al, 2010):

*During the previous socialist systems, housing policy had been aimed at guaranteeing all citizens equal opportunity of access to housing. Although this goal was never entirely achieved in any of the former socialist countries, a varying but continuous supply of housing was nonetheless maintained through the provision of low-cost prefabricated high-density housing estates. A substantial amount of the funds required for the construction of these large housing estates was secured through various forms of public financing and state subsidies. (Dimitrovska-Andrews, 2002)*





The physical downgrading of the environment is seen massively in the socialist housing estates. This is the reason why many scholars (cited in Temelova et.al.) argue that they expect massive outflows, demographic ageing of the estates' population and continues physical downgrading of th already poor residential environment.



Scholars have discussed their concerns about the future of the housing estates. Many of them have stated different opinions about them. Among those are: demolition, humanization and regeneration (Maier, 1997; Egedy, 2000; Tosics, 2005; Constantin, 2007, all cited in Temelová et. all, 2010). Temelová et.al. (2010) summarize those to give an overview of their future and what unshackles it:

- Expected massive outflow of better-off and more educated people causing social degradation within the neighbourhoods and ghettoization;
- Demographic ageing of the estates' population as young families tend to prefer newly built residential building than inhabiting the discussed quarters;
- Physical downgrading (ageing) – poor technical and architectural qualities;
- Poor residential environment.

#### 4.2.3. The challenges of the transition years

The new era of development that follows the fall of the socialist regime brought along the challenge of the new legislation, which assigned greater power to local governments to manage and control the urban areas (Nedovic-Budic, 2001). Planning on a very local level was also placed in the hands of the local authorities. Assigned with so many new tasks, governments were unable to handle them all correctly. Thus, some areas were deprived.

Three general aspects that are influenced by the political change and having a consequence in the development of the post socialist city are present (Tsenkova, 2002): 1) economic change; 2) social change; 3) changes in urban governance and 4) spatial change. Some 20 years after the fall of the socialist regime the path-dependency is still influencing the development of the countries, which are former members of the Soviet Block. The socialist times influenced the city's territory which now has to be regenerated not only due to the system change but because of the time frame. Territories are dynamic structures, they are not steady. Table 4.1 summarizes the main trends in the transition processes from the socialist to the capitalist city.

#### 4.3. The planning system – the change and the transitions years from the socialist planning system to the contemporary planning system

Bulgaria developed as part of the Soviet Block for about 45 years (1946 – 1990). During those years the planning of the cities was strictly following a mono-functional zoning principle. "Soviet era city planning was intentionally modernist. Mixed use space was not encouraged" (Dimitrovska - Andrews, 2002). The outcome was that different zones were vibrant at different parts of the day-night time. According to The Strategy for the development of Sofia (unknown), the result of the 50 years state planning and almost no local management, representing local needs, Sofia inherited a spatial structure different from the cities with market economy. For example, Sofia has four times more land-use structures provided for industrial aims than the European cities in general (Strategy for the development of Sofia, unknown).

Stanilov (2007) argues that with the fall of the socialist regime, the planning profession was seri-





ously undermined. Additionally, according to both Tsenkova (1997) and Stanilov (2007) all the laws and regulations became unusable in a period of just a few months which caused uncertainty and unpredictability of the future. With the democratic regime at hand new players emerged – the market started to regulate the planning. According to Sailer-Fliege (1999) the “changes are primarily the result of the complex interaction of inherited urban structures, market economy ideologies, new state institutional parameters and the general processes of transformation in the economy, politics and society”. Many chaotic buildings emerged at different places without ordering and structure. With regards to the planning laws and regulations, Stanilov (2007) explains:

*“One of the first acts of the reform-minded post-socialist governments was to adopt new laws that fundamentally redefined the structure of property rights in favor of private interests. This limited significantly the capacity of the government to act in defense of the public good, curtailing drastically the powers that urban planners once possessed.”*

With the change of the political system the planning process, which was done by the upper Governmental levels and only afterwards discussed with planners, was assigned mainly to the local authorities. Shortly, it turned out that “[l]ocal governments in urban areas are now seen as crisis managers charged with myriad responsibilities, but without adequate resources to manage them” (Tsenkova 2007). Moreover, according to Tsenkova (1997) a main weakness and a turbulence event was the fact that the restructuring process was accompanied by extremely slow economic growth and “tax evasion in the informal economy”. Additionally, local politicians took advantage of their “newly acquired power” and suspended “the practice of city development based on a pre-determined vision of officially adopted plans” (Stanilov, 2007). Furthermore, urban development was then characterized with serving private desires and managing investment decisions. Laws were changed to serve private initiatives (Stanilov, 2007). With this new situation at hand,

*“[t]he large-scale government-run projects shaping the growth of the socialist city were replaced by innumerable, incremental, small-scale space appropriations, which were difficult to control, particularly in a climate dominated by the social imperative for deregulation and market liberalization.” (Stanilov, 2007)*

The new regime empowered many new players, which needed to be considered by the planners and they needed to learn how to act together with them. Importantly, an international investment market emerged in Bulgaria. Another player, imposing its requirements is the EU, which assigned horizontal and vertical implementation of the levels of planning, along with the demand for knowledge, resources and strategic planning.

The change in the political system and the re-organization of the planning process is only one of the sides of the changes which the planners needed to meet. The other one is the re-organization of the public space, which was changing functions: previously administrative spaces were vibrant with commercial activities. Also, a dispersal of functions started to happen and the previously death-during-the-day zones turned into active ones.

Planners were unprepared to meet all of these changes at once. New plans and strategies were





needed, based on the new demands and requirements of the market. Under these circumstances, the planners needed to learn how to act “on the fly” (Stanilov, 2007). According to Stanilov (2007) most of the CEE capitals adopted new master plans in the late 1990s. In the case of Sofia, a new Master plan was adopted in 2007. It was further revised several times and a final one was adopted in 2011 (Directorate Architecture and Spatial Planning, 2012). All the revisions are caused by the yet unsecure planning procedure, by the desires of the private market and the dynamic post-socialist environment. Prior to the adoption of the new Master Plan a Law for spatial planning was adopted in 2001, which was also revised several times.

Sadly, all these changes that the planning practice in Bulgaria faced, lead to corruption and short-cuts, used to serve the rich ones. It may be concluded, that the active stakeholders in the planning process are namely the rich people. They are the ones who dictate the rules. Since planners did not have the power to avoid this and the capacity to use the positive of the socialist environment, we are now witnessing a downgrading of the environment. As previously argued, in the recent years governmental practices have been established to create a lively central area. However, due to lack of resources and local capacity, one of the most downgrading parts of the city is namely the socialist neighbourhoods. Stanilov (2007) argues that neither of the ex-socialist countries has taken a different transition path, avoiding the “Wild East” phase, which is a clear evidence for the natural path of the post-socialist transformation processes. Sailer-Fliege (1998) systemizes the problem-areas and argues that the most decaying ones are the housing stock, the deprived industrial areas and the “extent and deficiencies of high-rise housing estates”.



# THE CURRENT PERSPECTIVES

AND EXPECTATIONS OF THE (EX) RESIDENTS OF THE SOCIALIST  
HOUSING ESTATES

- 5.1. OVERVIEW OF THE INTERVIEWS' FINDINGS
- 5.2. GROUP 1 - THE INHABITANTS OF THE SOCIALIST  
HOUSING ESTATES
- 5.3. GROUP 2 - THE INHABITANTS OF THE SOCIALIST  
HOUSING ESTATES





For the aims of the current study, namely structuring the residents' perspectives and expectations for the socialist housing estates, open-ended interviews were conducted in the period 15.02.2012 – 24.05.2012. In order to get an insight into the features of the socialist housing estates, the author has preliminary sifted out the two Groups of interest to her. This step was accomplished because the researcher intends to find out what are the differences in the perceptions of the two representative groups and how do they differ. An interpretative approach for analyzing the data will be followed. A comparative study for the two identified stakeholder groups will be done.

The generation of data through interviews as described above is followed by an interpretive analysis, aiming at structuring the (ex) residents' perspectives and expectations for the socialist housing estates. The aim of this analysis is to structure the received information in an unbiased way. The main task of the researcher is to identify the key elements and to understand the complex twisted parts. The researcher shall analyze the data unbiased and without emotion. Additionally, qualitative data will also be presented in percentages, as explained in Chapter 3 Methodology. However, the aim is not to provide absolute numbers but a better visual representation of the information presented and analyzed. Moreover, the data is analyzed once a saturation point was reached.

Interviews were conducted with 18 people in total – 9 from Group 1, and 9 from Group 2. The interviewees were randomly selected. The gender of the interviewees is not taken into account. All the interviewees are Bulgarians, representatives of the following age-groups:

- 20 – 30 (9 people)
- 30 – 40 (4 people)
- 40 – 50 (4 people)
- 50 – 60 (1 person)

The interviews were taken in Bulgarian language. Generally, they were conducted face-to-face and one-to-one. Some of the interviewees preferred Skype meeting (2 people), instead of a face-to-face interview. Fifteen of the interviewees are recorded and transcribed. Three of the people refused to be recorded. During those three interviews the author took notes and summarized the information afterwards.

The interview questions were chosen so that to answer the three sub-research questions, developed in Chapter 2. Those, as already explained, might change or evolve over the interviews depending on the respondents and their answers and attitudes. The guiding interview questions may be seen in Appendix 2. Those, as already explained, might change or evolve over the interviews depending on the respondents and their answers and attitudes. The following three sets of question groups are followed:

1. Current perspectives of the (ex) inhabitants of the socialist housing estates on their living environment;
2. Expectations of the (ex) inhabitants with regards to the future of the socialist housing estates, expectation towards the Government (realistic perspective);
3. Wishes and desires of the (ex) inhabitants for the future of the socialist housing estates.



Table 5.1 Overview of gathered data - current perspectives of the (ex) residents

	GENERAL IMPRESSION		INFRASTRUCTURE		NEIGHBOURS		SPORTS COMPLEXES		PARKS AND RECREATION SPACES		OPEN SPACES		COZINESS		CHILDREN PLAYGROUNDS		LIGHTS ON THE STREETS		CRIMINALITY		MOVING OUT IF POSSIBLE	
	satisfied	not satisfied	satisfied	not satisfied	satisfied	not satisfied	satisfied	not satisfied	satisfied	not satisfied	satisfied	not satisfied	satisfied	not satisfied	satisfied	not satisfied	yes	no	yes	no		
GROUP 1		x		x		x		x		x		x		x		x		x		x		
		x		x		x		x		x		x		x		x		x		x		
	x		x		x		x		x		x		x		x		x		x		x	
			x				x				x				x				x			x
			x				x				x				x				x			
									x													
	x		x				x				x											x
	x		x				x				x											
		x		x					x													
NUMBER OF PEOPLE		3 / 9	6 / 9	6 / 9	3 / 9	5 / 9	4 / 9	6 / 9	2 / 9	7 / 9	1 / 9	8 / 9	5 / 9	4 / 9	5 / 9	5 / 9	4 / 9	5 / 9	6 / 9	3 / 9		
PERCENTAGE		33%	67%	67%	33%	56%	44%	33%	67%	22%	78%	11%	89%	56%	44%	56%	44%	56%	67%	33%		
GROUP 2		x		x														x				
						x												x				
		x		x															x			
NUMBER OF PEOPLE		3 / 9	6 / 9	8 / 9	1 / 9	4 / 9	5 / 9	2 / 9	7 / 9	1 / 9	8 / 9	0 / 9	9 / 9	2 / 9	7 / 9	0 / 9	9 / 9	5 / 9	4 / 9			
PERCENTAGE		33%	67%	89%	11%	44%	56%	22%	78%	11%	89%	0%	100%	22%	78%	0%	100%	56%	44%			

5.1. Overview of the interviews’ findings

An analysis of the interview process shows that most of interviewees were calm and eager to share their experiences. Only few of the respondents were hurrying or answering short and straight to the point, clearly showing they did not want to spend a lot of time on the interview. However, the information that I received from them, as well as from the rest of the respondents is valuable and important for the analysis.

A saturation point was reached in the two groups. The interviewees can be grouped in three main groups (e.g., see Table 5.1 and 5.2):

- 1. People that dislike the socialist neighbourhoods because they are not maintained and would like to move out or have already moved out.
- 2. People that feel comfortable and have not thought of moving out.
- 3. People that dislike the socialist neighbourhoods but would not move out as they believe that most of the other neighbourhoods would offer them worse conditions.

All of the interviewees except for three people (2 from Group 1 and 1 from Group 2) believe that living in a family house is the only way of living there should be. The rest three respondents feel better surrounded by many people living in blocks.

The interviewees (18/18) believe a renovation of the socialist neighbourhoods will provide a good living environment, as the initial plan, in their opinion is a nice one – blocks, with many open-spaces and spaces for recreation.

Each of the respondents from Group 2 moved out as they disliked the socialist neighbourhoods.

5.2. Group 1 – the inhabitants of the socialist housing estates

In the previous sections it has been explained that Group 1 consists of 9 people that are current residents of the socialist housing estates. In this group, there are representatives of all four age groups.

5.2.1. Current perspectives of the inhabitants of the socialist housing estates on their living environment

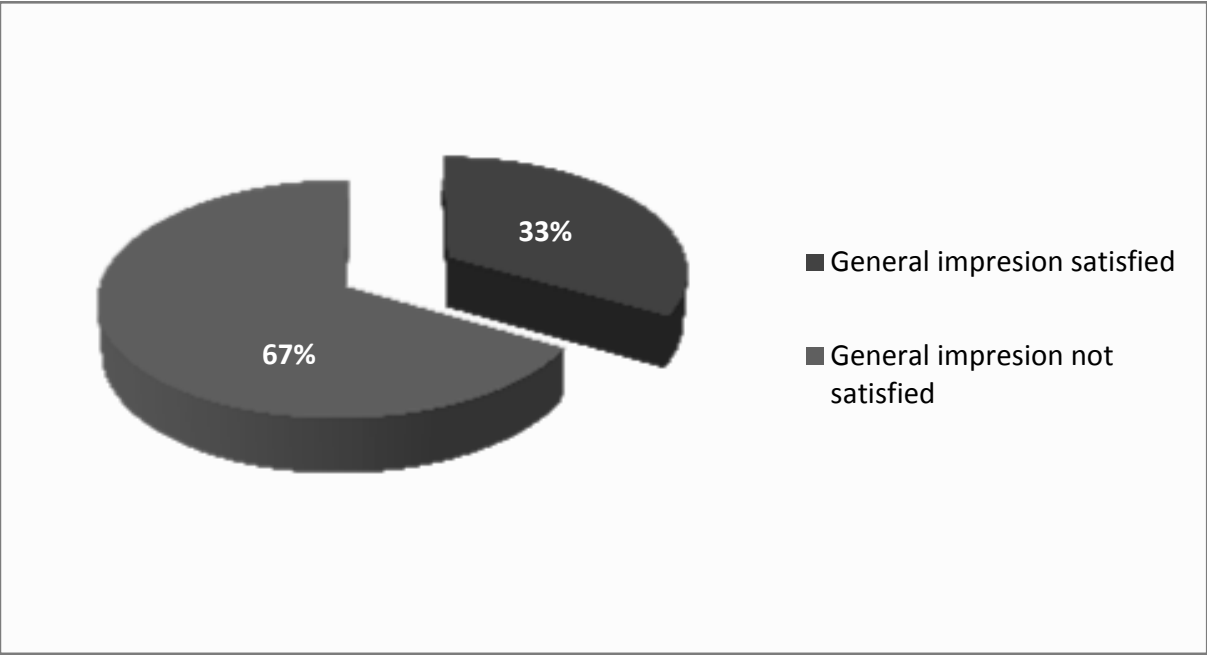
Generally, the residents of the socialist housing estates are not satisfied with the environment within the boundaries of their neighbourhood (e.g., see Figure 5.1 and Figure 5.2). 67% of them admit that they have a negative impression: “Generally speaking, the socialist housing estates are totally inhospitable” shared one of the interviewee as a starting point “... besides all the necessities that you have for granted – and I mean electricity, heating, water, etc. – all the rest is negatives.” Some of the interviewees describe the researched neighbourhoods as “a forest of concrete”, “with no identity or specificity”. To others, those are “sleeping dormitories” – “This is the only thing they satisfy successfully”, my respondent said. Only 33% of the people from Group 1 support the opinion that the socialist neighbourhoods are not a bad place for living, if generally speaking. Those 3



Table 5.2 Overview of gathered data - expectations of the (ex) residents towards the future

		GOVERNMENT		RENOVATION		DETONATION		PRIVATE INVESTMENT	
		concerned	not concerned	possible	not possible	yes	no	possible	not possible
GROUP 1			x		x		x	x	
			x	x			x		x
			x	x			x		
		x		x			x	x	
		x		x		x		x	
			x	x			x		x
			x	x			x		
		x		x			x		x
		x		x			x	x	
NUMBER OF PEOPLE		4//9	5//9	8//9	1//9	1//9	8//9	5//9	4//9
PERCENTAGE		44%	56%	89%	11%	11%	89%	56%	44%
GROUP 2			x	x			x	x	
		x		x			x		x
			x	x			x		x
			x	x			x		x
				x			x	x	
				x			x		
				x			x		
				x			x		x
				x			x	x	
NUMBER OF PEOPLE		4//9	5//9	9//9	0//9	0//9	9//9	5//9	4//9
PERCENTAGE		44%	56%	100%	0%	0%	100%	56%	44%

Figure 5.1 General impression of the residents of the socialist housing estates towards their living environment.



out of 9 people share the opinion that these neighbourhoods are not a low-quality living place and they feel comfortable living in such a neighbourhood.

Most of the people dislike the socialist neighbourhoods because of the low-quality environment they offer. 78% of the respondents find the open-spaces in between the blocks unattractive, dirty, not managed at all, and filled with broken playgrounds, untrimmed grass and garbage. However, many of the respondents share the opinion that if well-managed and taken care of those neighbourhoods will be a nice living environment as there are a lot of open-spaces and “you can breathe”. Interestingly, almost half of the people in Group 1 referred to the negative characteristics of the panel-flat neighbourhoods prior to being asked. Many of the interviewees share on their own that what they dislike is the fact that there are too many noises in the blocks – “you hear everything – the elevator, the conversation of the neighbours, skype calling, everything”. Additionally, about 50% of the people find it annoying that there are too many people living together, which causes many problems – communication, decisions to be taken, agreements. Also, as 2 of my respondents pointed out that if even one person does not want to technically renovate their apartment – an initiative cannot be taken:

“Problems are the common spaces in the block itself and the payments we have in common. I can’t change the water pipes and the whole installation because the people living in the apartments below me can’t afford it, or do not want to do it. So, if I want to make my apartment better I have to pay for all of them because I can’t change only my system. Everyone below me has to do it as well. It is a similar situation with the roof. I am on the last floor and I have problems with flooding, but my neighbours from the first floor do not have this problem and they are thus against fixing the roof, or in other words against spending common money for that purpose.”

Another interviewee shared that people are not meant to live in blocks – family houses are needed, according to him. 30% of the interviewees would move out only to live in a house with a yard. One of the interviewee makes a comparison to describe how he feels in the socialist neighbourhood: “This living can only be compared to living in a hotel, with the exception that there is nobody that you can order room service to”.

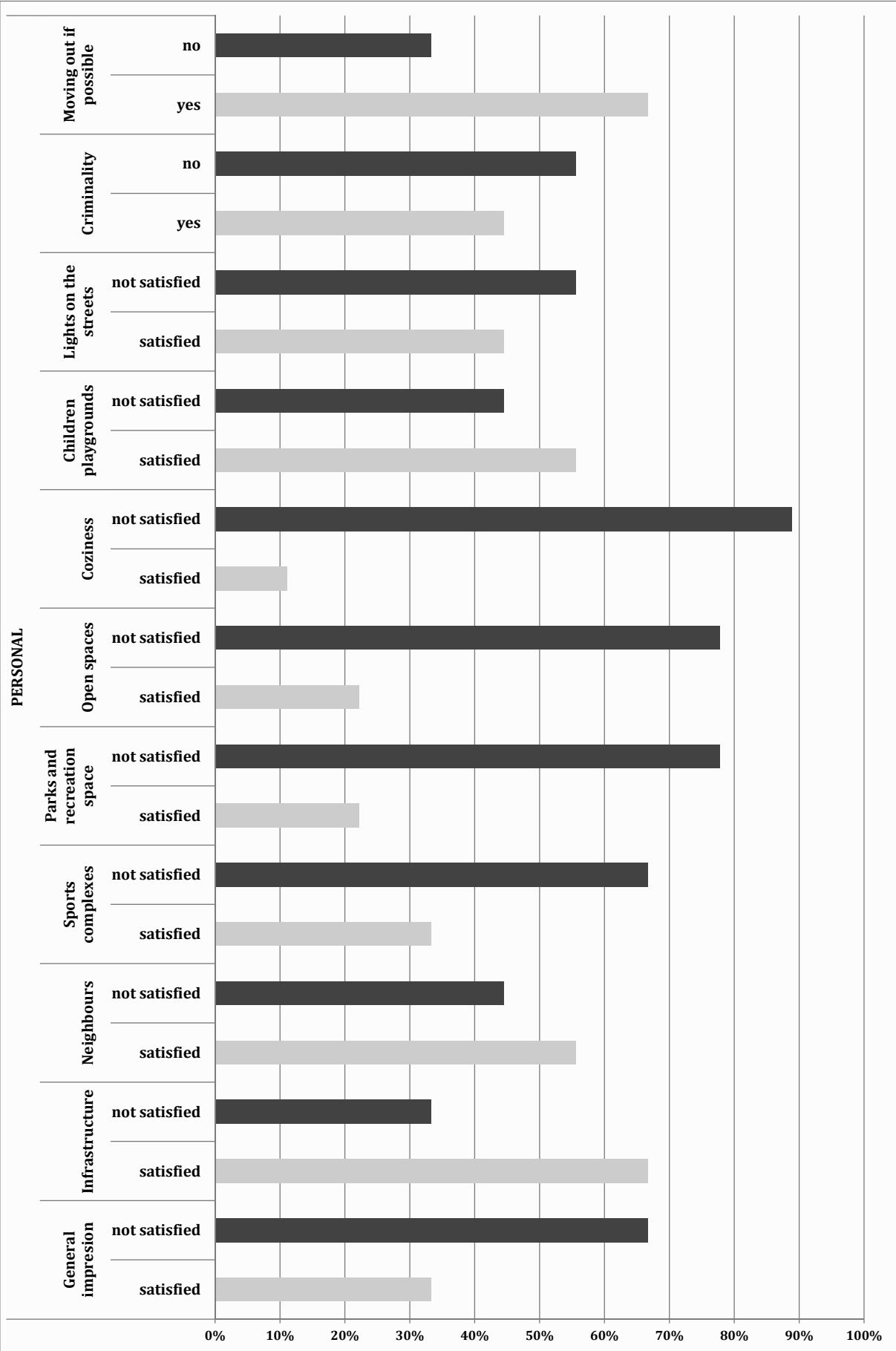
Infrastructure:

Six out of nine people (33%) share the opinion that even though the neighbourhoods of the re-researched kind are not well maintained, the infrastructure is well-planned and well-developed. Most of my respondents said that the road network and public transport are well-developed and they reach the central parts relatively fast and easy: “There is the public transport – different lines – which take me to the central part of the city for about 15-20 minutes. Also, I have my car and my block is located really close to the urban highway and it takes me 10 minutes to be downtown”.

On the other side, two of the respondents (22%) explained that the infrastructure in their neighbourhoods is really bad. Both of them share the opinion that the main roads that lead out of the neighbourhood are not enough for the capacity of the neighbourhood and the location is not good.



Figure 5.2 Current perspectives of the inhabitants of the socialist housing estates on their living environment



According to one of them he needs to use 3 to 4 busses in order to get downtown. This is the reason why he started using his bike. This is a nice thing according to him, except for the fact that there are no bike alleys and it is quite dangerous. Besides, as he explained, he needs to go through several industrial zones which are dark and full of homeless dogs.

Part of the topic for the infrastructure is the supermarkets and their availability. All of my respondents admitted that they have many different supermarkets in their neighbourhood and they feel really comfortable with that. Schools and kinder gardens are also available. Additionally, as some of the interviewees explained, in the recent years many shops, business centers and open-markets evolved: *“You can live in the neighbourhood and never go out of it. You have everything you need to live”*.

Neighbours:

With regards to the people that live in the socialist housing estates my respondents support two different opinions: 1/3 of them think that people are everywhere are the same, a mixture of different classes; 2/3 support the idea that as initially built – those neighbourhoods were built for the working class and thus –lower class people inhabit them. This part of my respondents also said that due to the lower prices of the apartments, lower class people buy apartments in those neighbourhoods now.

Sports playgrounds, parks and recreation:

According to 74% of the respondents there is a major problem with the sports playgrounds, the area for sports and recreation and the children playgrounds. Those are either not existing or broken and not usable: *“... swimming pool, fitness, and tennis courts. There is nothing. There is only one fitness and it is miserable”*. Only 36% of the interviewees said that those grounds are good enough to be used, or they are satisfied with the ones in neighbouring living quarters or the central parts of the city.

Interestingly, my respondents explained that there are some playgrounds developed by the Municipality through the last years. The interviewees described them as well-planned, with lights and for common use. Also, about 30% of the people that took part in the interviews explained that, lately there is an initiative of fixing the children playgrounds in their part of the neighbourhood and they were happy and amazed at the same time.

Parks are mostly missed by all of the interviewees. To my question of what they lack the most, all of them were definite – a park. With regards to the children playgrounds, one of the interviewee said that there are Cafes which have some playgrounds within their property and this is enough for the children. Some of my respondents explained that the children playgrounds were actually well-planned. However, *“they decayed with the time – it is on the one hand the inhabitants and on the other the lack of municipal maintenance”*.





The inhabitants of the panel-flat neighbourhoods are satisfied with the fact that they have open-spaces and developed infrastructure. What the interviewees mostly dislike is the badly maintained in-between-the-blocks spaces, the partial technical renovation done by some of the households, the dangerous “abandoned” children playgrounds and the problem with the parking.







Many of the residents complain about the parking habits of their neighbours. Cars are parked in the open-spaces, not on regulated parking lots. This creates an ugly environment, damages the pavements and especially the green spaces.



### Open-spaces:

Only two out of nine respondents feel satisfied with the open-spaces around their blocks. These two people shared that they do not have an active life within the boundaries of the neighbourhood as all of their friends are from elsewhere and they gather in the central part of the city. However, they are satisfied with the open-spaces as they exist. What these two people explained is that at least there are open-spaces compared to the central parts of the city or the newly constructed neighbourhoods where everything is on top of something else and stifled at a maximum.

Half of the respondents share the opinion that it is according to the Government to design the open-spaces and create the playgrounds and the gardens, but then it further depends on the people. All of the residents share the opinion that those open-spaces may be turned out into nice ones and this will create a lively environment.

Nearly all (80%) of the people share the opinion that the open spaces are miserably managed and lack plants and trees. According to some of the respondents, their neighbours do not take any care about the environment and still throw their garbage baskets out of the window.

Contrary to that, many of the interviewees have the idea that their neighbours, and sometimes they themselves, take care of the spaces in front of their entrances. As it is shared by some of the interviewees *"There is a group of people in my block and we take care of the open space around"*. Others mention: *"The people are active, they maintain the space in front of the entrance – we have now trees and flowers and it's nice"*.

Many of the respondents emphasize on the open-spaces which exist, compared to the central parts. Eventually, those people see an option for these spaces to be nicely arranged, while where there no such spaces this is not possible. Several of the interviewees mention that.

### Coziness:

Clearly, the inhabitants of the socialist neighbourhoods do not find them cozy (89%). Only one person supports the idea that these neighborhoods are cozy. At the same time, he would also like to move out if he had the chance to live in a house.

### Criminality:

Seven out of the nine interviewed people (78%) from this group support the opinion that the criminality in the socialist neighbourhoods is not on a higher level than elsewhere. The other two people explained that there are many dealers, but they did not tell anything about whether they think these representatives of the society are more or less in other parts of the city.

On the other side, 1 of the interviewed people, who lived in a centrally located neighbourhood prior to this neighbourhood shared:

*"Iztok was specified by its vicinity to Pliska – one of the major bus-stops in Sofia."*



*That makes all type of strange people gather there. Personally, I felt disturbed in the evenings. In the evening you could meet all kind of strange people, who do not live there and that made me feel uncomfortable. Here, in a neighbourhood that is distanced and not that tensed I feel calmer. I guess this counts for all centrally located neighbourhoods."*

Contrary to all other aspects researched with the interviews, the gender of the participants did play a role when speaking of criminality. The female respondents explained that they are afraid when going home late when it is dark. One of the females explained that if she needs to get home late she would use a taxi, which would stop her in front of the entrance to her block, but this is due to the homeless dogs. Otherwise, she says: *"Safety? No! And I am definitive that I would not feel safer anywhere else – look at the grids in front of the windows, the security doors ..."* One of my male respondents said that his partner feels endangered every time she comes home at night.

For many of the respondents criminality was associated with fear and they also talked about the homeless dogs. To the question about the feeling of safety one of my respondents answered:

*"No! The factor is the homeless dogs. While going home you look like someone that is going to steal something because you look around all the time. And besides, there is still high criminality – we are not moving forward with that."*

#### Moving out:

Interestingly, more than 2/3 of the participants in the interviews explained that they would move out because they preferred living in a house. One person (11%) said that he would like to move back to his previous neighbourhood – centrally located and a nice and cozy one. Another one (11%) is not certain he wants to move out, but as he explained, if he is moving he would move to a centrally located neighbourhood which is close to the central park and to the main roads. The rest of the respondents (33%) would not move out as they feel comfortable where they live at the moment. Besides, they share the view that it is not better anywhere else.

#### **5.2.2. Expectations of the inhabitants with regards to the future of the socialist housing estates, expectation towards the Government (realistic perspective)**

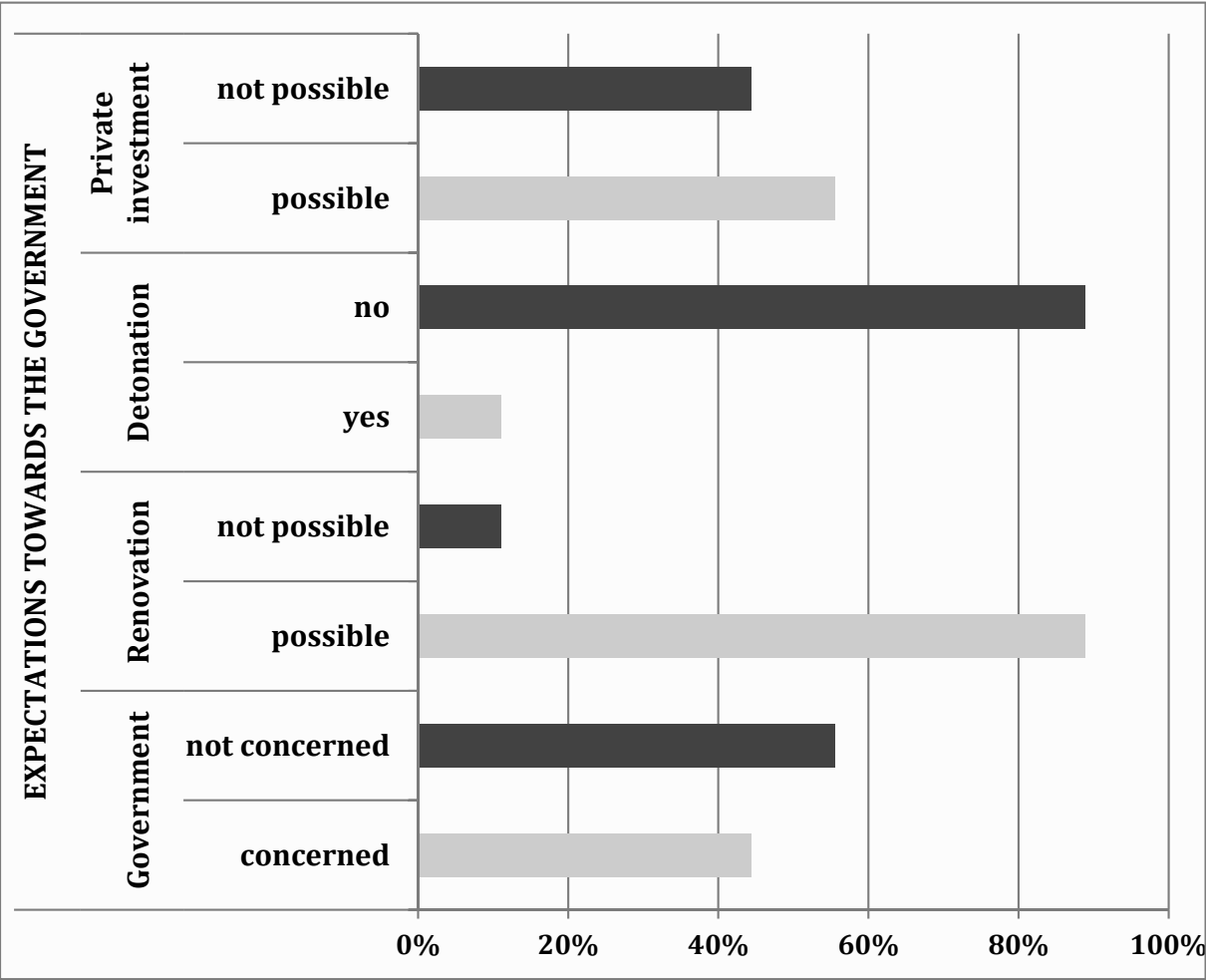
Different opinions are stated by the interviewees with regards to the connection of the Government to the problems of the socialist neighbourhoods (e.g., see Figure 5.3). Merely half of the respondents (44%) support the idea that the Government does not take any action with regards to the discussed neighbourhoods: *"What I feel is that in Sofia, the Government representatives are not interested in changing things for good"*.

Interestingly 8 out of 9 (89%) of the interviewed inhabitants share the opinion that renovation is possible and would turn the panel-flat neighbourhoods into nice dwelling areas. Only 1 of the interviewee supports the idea that detonation of the blocks and the complete regeneration of the neighbourhoods is the possible way out of the problem.

Parking in the green spaces, and on the pavement is typical for the inhabitants of the prefabricated neighbourhoods. People are forced to do so as in the last year parking spaces are hardly found after 17.30 hrs. due to the increased number of residents with one or more vehicles.



Figure 5.3 Expectations of the inhabitants with regards to the future of the socialist housing estates, expectation towards the Government (realistic perspective)



When asked to think how renovation or regeneration would happen, the interviewed inhabitants also touch the topic of private initiatives and public-private partnerships (PPPs). 56% of the inhabitants think it is possible to renovate the neighbourhoods through PPPs. The rest (44%) of them share that private investment would happen only if the private sector sees material outcome, a direct income, which is not the case with those neighbourhoods, as the interviewed people described it.

Renovation:

When asked about the future of the neighbourhoods if looked upon realistically some (2) of my respondents answered that the best way for them is to disappear or to be detonated, however, in their view that is not possible. Further questions to those specific people about whether it is realistic to think that in ten-years-time the neighbourhoods could be better-looking or managed, they answer straight ahead: “Absolutely not!” Another interviewee adds: “I don’t even have a clue how would this problem be solved.” Another one adds: “They will decay and will be continuing to decay!”

Other people support the idea of renovation. Different opinions are stated. Among them one of the respondents explained that in Bulgaria’s environment actions are initiated by social activities. According to him people should organize themselves and a critical amount of people should initiate a process of renovation: “It is a fact that this Government lets to be led by people’s initiatives. This is not simple, but if committees are formed things might change. If we wait for the administration – I doubt that something would change.”

The topic of renovation touches upon a sensitive, as it appeared, topic for the inhabitants. Some of them explained that the land below the panel-flats is not owned by the inhabitants. “Automatically, that makes them unreal owners. Why would you invest then? It’s better to search for an alternative”.

On the other hand, a person explained that according to him if renovation does not happen within the next few years, there would be no need of it at all, as the blocks would technically be not sufficient anymore.

Government:

Although independent from each other the interviewees formed a nice discussion about the Government and its involvement with the problems are issues related to the socialist neighbourhoods. More of the respondents (56%) share the opinion that the Government is not concerned. Few of them (22%) are involved around the idea that there are actually programs and it does something but we do not feel it. Another 2 (22%) share that it is the fault of the inhabitants that do not do anything about the renovation or regeneration of the neighbourhoods as there are programs of the Government, also assisted by the EU, which people either do not know about or are too lazy to deal with them. One of the interviewee adds:

“As far as I know such programs are being developed but we are a little interested in those. We use a little of those. Because if the Government does a small part, and then this small part is of interest to the population, it is possible that this little part





A major problem according to the interviewees are the partial technical renovations of the buildings. Those are done not in coordination with the block's identity and architecture. Different colours, textures and ways of thermal insulation are seen on the facades of one block. The look is beyond discussion.



Interviewees from both Group 1 and 2 discuss the children playgrounds - they are either not initially constructed or have reached a condition that are already not usable or even dangerous.



*is being built over and then we'll get the big thing. In a way, the Government can do nothing big if the population is not involved. This is a type of economic commitment because it is money-dependent. If this thing is used it will be developed, if it is not used, it will be ruined. Plus, there are already examples of completely renovated panel-flats and they look like any other brand-new building – just a few of course, but they are a good example.”*

Another interviewee shares that according to her the Government is not involved, or if it is it is just a little. However, according to her “[t]he people themselves should be active”. “There should be some social responsibility.” Contrary to that one of the interviewees adds: “... We pay tax and the local administration should do what is needed. I don't believe it's normal that you go out and plant grass, let's say!”

#### Public-private partnerships for the renovation of the housing estates:

About half of the respondents (56%) support the opinion that PPPs are a possible way for the renovation of the panel-flats. Those people not only think PPPs are possible, but they also think this is a much better way as it will be better done and the environment would be more attractive. The people that support the opposite idea (44%) share that according to them PPPs are not possible as “[i]n order to attract the private investors, there should be income from that whole thing”. One of the interviewees explained that when private investments happen in the central parts of the city it is advertisement that they earn from. However, that is not the case with the panel-flat neighbourhoods, as he explained. One of the respondents also explained that even in PPPs the inhabitants should take a part in the process investing some money. He continued: “The people haven't completely paid off their apartments yet. Then, where would this money come from?”

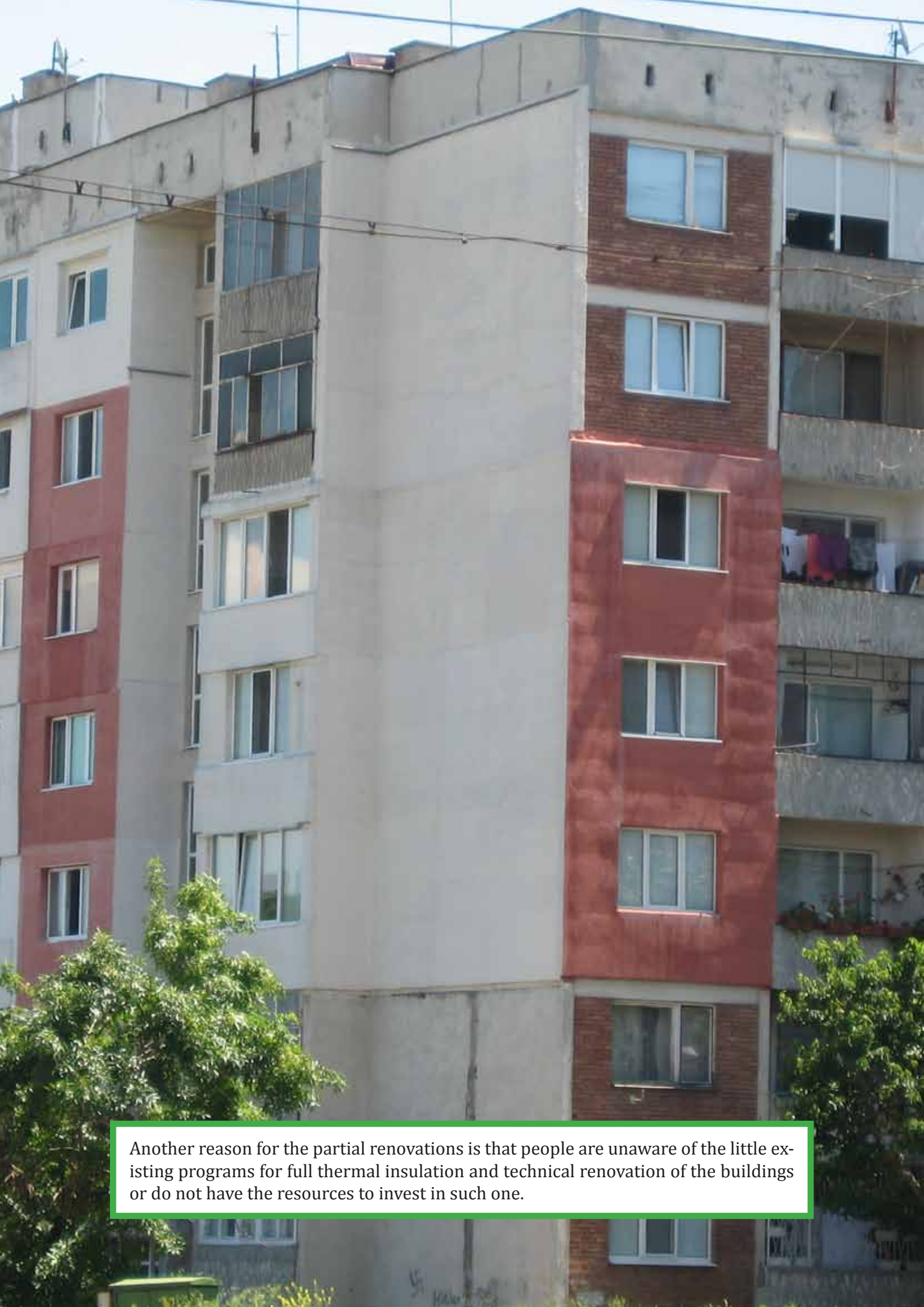
#### **5.2.3. Wishes and desires of the inhabitants for the future of the socialist housing estates**

Interestingly, when asked to think about what they wish to turn the socialist neighbourhoods into, 89% of the interviewees start talking not about completely changing them into some other type of a living environment. Rather, the interviewees explain that they would like to see the blocks renovated and unified, the open-spaces nice and managed, planted with trees and plants, the children playgrounds renovated. Among the rest is dogs' places and lowering of the criminality. One of the interviewees said that “[i]f we are contemporary and thinking people we should work for a better environment”. Below is a list of the wished changes for the socialist neighbourhoods as summarized by the interviewed inhabitants of the socialist housing estates:

- Renovation
- Unification of the buildings
- Managed open-spaces
- Garden management
- Children playgrounds
- Distinctive dogs' places
- Public transport

In the summer period, when plants are green and blooming, the picture is a little bit better. However, all problems are still at hand.





- Criminals out
- Centralization
- Underground parking spaces
- Passive buildings

Unification of the buildings is a topic also encircled in the wishes of the inhabitants for the future of the housing estates. Mentioned earlier in the beginning of the interviews some of the respondents finished it here. According to those people *“it is nice to live in a panel-flat neighbourhood”*, however management is required. Moreover, the current process of self-renovation that the inhabitants have started creates a terrible outer vision of the neighbourhood as one of my respondents referred to.

Certainly, negative opinions have been stated. *“There is no happy future for those neighbourhoods. We will reach the point of collapse and this would be it. Prior to that moment nobody will put his hand on anything”* – categorically states one of the interviewees.

Another interesting point was made by another one of the interviewees who explained that *“we need to make a step back”*. In his opinion centralization is the way out of the crisis with the socialist neighbourhoods. He explains that it was much better in the years when each neighbourhood had a library, a cinema, a sports playground, etc.

Three out of nine respondents (33%) speak about the problem with the parking spaces. According to them underground parking lots should be constructed as the problem with the cars is taking over the open spaces. These interviewees admit that the problem with the parking space is not as serious as in the central areas, however it is growing and this is the decision.

An interesting argument was given by one of the interviewees who explained: *“I would change them for passive buildings. I wouldn’t change them for houses. The blocks are a very good option, as I said already, houses take a lot of space – at the same time this is an overdevelopment and damaging the environment.”*

5.2.4. Conclusions

Although there are many different opinions stated, there are many common characteristics of the panel-flats neighbourhoods that their inhabitants like or dislike (e.g., see Table 5.3).

Interestingly, almost each interview conducted with representatives of Group 1 starts with con-

Table 5.3 Positive and negative characteristics of the socialist panel-flats (by Group 1)

POSITIVE	NEGATIVE
existence of open spaces	ghettoes
parking spaces	not managed
developed infrastructure	lack parks and sports playgrounds
quiet and calm	noisy
	the large number of inhabitants in each block

Another reason for the partial renovations is that people are unaware of the little existing programs for full thermal insulation and technical renovation of the buildings or do not have the resources to invest in such one.





trary opinions stated by the interviewee. Those interviewees start the conversation by telling the researcher that the panel-flat neighbourhoods are inhospitable, lack coziness or are unattractive sleeping dormitories. However, at the same time these people state that they are used to it and further in those interviews they explain that they *"would move out only to live in a house with my own garden"*. Most of the interviewed people also support the opinion that the socialist neighbourhoods are well planned, with a lot of open-spaces, places for recreation and sports, children playgrounds, etc. What these people dislike is the fact that nobody takes care of the environment. Arguably, three (out of nine) respondents support the idea that the Municipality shall maintain the open-spaces in between the blocks – landscape design, construction of children playgrounds and sports playgrounds, zones for recreation and other such territories around the blocks. These people, however, stand behind the idea that once the Municipality creates those places, it is the inhabitants that shall take care of them. Additionally, as one of the interviewees said: *"... the good-looking space creates respect in the people and thus has good consequences. Respect is what makes people do not do indecent things"*.

What is mostly liked by the respondents in the panel-flat environment is the fact that the open-spaces actually exist. Most of them explain that *"you can't breathe"* in the central parts of the city, which are over-built.

Contrary, the open-spaces are also mostly disliked for the reasons that the inhabitants find them neglected, weedy, and full of garbage and broken children playgrounds. Three of the interviewees (33%) relate the neighbourhoods to a *"forest of flats"*. However, 89% of the interviewed inhabitants support the idea that if well-maintained those neighbourhoods will provide a much better living environment than many of the centrally located or newly constructed neighbourhoods. In support of the idea they explain that this is due to the existence of open-spaces, infrastructure, developed public transport and also the subway that is being developed.

Another factor that is mentioned by a number of the interviewed representatives is the fact that buying or living in a panel-flat is much cheaper than living in a house and that is what people can afford. However, there are others who state that actually, if you would like to have better characteristics of your flat, living in a panel-flat would cost you much more on the first hand as you need a fortune to fix it and make it applicable.

Different statements are presented when speaking of the realistic future of the panel-flat neighbourhoods. According to some of the people they should be detonated and family houses built instead. However, they admit that this is realistically not possible.

According to some of the respondents the Government is not concerned with the panel-flats at all. The rest (56%) share the opinion that it is actually concerned but it is either not seen by the inhabitants because every plan is just on paper or, as other stated, because the inhabitants are not interested enough in those programs. Interestingly to the attention of the author, none of the respondents mentioned that the Government does not take any action for informative programs.

With regards to the PPPs the interviewed people mostly share the opinion that they are possible and it is better to have such programs initiated. Others share that PPPs are not possible or yet initi-



ated for the reason that the private sector desires a direct income and do not think about indirect such, which – according to some of the respondents (22%) is a way out if PPPs are applied.

As for the wishes of the inhabitants for the future of socialist housing estates the interviewed people mostly refer to complete renovation of the buildings, management for the open-spaces, children playgrounds and a construction of underground parking lots. Only two of the interviewed people share the opinion that detonation is the way out or that nobody would take care of those blocks prior to their collapse.

Interestingly, most of the inhabitants, when asked to share their wishes do not “turn” the neighbourhoods into another type of living environment. Rather, with their explanations, they refer to it as a nice living environment if only well managed.

### 5.3. Group 2 - the inhabitants of the socialist housing estates

The interviews with the second group were conducted with 9 people as well. All of them have moved out of the socialist neighbourhoods as already explained. Except for one of the people who live in the Netherlands at the moment and that is the reason to move out, all the rest eight people (89%) have moved out as they preferred to live in the central parts of the city or in a newly constructed neighbourhood. Representatives of three age groups are present in group 2.

#### 5.3.1. Current perspectives of the ex-inhabitants of the socialist housing estates on their living environment

Generally, the environment of the socialist housing estates is disliked by the ex-inhabitants of those quarters (67%) (e.g., see Figure 5.4 and Figure 5.5). They associate the panel-flat neighbourhoods with garbage, not trimmed grass, ruined playgrounds and benches. *“Otherwise they are not bad”,* says one of the interviewees, *“...with well-planned surrounding spaces. But again, they are all the same”*. Another interviewee describes the discussed housing estates as grey and boring, *“...they do not have any details and are all alike”*.

Most of the people (89%) in Group 2 share the opinion that the infrastructure is nicely developed, providing everyday needs, good connections with the rest of the city and nice public transport. About 75% of the respondents are completely dissatisfied with the possibilities that these types of neighbourhoods offer for sports and recreation. Additionally, the open-spaces are not well-managed they explain:

*“I felt discomfort! It is all about concrete and a huge clustering of people. The in-between gardens are just for the sake of appearance. They are not maintained, not nice; they do not give a pleasant feeling. I missed plants.”*

However, most of the interviewees explain that if nicely managed the neighbourhoods will not be a bad place for living:

*“In general the idea of those neighbourhoods is very good – they have spaces for a*

**Figure 5.4 General impression of the ex-residents of the socialist housing estates towards their living environment.**

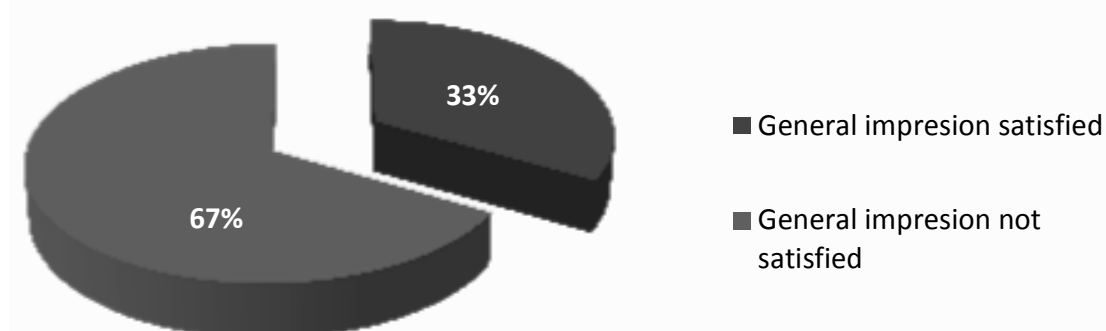
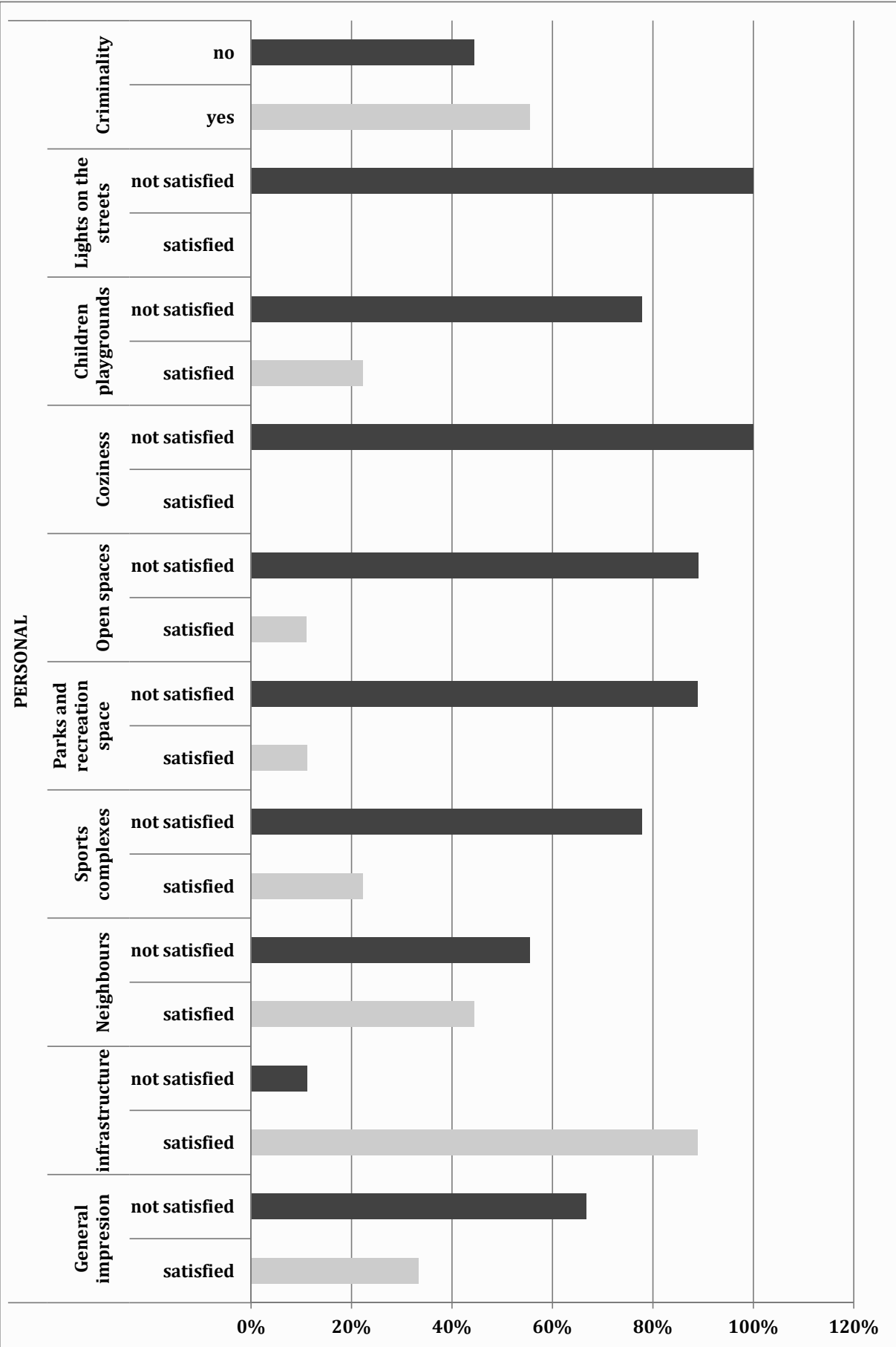




Figure 5.5 Current perspectives of the ex-inhabitants of the socialist housing estates on their living environment



walk, for the free time, for playgrounds, but those things are just not there ... It was a choice of another type of construction and a neighbourhood with infrastructure, supermarkets, public transport and sport complexes. And the biggest advantage of it all is the isolation from your neighbours.”

The people from this group absolutely support the fact that coziness cannot at all be discussed and the lights on the streets are poorly managed. About half of the people (44%) think that the environment is more or less criminal.

With regards to the Governmental attitude and concern towards the panel flats the people from this Group are divided in two subgroups. 44% of the respondents are positive about the fact the Government works on programs for the renovation of the panel-flat neighbourhoods. The rest (56%) are negative. However, all 9 respondents are positive that renovation of the panel-flats is possible and detonation is not the correct way out of the situation.

Infrastructure:

According to 89% of the ex-inhabitants of the socialist housing estates their infrastructure is well-developed. All of these eight people explain that the socialist neighbourhoods that they used to live in are with far better infrastructure than their current places of dwelling: “When it comes to infrastructure it is better in the panel flats, there is better public transport and supermarkets, the road network ... At the moment where I live there are no such road networks.”

Only one of the interviewees have another position: “The greatest problem that I see is that the neighbourhood is initially built without infrastructure ... The social is not thought about.”

Neighbours:

The topic of the neighbours is touched upon by the ex-inhabitants mainly comparing the isolation that they have now and the previous blocks where all noises were heard from them. Two of the interviewees explained that a positive characteristic of their new dwelling areas is the fact that more young people and young families inhabit their current neighbourhood.

With regards to the class of the people living in both the ex and the current neighbourhood of my interviewees one of the respondents explained that she was quite happy with her neighbours in the block in the socialist neighbourhood as the apartments in it were sold to people from the Bulgarian Academy of Science and thus that were nice and educated. The rest of the interviewees (56%) responded that they disliked their neighbours.

Sports playgrounds, parks and recreation:

About 75% of the interviewees are not satisfied with the possibilities for sports and recreation that their previous (socialist) neighbourhood provided them with. Some of the respondents told me that “there is space where you take a walk, but these spaces are related to the open-spaces in between the blocks which are completely unmanaged and not taken care for”. Some interviewees add





Most of the nicely looking open spaces are managed by the people that live in the particular block.

that you can go and play basketball or football in the school yards and that is it.

Contrary to that one of the interviewees said that having that many open-spaces in the socialist neighbourhoods gives you the possibility of practicing different sports. Having said that, she immediately turned 180 degrees in her words and said: *"On the other hand, those spaces are rarely taken care after. They have not been managed ever since they have been constructed. This is not good because they turn into dumping ground – garbage is thrown there, homeless dogs are attracted. But if they are well managed it could be far better."*

78% of the respondents explained that the children playgrounds in their ex neighbourhoods are not in good quality at all. *"There are playgrounds but they are either broken or at the situation prior to breaking down."* On the other hand, most of the respondents admit that there is no space in their current neighbourhoods either and they need to take their children to some parks around the city.

#### Open-spaces:

Only 11% of the ex-inhabitants of the socialist housing estates are satisfied with the open-spaces in between their ex blocks. This is for one main reason – they lack open spaces in their current neighbourhoods: *"At least we had open spaces in the previous neighbourhood"*.

#### Coziness:

All of the interviewed people find the socialist neighbourhoods not cozy. This feeling is again created by the not managed open spaces and the outer look of the blocks. Also, as some of the interviewees said: *"You have the feeling of living in concrete."* Another one of the interviewees explained: *"The open spaces are really not taken care of, the parking spaces are not managed – there are chaotically parked cars all over, the entrances of the blocks are not well-managed and they stink."*

#### Criminality:

Asked to think about criminality, 56% of the people respond that the feeling of criminality was there when living in the socialist neighbourhoods. However, those people said that it is everywhere like that. According to the interviewees the feeling of discomfort is caused mainly by the homeless dogs. One of the interviewees said:

*"I am not afraid of the homeless dogs or of somebody attacking me. However, I am not feeling secure when I know my close ones are outside."*

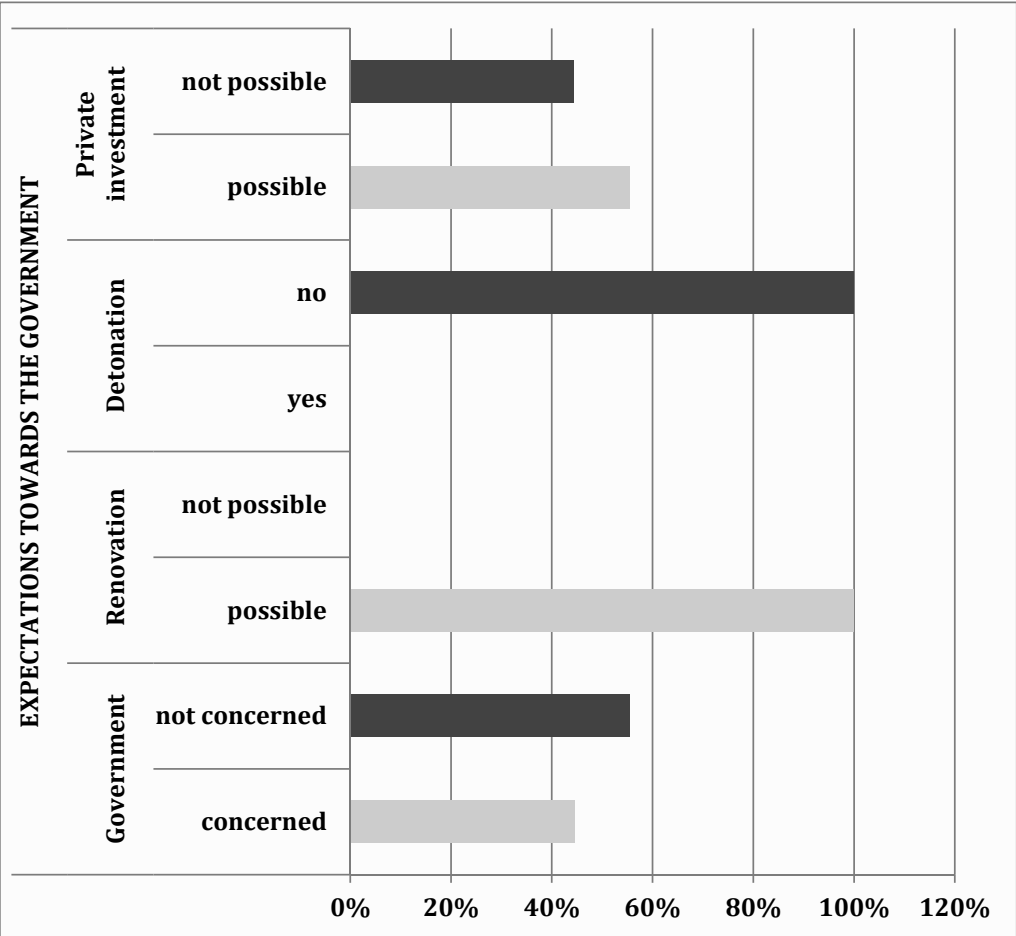
Also, 2 of the respondents explained that they were used to their ex neighbourhoods but if you walk there for the first time you wouldn't be feeling safe. That, as they explained, is valid for each neighbourhood. Additionally, another interviewee stated: *"I wouldn't say that there should be more criminality compared to other parts of the city."*

#### Moving out:

Most of the respondents (78%) changed their ex neighbourhood for newly constructed buildings



Figure 5.6 Expectations of the ex-inhabitants with regards to the future of the socialist housing estates, expectation towards the Government (realistic perspective)



in newly constructed neighbourhoods. The rest changed because they moved out of their previous city – one of them lives in the Netherlands, and the other one in a newly constructed neighbourhood in another city.

5.3.2. Expectations of the ex-inhabitants with regards to the future of the socialist housing estates, expectation towards the Government (realistic perspective)

The second part of the interview questions are related to the realistic future of the socialist housing estates envisioned by their ex-inhabitants (e.g., see Figure 5.6). About half of the respondents (44%) support the thesis that the Government is involved in developing programs for the renovation of the socialist housing estates. All of them (100%) share the view that a renovation is the possible way out of the problem and emphasize that if well-managed the researched neighbourhoods will provide a nice living environment. According to this group (Group 2), PPPs are possible, however, different interests are of charge and that puts question marks at the end of the sentence.

Renovation:

When asked about the realistic future of the socialist negihbourhoods the different people have opinions, supported by different arguments. However, there is one common trend – renovation of the panel flats, together with management for the open spaces will make a lively and nice environment, say all (100%) of the interviewees:

*“If completely renovated – yes, the neighbourhoodss would be a nice place ... Moreover, if completely renovated the neighbourhoods will be far better than the rest of the new negihboruhoods, which are stuck with buildings and out of space.”*

Some of the respondents argued that it would be nice to renovate those neighbourhoods but they “just can’t imagine it”, as one of the interviewees stated. “A lot of money are needed, the state does not have them; and rules ... it is a matter of a worldview, of mentality. We are not disciplined! It’s all about common rules and mentality.”

Additionally, with some of the interviewees (33%) the conversation in this part of the interview naturally flowed into the desires of the previous neighbours of the respondents to move out. They explained that in their opinion if the neighbourhoods are nicely managed their ex-neighbours would remain living there, except for the ones that would like to live in a house.

Government:

Different points are made when speaking about the Government and its involvement for the renovation of the socialist housing estates. Some of the respondents (33%) mention that there should be some programs for those neighbourhoods but my respondents are not aware of such. Additionally, the topic of financing is touched upon by means of the impossibility of the Government, according to the inhabitants, to subsidize the renovation of the neighbourhoods.





According to others (33%), nothing would happen until they start falling apart. And then, *“they will need to be demolished and built again on the same principle”*, described the situation one of the interviewees.

#### Public-private partnerships for the renovation of the housing estates:

Even though 56% of the respondents admit that public-private partnerships are possible when renovating the neighbourhoods, some of them do not seem to find it realistic in our environment: *“It’s possible, but I actually doubt it.”* Others share that PPPs are possible when it comes to the open-spaces and the playgrounds. One of the interviewees explained: *“It is trendy to have a CSR program right now. Especially, for some companies that need advertisement ... There should be some public programs of the Government perhaps.”* Others add that if initiated by the Government such mechanism would actually be working really well.

#### **5.3.3. Wishes and desires of the ex-inhabitants for the future of the socialist housing estates**

When asked about the wishes of the ex-inhabitant for the future of their ex-neighbourhoods they provide an interesting picture. Among the most discussed issues are:

- better construction
- more interesting architecture
- sports playgrounds
- children playgrounds
- plants
- good management

When explaining about her wishes for the future of the neighbourhoods, which comprises of *“clean streets, green spaces and playgrounds”*, one of the interviewees said that *“[t]he people must be given a chance to live actively”*. Another one of the respondents would turn the neighbourhoods into family houses with private yards. However, saying this he continued explaining that according to him that could only be dreamed and it is not possible, as all these people need to be accommodated somewhere.

It has been described by one of the ex-inhabitants that a mixed-use space will be far better than the current state of the neighbourhoods. He supports the idea that those neighborhoods shall also comprise different functions – work, possibilities for recreation. This would make the neighbourhoods far more attractive, as explained by the interviewee and *“more comfortable for the people living in.”*

#### **5.3.4. Conclusions**

Even though many different views are presented by the interviewed ex-inhabitants, there are common trends in their vision when describing the socialist neighbourhoods (e.g. see Table 5.4).





What both Group 1 and 2 find positive about the socialist housing estates is the existence of open-spaces. They dislike the fact that these spaces are not well-managed. However, both representatives admit that their existence is positive and if nicely managed they would provide an excellent living environment, compared to the high-density new neighbourhoods.

Remarkably, when speaking about their previous neighbourhoods, the interviewees stated different opinions about what they dislike and what they actually miss in their current neighbourhoods. These people start the interview by explaining that the socialist neighbourhoods are not cozy, they are unattractive and uncomfortable for living as they lack management. At the same time, the respondents find that the best about the socialist neighbourhoods is the existence of open-spaces. Most of them share the opinion (78%) that if well-managed, the socialist neighbourhoods will provide a nice living environment. Additionally, 89% of the respondents share that the infrastructure is well-developed.

When asked to speak about their neighbours and the concern of them towards open-space, some (56%) of interviewees share that they were satisfied with their neighbours, which were nice, educated people, friendly and in good relation with the interviewees. Also, there are some groups of people, as explained by the respondents that take care of the open-spaces around. Mostly disliked by Group 2 are the dirty open-spaces, the lack or broken children playgrounds, the lack of sport playgrounds and last, but not least, as stated by them, the bad insulation of the flats and all the noises that you get to hear.

Three out of nine respondents (33%) explained that a thing that they dislike about the socialist panel-flat neighbourhoods is the fact that the population there is ageing. They enjoy their younger neighbours in the new buildings they live in.

All nine of the interviewees from this Group (100%) explained that the criminality in all parts of the city is the same, and were not feeling calmer or respectively more endangered in their old neighbourhoods.

Interestingly, 78% of the respondents moved out of the socialist neighbourhoods to live in newly constructed neighbourhoods. However, they still support the idea that if well-managed the panel-flat areas will be a nice and lively place to live in. Additionally, when asked about the desires of their ex-mate to move out of the discussed neighbourhoods, the respondents explain that they do not think so if placed in a situation where the blocks are technically renovated and the open-spaces taken care after. However, two of the interviewees (22%) emphasized on the fact that the people's mentality is also to change and that if the inhabitants do not take care of their environment, they should not expect anybody else to do so.

Table 5.4 Positive and negative characteristics of the socialist panel-flats (by Group 2)

POSITIVE	NEGATIVE
existence of open spaces	not managed
parking spaces	technically not good buildings
developed infrastructure	lack parks and sports playgrounds
	noisy
	the age of the inhabitants



# DISCUSSION

- 6.1. REFLECTION ON THE RESULTS AND RESEARCHER'S EXPECTATIONS
- 6.2. THE COLLABORATIVE APPROACH
- 6.3. PRACTICAL AFVISES FOR THE PLANNING PRACTICE



The current study was initiated by the author with the aim of enhancing the process of urban regeneration for the socialist housing estates in Sofia. The purpose of the study is to contribute to the process by structuring the residents' perspectives and expectations towards the future of the researched housing estates.

The information about the citizens' perspectives and expectations is gained through semi-structured, open-ended interviews. Chapter 5 provides an in-depth analysis of the results from the interviews. The results show that there are many similarities, but also differences in the perceptions and expectation of the two interviewed groups of people (Appendix III). With this Chapter the author aims at answering the main research question and three sub-research questions posed in Chapter 2, namely:

**What are the current perspectives and expectations of the (ex) residents of the socialist housing estates?**

- 1. What kind of meanings and values do the (ex) residents attach to the socialist neighbourhoods?*
- 2. What are the expectations of the (ex) residents towards the future development of the socialist neighbourhoods?*
- 3. What are the wishes of the (ex) residents towards the future development of the socialist neighbourhoods?*

#### **WHAT KIND OF MEANINGS AND VALUES DO THE (EX) RESIDENTS ATTACH TO THE SOCIALIST NEIGHBOURHOODS?**

The general impression for the socialist housing estates is negative, as presented by both the inhabitants (Group 1) and the ex-inhabitants (Group 2) of the socialist housing estates. 67% of both groups support that opinion. The main negative characteristics that both of the Groups refer to are related to management of the open spaces in between the blocks, the lack of parks, sports playgrounds and children playgrounds. Also, a point is made by most of the interviewed people about the number of the inhabitants, which is problematic when it comes to decision making, common rules and actions. Many of the interviewed people from both Group 1 and 2 share that a huge problem related to living in the panel-flat blocks is the noise from all around, which is related to the construction method and the insulation of the flats.

Interestingly, 33% of the respondents of Group 1 would not like to move out of them. The rest (67%) would like to move out only to live in a house or be closer to some parks and the city center. This result is very interesting to the author, as her expectations were different. Additionally, people from Group 1 (89%), but also all of the people from Group 2 (100%) share the opinion that if renovated and well managed, the socialist neighbourhoods will provide a nice living environment. There are also many positive characteristics of the socialist housing estates presented by both interview Groups. There is a consensus among the respondents that the existence of open-spaces is a quality number one of the socialist housing estates. The respondents also mention the availability of parking spaces and last, but not least – the developed infrastructure. About 75% of the residents share that the infrastructure is nicely developed.

A major downside of the panel-flats and the prefabricated housing estates in general is the partial renovation. This makes the living environment not cozy and an uncomfortable feeling is grounded in the inhabitants, comment representatives of Group 1 and 2.



The components of the neighbourhoods that the residents mostly dislike are the management of the open-spaces, the coziness and the feeling of comfort that the neighbourhoods offer; the status of the playgrounds and the lack of parks; lights on the streets in the dark part of the day is also a discussed problem. As to criminality, all of the respondents share that it is not a bigger problem than in any other part of the city.

#### **WHAT ARE THE EXPECTATIONS OF THE (EX) RESIDENTS TOWARDS THE FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SOCIALIST NEIGHBOURHOODS?**

Both of the interview Groups have similar results with regards to their expectations towards the future of the socialist housing estates. Almost all of the interviewees (89% of Group 1 and 100% of Group2) share that renovation of the researched estates is their possible future. Their opinions differ as to who would finance or subsidize it and the time-frame of the actions for the renovation of the buildings and the open-spaces in between them.

At the same time, 56% of both the respondents from Group 1 and 2 share that according to them the Government is not working on any programs or plans for the renovation of the socialist housing quarters. The ones that do think that there are some procedures initiated by the Government (44%) have doubts as to whether they are not popular or the population is not taking them into account and not using them.

Only one out of 18 respondents states that the blocks shall be detonated. However, in his view new blocks, identical to the existent ones should be built, only afresh, with no drastic changes.

Opinions are similar also in respect of the possibility of applying public-private partnerships. According to 56% of the respondents PPPs are a possible partnership in renovating the neighbourhoods. Some of the respondents explain that the method is good for the open-spaces and playgrounds only. Others refer to the whole renovation. The ones that do not support the opinion (44%) that PPPs are possible mention that it would be nice to have such partnerships established. However, the point of these respondents is that private initiatives are taken only when a direct income is envisioned by the investors.

Importantly, almost all of the interviewees (about 90%) share that if nicely renovated the socialist neighbourhoods will provide a lively environment. They mention that as when asked about the realistic future of the neighbourhoods they explain that parks, managed open-spaces and playgrounds are what they envision for the future of their neighbourhoods.

#### **WHAT ARE THE WISHES OF THE (EX) RESIDENTS TOWARDS THE FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SOCIALIST NEIGHBOURHOODS?**

The third phase of the interviews related to the wishes and desires of the inhabitants and ex-inhabitants for the future of the socialist housing estates provided the author with very interesting insides. When asked about their wishes for the future of the researched neighbourhoods the inhabitants speak of renovation of the blocks and the open-spaces, creation and reconstruction of the existent sports and children playgrounds, formation of gardens with plants, dogs' places and

Both Groups share the opinion that if renovated and nicely managed the socialist housing estates will provide a nice living environment. Just a couple of flats have been fully renovated, however they are a nice example of the statement.





An example of a fully renovated panel-flat block.

other such facilities, also a park and places for recreation. This outcome is of great interest to the author who expected that the inhabitants, and also ex residents dislike the panel-flat neighbourhoods and their idea and would turn them into other types of living environment, if given the possibility – family houses, smaller blocks, or other types of neighbourhoods.

### 6.1. Reflection on the results and researcher's expectations

It may be concluded that the results of Group 1 and 2 are very similar. The representatives of both Groups share similar ideas and have similar attitude towards their living or ex-living environment. Of interest to the results that the researcher obtained are her personal expectations. The researcher expected that the socialist neighbourhoods would be massively disliked by the respondents and especially by their current inhabitants. Arguably, that is not the case as the results and their analysis presented.

Additionally, the ideas of the inhabitants are not related to major restructurings. They have adequate expectations and minor remarks mainly towards outer look and the situation with the open-spaces, which has been extensively dicribed.

Another interesting to the attention of the author point is the attitude of the interviewed resident to the Government and its actions. The researcher expected a very negative attitude and instead met understanding and also some blame on the inhabitants for the current situation of the socialist neighbourhoods.

Last, but not least, an interesting outcome naturally appeared during the research process. Even though the construction of the socialist panel-flat blocks was doubted by both the researcher and other scholars, it proved to be good and stable. An earthquake with a magnitude of 5.8 (according to BAS and the American Seismological Institute and 6.4 according to other German Seismological Institute) happened on 22nd May, 2012. All of the panel-flat blocks are checked post the Earthquake and they are with stable constructions and no damages.

### 6.2. The collaborative approach

The current study follows a collaborative approach and Healey's (2009) description of spatial planning which shall "understand the complexities of the study area, be sensitive to the location, embrace synthetic thinking, and be imaginative." Although including people in the planning process is a challenge, it is also a necessity, according to the author's vision presented in this study. Having chosen the perspective of the citizens the author tried to strictly follow these guidelines when conducting the study. The author aimed not only at enhancing the knowledge about the process of urban regeneration for the socialist housing estates in Sofia, but also raising the participants' consciousness and getting ideas for the development of the researched territories.

As the researcher has already argued, working with the people is essential in spatial planning, as they provide the planner with valuable insights - local knowledge, wisdom and creative ideas are essential when working with already existing territories that need to be regenerated. At the same time, the residents in the case of the current study are the stakeholder group with the most





This playground is constructed by the Municipality. It is nice, with new and contemporary playing equipment, surrounded by a fence and overlooked by a camera - way to save it for a longer time.

realistic view. Additionally, when working with the inhabitants at such an early stage in the planning processes (the initial phases) many future problems could be avoided – such as resistant residents, opponents of the plans and negative voices.

Having already analyzed the information gained through the interviews with the inhabitants and the ex-inhabitants of the socialist neighbourhoods, the author is able to indicate that the study is successful as new knowledge is gained, unexpected results are received and a saturation point of opinions is reached. Most importantly, working with local people ensures that the future developments are based on local needs and ideas, rather than on entrepreneurs' ideas of income.

A downside of conducting semi-structured and open-ended interviews is the fact that when speaking to people that are more introversive or in a hurry in-depth information cannot be obtained. At the same time, with such a type of interviews the researcher is able to work with the questions, navigate the interviews in different directions, depending on the respondent and obtain more information. The researcher believes the type of interviews is correctly chosen.

Admittedly, the collaborative planning is criticized, as well. That is based on the fact that the process of involving all possible stakeholders and inviting them on the planning/policy making table could make the process long and ceaseless (Healey, 2009).

### 6.3. Practical advises for the planning practice

Inviting citizens in the planning processes have many positive but also negative consequences. Arguably, this is an opportunity for the residents to share their opinion, to place their ideas on the planning table and share their knowledge. Admittedly, the locals possess insights into the problems of the area they live in, but also know its positive characteristics. Additionally, public participation gets the planning process closer to fairness and justice (Booher, 2004).

The chosen method, used in the study, for involving the society through interviews is an interesting initial step in planning according to the author. By conducting the interviews with the residents, the planners are granted with insights into the territory they are researching but also with ideas and inspiration. In short, the planners are introduced to:

- The perceptions of the people about their local environment;
- The positive and negative characteristics of the environment;
- The wishes of the inhabitants for the future of their neighbourhood;
- The idea that people might be unaware of some mechanisms available and subsidies given by the Government / the State / the local municipalities.

Having all this information, the planners are thus aware of the characteristics of the land which is to be regenerated. Additionally, an insight into the class and communication among the people in the specific neighbourhood is experienced by the planners. Thus, the developments suggested by the future plan could be initiated by people's ideas and vision, or by the planner's perception about the people and their local environment. This is a valuable step in the initial planning process, as knowing people's attitudes about certain ideas, constructions, and developments or



changes, could lead to avoiding problems with the society on a later stage of the planning process when public hearings are held as they are requested by the law. According to the author, people's involvement in an early stage of the planning process would avoid later problems and would allow the planning process to be smooth and easy.

Although the communication with the local inhabitants provides valuable insight for the planning processes it might have negative consequences as well. It could also be risky and tricky. Planners should always be alert as even if some developments are initiated, suggested or supported by a group of representatives, is not a sign that it would be well perceived by all the people apprehensive of the plan being developed. Also, the initiated by the locals developments, might not be foreseen and supported by the planners due to normative or technical reasons.

Different perceptions and expectations might cause uncertainty but also a scene for negotiation. A topic of another study is whether planners should follow Habermas's idea of collaboration with an end result of consensus, or whether the best possible decision, achieved with a lot of arguments, shall be taken for the regeneration of a certain territory. Thus, the process might be slowed down if arguments are not clear to the citizens or people form protests. Nevertheless, the author supports the participation processes, prior to any other parts of the planning process, as the local knowledge and needs shall be considered by the planners.


Another very interesting to the author topic, typical for the researched country, is the topic of private interests. Many developments happen because a powerful person is willing so. If such a situation is accompanied by participation of local inhabitants and their requirements are not met, the planning process might be prolonged due to the need of public hearings when a plan is not supported by the local population.

Involving locals in the planning process might also lead to emotions in the planners. Such shall be avoided, as the plan should not be biased by personal sensitivity or feelings. Moreover, planners should be careful and should be able to separate the emotions of the inhabitants from their visions for development.

There is also an important step of the planning process which shall be a step after the interviews. The gathered information shall be sifted out to valuable and not valuable one and only the first one shall be further investigated and used for the strategy for development.

When working with local people planners should be aware of the time needed to hear their opinions. This is a downside of conducting interviews on an eye-to-eye basis. The specific type of communication with the people should be chosen with respect to the need of information and the territory being developed. In the specific case of regeneration of living quarters, the author advises the planners to use open-ended and semi-structured interviews as the personal touch with the people provides insights, ideas, perceptions and expectations. Additionally, realistic idea of what is liked and disliked in the neighbourhood by the people is provided to the planners.

Planners should be aware that involving people in the planning process and conducting interviews with them prior to the development of the plan is time and resource costing. Involving civilians at



This is another example of Municipal work: The Municipality have used an existing large open space, which was not maintained for years and have turned into a little park with children playground. What can additionally be notices however is that it is "half-done" as one of the interviewees commented. The pathways are not finised which makes the park not that cozy and comfortable. When it rains it looks like a construction place.



an early stage of the planning process might or might not save time during the development of the plan, depending on the expectations of the people. Contrary, involving local people after the plan is developed might lead to taking many steps back in the progression and cancel already achieved results.

In conclusion, working with the people prior to developing the plan should be carefully done by the planners. Emotions shall not be allowed and emotional statements shall not be considered. The development of the plan shall not be biased by personal involvement and interests. Planners should be aware of all the ups and downs of involving locals prior to the development of the plan. Finally, the time frame of the project shall be carefully planned and some extra time shall be considered in case of unexpected slow down.





# CONCLUSION





The current study aimed at studying the central research question as follows:

**What are the current perspectives and expectations of the residents and ex-residents of the socialist housing estates?**

The study was initiated by the author due to her professional interests and emotional involvement with the post-socialist environment. Initial research on the planning process related the socialist housing estates in Sofia provided the researcher with valuable information on the current status of the Governmental activities related to the researched territory.

Additionally, a consecutive literature study on the practices of other ex-socialist countries and their transformation process provided the researcher with information on the successes and failures of other countries having similar territories. This part of the study ensured the uniqueness of the current study and its aims. Moreover, it ensured the author that the results of the research will be useful and important for the future development of the socialist housing estates.

In conclusion, it may be considered that no big changes are expected by the residents and ex-residents of the socialist housing estates. Importantly, the expected and also desired transformations are manageable and realistic. The inhabitants strive for a cozy environment, park spaces and nicely managed surrounding environment. They appreciate what they already have – well-developed infrastructure and public transport, open-spaces and parks. What they would like is to get some support from the Government and better the appearance of those neighbourhoods. Most importantly, as some of the interviewees explained, “[m]ore and more young people come to live in those neighbourhoods”. In the opinion of the researcher, this is an important remark that should be brought to the attention of both the public and the private sector.







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# APPENDICES

APPENDIX I: REVIEWED DOCUMENTS

APPENDIX II: GUIDING INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

APPENDIX III: INTERVIEW SUMMARIES – GROUP 1 AND 2

APPENDIX IV: INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTIONS



## APPENDIX I: REVIEWED DOCUMENTS

### National Housing Strategy (2005):

The aim of the strategy is to define the objectives and the sub-objectives of the new housing policy and to frame to principles and directions for management aiming at improving the conditions of the dwellings and the dwelling areas and enhancing the level of housing demands. The document is created by the government which says that the need of such a strategy is defined by the importance that dwelling environment plays within the social, economic and culture progress of the community. Among the main outcomes of the study that has been performed in order to publish the strategy is the fact that there is a bad maintenance practice when it comes to the flats. That, as may be read in the document, is an outcome of the fact that there is a minor subsidy for the maintenance of those housing estates – less than 1% of the government's budget. Moreover, the amount goes mainly for old governmental debts. The document also states that the main problem for the bad environment that the dwelling areas provide is the fact that there are no normative documents, which are a foundation for design, construction and certification of the buildings according to their energy characteristics. One of the two main aims defined in the strategy is: Seizing the process of downgrading the conditions of the existing housings. The strategy includes a program (B-3, p. 10 of the document) directly involved with the socialist panel flats – Renovation of the panel flats: The program includes identification of the number of the flats within each municipality and creating a technical passport for each building; renovation – partly subsidized by the municipalities; defining the obligations of the owners of the flats; the foundation of a normative base and financial conditions ensuring the possibility of a technical renovation for the buildings. The strategy concludes with a statement that there will be an informative campaign with the inhabitants to inform them about the new housing strategy.

Interesting: What interested me is the fact that there is a strategy for the housing estates, which discussed their future, but that discussion is based on the buildings only and their technical passport. It is not based on vision for their future, neither on planners'/architects' opinions nor on the wishes or ideas of the inhabitants.

### National Program for Renovation of the Housing Estates in Bulgaria (2005):

The basis for the development of the National program for renovation of the housing estates is the Action plan of the National housing strategy. Priority of the program is the panel flats. Moreover, the technical renovation of the panel flats, according to the program's priorities shall be an inseparable process of the regeneration of the housing estates. Again, the government is involved by means of the renewal of the normative enactments; direct subsidies, methodological and technical assistance, and informative programs. Public-private partnerships are encouraged (please note that the program is accepted in 2004. In 2012 there is still not a final version of the Law for PPPs). Remark 2 of the program: Regeneration of the panel flats – this is the change of their structure and building plan, in this including the parceling of the land for existing and new buildings, green spaces and other initiatives according to a parcel plan. The plan has three phases: 1) 2005 – 2015; 2) 2008 – 2020; 3) according to the successes and failures of the previous two.

Interesting: Important for the current study is the analysis that has been done for the aim of the program. An objective of the program is to assure a sustainable dwelling environment within the neighbourhoods and to ensure aesthetic qualities of the dwelling territories. Systemized problem aspects are:

- Functional, infrastructure and spatial disintegration of the neighbourhoods;
- Big empty spaces – not maintained, used for temporary objects and illegal landfills;
- Due to the restitution that took place in the early 1990s there are buildings and other objects which are built not in accordance with the entity of the environment – often a subject of conflicts and utterances;
  - Missing parking spaces (garages) – the planned underground parking lots are not constructed; the newly (and often by the initiative of the inhabitants) parking containers are not well perceived within the environment – most of the times they are illegally placed on green spaces.
  - Impossibility and lack of spatial structures and planning for social places, trading complexes, cultural buildings and other initiatives of the inhabitants.
  - Bad exploitation, thermal, noise and esthetic qualities of the building installations and the elevators;
  - Tendencies for criminalization of the environment.

It is the aim of the Government to issue the necessary normative and financial conditions so that the above-mentioned problems are executed. It shall specify the obligation of the municipality and the inhabitants. It is the inhabitants' obligation to: Register an entity which shall represent the inhabitants of each panel flats:

- participate in a PPP as municipal entity;
- have financial responsibility for the renovation (financial assistance with governmental measures, including tax decrease and subsidies);
  - have a new attitude towards the use of energy and the maintenance of the common places in the panel flats, including the around-the-panel-flats territories (VERY IMPORTANT – it is not specified what is the territory around the panel flats in the master plan);
  - to be pro-active in the new regime of governance and maintenance of the panel-flats – register and maintain the technical passport of the building, including the around-the-panel-flats territories;
  - to be pro-active in a partnership with the municipality in the maintenance of the newly-planned public green spaces as a result of the restructuring of the neighbourhoods.

### Strategy for the development of the municipality of Sofia (2001):

The document discusses the development of Sofia within the context of a post-socialist environment. Interestingly, it states that a main problem in the development of the city, also caused by the Master Plan, is the fact that even within a democratic environment, the private sector is not considered and used at its maximum. The document discussed the inherited from the socialist times areas – mainly visualizing the industrial zones. A main aim is the development of a more effective spatial structure. The document emphasizes on the bad quality of the socialist panel-flats; also, they are ineffective with regards to the energy consumption. It is recognized that there is a



lack of financing and an ineffective normativity for the maintenance and the management of the panel-flats.

Interesting: The focus of the strategy with regards to the socialist neighbourhoods is on the energy, not on their overall environment. Pilot projects are considered necessary and they focus on the technical renovation only. The open-spaces in between the panel flats are not considered.

**Strategy for the development of the municipality of Sofia (2009):**

This document also emphasizes on the need to regenerate the socialist neighbourhoods, so that they become adequate to the contemporary requirements of the inhabitants – technical renovation, regeneration of the areas between the panel-flats. The document clearly states in Chapter 4.4. The panel-flats cannot be deconstructed – they should be regenerated. For this aim an adequate dwelling policy should be enacted.

**The Master Plan (2009):**

The master plan of Sofia (from 2009), Chapter 4: Conditions and spatial development of the functional systems of Sofia (Municipality of Sofia) says that the statistics data from 2006 is that by 2030 the need of housing would account to 255 000 housings which are highly vulnerable with regards to the need of massive restructuring and renovation of the panel-flats. Similarly to the Strategy for the development of Sofia, the Master plan states that the panel flats cannot be deconstructed, they need to be regenerated.

**Integrated plan for urban regeneration: to be accomplished**

**APPENDIX II: GUIDING INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

**WHAT KIND OF MEANINGS AND VALUES DO THE RESIDENTS AND THE EX-RESIDENT ATTACH TO THE SOCIALIST NEIGHBOURHOODS?**

1. What is your opinion about your (ex) neighbourhood?
2. What are the positive and the negative characteristics of the panel-flat neighbourhoods?  
/What do you like/dislike about your (ex) neighbourhood?
3. How does the environment in your neighbourhood makes you feel?
4. Do you think the panel-flats negihboruhoods provide a nice and contemporary living environment?
  - Coziness;
  - Infrastructure – road network, connections with the central parts, public transport, supermarkets, schoold and kindergardens;
  - Possibilities for sports and recreation;
  - Children playgrounds;
  - Parks
5. Do you feel secure in your (ex) neighbourhood?
  - Criminality;
  - Homeless dogs;
  - Lights on the streets.
6. What do/did you miss?
7. If you had the possibility to move out would you do it and for what would you change your current apartment?
8. How do you feel about your neighbours?
  - Class of the people;
  - Activities about the surrounding space;
  - Community?

**WHAT ARE THE EXPECTATIONS OF THE (EX) INHABITANTS TOWARDS THE FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SOCIALIST NEIGHBOURHOODS?**

1. According to you what is the realistic future of the panel-flats neighbourhoods?
  - Renovation;
  - Demolition;
2. Do you think the Government is working on programs and projects for the renovation of the panel-flats neighbourhoods?
3. Do you think that PPPs are possible in the processes of renovation?
4. Do you think your (ex) neighbours would like to move out and for what reasons?
5. Do you think it is possible to think that in 10-year-time the panel-flats neighbourhoods will have a better look?



**WHAT ARE THEIR WISHES TOWARDS THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SOCIALIST NEIGHBOURHOODS?**

1. If you could change something and you were given a magic stick what would you turn the socialist neighbourhoods into / how would you change them / what would you change?

**APPENDIX III: INTERVIEW SUMMARIES – GROUP 1 AND 2**

**Group 1 (Km.):** My respondent living in a socialist neighbourhood is overall positive about the neighbourhood and the environment. His opinion is that if little management is at hand those neighbourhoods will be a nice a living place.

**Group 1 (E.):** E. was very short in her answers, and seemed not very informed about any programs. However, my overall feeling is that she doesn’t find the idea of the socialist neighbourhoods bad. It is other factors – the homeless dogs and criminality that bother her. But she is aware that it is not different in another neighborhood. She doesn’t want to get away. Similar to the other participants in the interviews she finds it important for the people to be united and participating, to be active. What she lacks is a park, some playgrounds and sports complexes.

**Group 1 (G.):** My overall impression is that Gn. does not have anything against the panel flats. His major problem is the lack of parks in these neighbourhoods. His statement is that these neighbourhoods are present and we need to manage them as if well-managed they could provide a pretty nice living environment. He would prefer smaller blocks but in the situation of having those already Gn. says they are blocks like any other with a different construction method. What intrigued me is his opinion about the power of society and the possibility that the strong voice of the society might change something.

**Group 1 (Id.):** Id. is pretty well-aware of the issues in the panel-flats. What disturbs him, as I could notice, is the initial idea of these flats and the people that surround him. He feels lucky with the territory around his block and is aware that it is not like that everywhere. According to him the problem with the situation in those neighbourhoods is both in the Municipality and in the citizens.

**Group 1 (J.):** J. is very positive about the neighbourhoods and their future, accept several things that I overall think are not that important for him – problems with his neighbours because of payments, noise coming from the next apartments. According to him the panel-flats neighbourhoods need to remain the same, although demolished and build a new, but with the same structure. He would not move out because he has a perfect view, the public transport is well-developed and he has commodities around.

**Group 1 (Ka.):** Ka’s opinion about the panel-flats is both positive and negative. He finds them suitable for accommodating such a huge number of people. What he lacks is nature, plants and trees. He would only move out to live in a house. Importantly, he talks about the newly constructed neighbourhoods and explain that they are much worse than the panel flats as they lack open-space and infrastructure, something that the socialist neighbourhoods are initially planned with.

**Group 1 (K.):** K. is humbled with the idea of living in a socialist neighbourhood. “Well, I am used to it. I can’t say I like it, but I am used to it.” He lives there because he does not have the financial possibility to move away and live in a small village. However, instead of complaining, he has made his way in – he has his bike, he is not bothered by the routes to the center. Also, we shall take into account that he possesses his time as he works from home. He bikes and goes downtown to meet



friends or to do his own business, which is not like travelling with three buses every day to and from work.

Even though humbled, K. has his very strong opinion about what happens in the socialist neighbourhoods. According to him: “Nothing will change much”, “The government does not care”, “Everything is half done”, “The future of those neighbourhoods will be decided last-minute”

In general, K. does not seem or sound attached to his neighbourhood or his neighbours, nor the environment around him. He values his neighbours as they are gentle and say hi to each other, and also, they do not have problems among themselves. The panel-flats are highly disliked by K. and so are the spaces between the panel-flats. What is more, he doesn’t find anything that he can actually do there – they do not have trees or sport grounds, nor a good park. Thus, he uses other areas within the city.

**Group 1 (K.G.):** K.G. is not fond of the socialist neighbourhoods because he doesn’t like living in a block/flat in general and also because they are not maintained. He lacks the open-spaces because they are not maintained. He also thinks that it is also the people that are responsible. According to K.G. the government is not responsible at all. Differently to the rest of the interviewees until now he finds the idea of the pv panels attractive because the families need more independent energy source. K.G. finds the transport network nice by both public transport and car. By his words and explanations you can easily notice that he has thought of his neighbourhood previously and he is concerned about his living space.

**Group 1 (Td.):** Related to the rest of the respondents Td. is quite positive about the socialist neighbourhoods. The things that disturb him are something that he accepts as normal. He desires some changes but in general finds living in the socialist neighbourhood quite pleasant. He finds it easy to reach the central parts, cozy. He doesn’t find the Government active in managing the estates but is not negative towards it because of that.

**Group 2 (D.):** Overall, D. is positive about the socialist neighbourhoods. In her opinion, if well-maintained and renovated those will be a nice place for living. Besides, D. is very positive about things that are already happening like the construction of a Municipal football playground or the renovations of the children playgrounds.

**Group 2 (F.):** F. is overall positive about the neighbourhood with a few exceptions. In general, he likes the central parts more because he is such kind of a person who wants to be part of the buzz. He likes the central location of his new flat and the fact that it is surrounded by parks. However, his statement about the socialist neighbourhoods is that if well managed they are a nice place for living.

**Group 2 (Ek.):** My impression is that Ek. refers to the socialist neighbourhoods as the lower-class neighbourhoods. She is happy with her new neighbourhood. If she was given the possibility she would turn the neighbourhoods into more attractive one, with better vision, without changing their structure.

**Group 2 (Ii.):** Ii. is positive about the socialist neighbourhoods – he dislikes their current situation. He is not disturbed by the many people. He admits that if possible he would turn them into one-family houses but at the same time – he thinks that if well-renovated they will provide a better environment than any newly-built neighbourhood. He is positive about the Government and its action-plans.

**Group 2 (I.):** I’s position about the panel-flats neighbourhood is quite positive when it comes to the whole environment that they have. Her opinion is that if those neighbourhoods are well managed they could provide a perfect living environment. She is sure that if the panel-flats neighbourhoods are managed and the blocks renovated she would like to move back – she enjoys the space that the neighbourhoods offer because there is better infrastructure, open spaces and playgrounds.

**Group 2 (J.):** The feeling that J. left in me that he is very negative towards the socialist neighbourhoods. Moreover, J. is negative about ever living in such one. I asked him whether he could think of going back if they are maintained and re-constructed but he answered “No!” again. The main reason for that is that there are too many people there “It’s a clustering of people!” J’s idea of the development, the future but also the present conditions is that it is all about the people and their mentality. “It is not that somebody does it for you. You do it for yourself!” Besides, according to him the newly constructed flats are inhabited by young people and families who would like to change their environment.

He doesn’t find the state active; “There is no succession in the Governments’ actions”, according to him. Even though he thinks it is the people that should be active, the Government shall follow its obligations. “I work as you know in a construction company. We built the flats, but we also do the infrastructure, because the Municipality would never do it – this is all around Sofia. And even though, we do the pavement for the sake of the people living there, for their comfort, even though it is the municipality that shall do it – they (the state) come and fine the company because we put sand there for the construction works – well, then, where shall I put it, it’s me doing your job, for no money and nothing in return and after all, it’s me (the company) that is receiving the fine. It just doesn’t work that way.”

J’s attitude toward any Government’s action is negative. He doesn’t think they care. However, all the time he stresses that if people feel engaged with the space around them it would be much better.

**Group 2 (N.):** N. seems to be disturbed the most from the fact that many people live in the same block. This, according to him, leads to many problems. He finds the panel-flats neighborhoods not cozy and uncomfortable. According to him the future of the panel-flats is not good as the Government would only take some initiative when the blocks become dangerous.

**Group 2 (T.):** Overall, T’s idea about the panel-flat neighbourhoods is not with a bad idea behind them. The problem, according to her is that they are not maintained. Her main emphasis is on the social awareness and consciousness which is missing. “We are not disciplined! It is about common rules and mentality.” There is no public awareness or consciousness.” According to T. the



Municipality has its obligations but also the people. She moved out with the motif of a better construction, which would also separate her from her neighbours – “In the panel-flats you can hear everything”. She finds it a possible solution that private companies help maintain the open-spaces but there should be some advantage for them in order that to happen.

**Group 2 (M.):** M. is very positive about the socialist housing estates. she shares that they have nice infrastructure and she hopes that they will start to be maintained. She is bothered by the partial renovations, the garbage, the homeless dogs and mostly by the people that are totally not concerned with the environment that surrounds them.

**A DISK WITH THE RECORDS OF ALL INTERVIEWS IS AN INSEPARABLE PART OF THIS THESIS.**

APPENDIX IV: INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTIONS

Interviewees: F. (Group 2)  
Km. (Group 1)  
Date: 11.05.2012  
Time: 20<sup>30</sup> – 20<sup>56</sup> (duration 26 min.)

DESCRIPTION OF THE INTERVIEWEES

**Age group:** 20 – 30

**About:** One of the interviewee (Gr. 2 – F.) is a geodesist; Km. is a computer specialist.

1. What kind of meanings and values do they attach to the socialist neighbourhoods?

*Instead of the usual one-to-one interview situation here I met two friends that wanted to be interviewed together, although from the different groups. One of them lives in a panel-flat neighbourhood, the other one moved away to live in the central parts of the city about a year ago. After the usual introduction of the topic of my thesis and the aim of the interview I started with the first question of their opinion about the socialist neighbourhoods: Km. answered straight away: “I relate the panel-flat neighbourhoods with the place I live at the moment and a ghetto, more or less. This is my opinion. I am used to them. Actually, I don’t live in a panel flat but I am in the neighbourhood, in that environment, thus I have an opinion.” I interrupted to ask about Km’s overall attitude towards the neighbourhood – positive or negative it is? “A lot of drug-users and criminality, but I know these people, well I don’t walk a lot in the evenings. Well, I don’t have problems.” Do you think that if you live in other parts of the city – centrally located it will be different, I asked. “Definitely, for better or worst I can’t say, but I am sure it’s different. I went deeper in the topic about the overall atmosphere in the neighbourhood and asked Km. what does he think created this atmosphere – the fact that they are not well managed or the fact that the price of the flats is way cheaper and people from a lower class can afford those? “Perhaps, the second one”*

*Here, I moved to my second interviewee – F. and asked him what is his opinion about the panel-flats neighbourhoods.”I have lived in a socialist neighbourhood around 20 years – for these years – I like the panel flats. The problem is that they are not well-insulated but on the other hand I like the living in a common neighbourhood with a lot of other people – not to be isolated, one neighbourhood with many people ... a small (commune adds Km.) ... mega polis.” And what is difference between the current place you live and the panel-flats neighbourhood – I mean the neighbours, the surrounding environment, and the open-spaces. “Well, previously, I didn’t have another basis, so that I could compare.” Yeah and what about now, when you compare it to your old neighbourhood? “Well, compared to here – the location is worst and also the problem with the heating – you need much more finances in order to heat the panel-flats. About the open – spaces: they “fixed” them within the last 3-4 years, prior to that they were a garbage container suitable for nothing. Nobody took care for them before, but now they manage them. And as far as I know it’s the inhabitants that take care about them not the municipality.”*

*Here, I asked F. whether if he had the possibility would choose to live in a panel-flat neihgbourhood or in his current place. “Elsewhere in the central part. Like here – I like it more because it’s brick-constructed building. It’s in the central area – close to anywhere, close to many parks – I have “Borisova gradina” on one side and “Zaimov” on the other. On the other hand, as a neighbourhood – my previous neighbourhood – it’s not bad as it has infrastructure, supermarkets, it has everything. I didn’t miss anything.”*



*I referred back to Km, asking him whether his neighbourhood is good enough according to his needs talking about infrastructure, supermarkets, etc. Is it suitable for your everyday needs, I wrapped up: "Yes, it's ok." So, you don't have a problem with shopping and the distance from the central parts of the city? "There are supermarkets, there's the metro, the transport is all ok. You can even live without going out of the neighbourhood." What about, I went, with the sports equipment. "There are a lot of such in close neighbourhoods. In our neighbourhood there are about, I don't know, the municipality constructed, with the support of EU programs, about 5-6 basketball/football playgrounds, which are pretty well managed." F. interrupted me to say that in his part of the neighbourhood they also constructed a number of sports playgrounds. Km. continued by describing the problem with these playgrounds – the problem, as he sees it is that everyone plays and there is no control, you can't go and play, because somebody else is there already. Therefore, he and his friends play football on private grounds. F. added that another problem is that once they make them, nobody manages them after that. He describes the situation with the nets – all damaged already but not changed. But the nice part is that they created those playgrounds, which are a good number for the neighbourhood and the population it has. Km. adds that he and his friend clean them and manage them as far as they can because we know that there won't be other – "It's what they made, that's it and we need to take care of them."*

*I moved to the topic of the children playgrounds. I asked my interviewees whether they think those neighbourhoods offer an adequate environment for little children and children in general. "If you had children now would be ok taking them outside?" Km. answered: "Yes, my neighbourhood has enough children playgrounds. They are managed – by the inhabitants, not by the municipality, again." I asked whether the old children playgrounds from the early years of the neighbourhoods are managed. "Well, not – on other places." Km. explained that there a lot of cafes with playgrounds where the children can play. "It's ok." What about a park? "The West park is pretty close. It's not very nice. For parks – there are the downtown parks, or Vitosha (aka the mountain).*

*I asked F. about his opinion about the environment of the socialist neighbourhoods and the children. "If you have children, the panel-flats are not densely built as the new neighbourhoods which do not have paved streets, open-spaces and playgrounds. I've heard of places where restitution is at hand and a block is built in the in-between spaces, where children playgrounds are constructed. Luckily, there are no such events in my previous neighbourhood – the open-space garden is an open-space garden, for now. Overall, the panel-flat neighbourhoods have enough green spaces where children can play."*

*I moved to the topic of criminality, asking whether my interviewees feel comfortable and safe in the neighbourhood. Km. answered that this is a relative condition. On my question about the lighting and whether this is the problem F. answered that the problem is in the lower class of the inhabitants – and emphasized that the problem is in the people, not in the neighbourhood itself. Km. added the criminal groups are well-gathered in those neighbourhoods but he, as a long-living inhabitant of the neighbourhood feels ok. He added that the streets that lead to the metro are well-lit but there are areas that are dark. "It's not a problem. Personally, I don't have a problem."*

*I asked my interviewees whether they have a problem with the homeless dogs and whether their number is greater than in other parts of the city. Km. answered that there a lot of homeless dogs but he doesn't have a problem with them. "They do not bite or run after you." F. answered that in his part of the neighbourhood there's no problem with the homeless dogs. There are just a few, but he emphasized that in the central parts there are not at all.*

F. added himself that the good side of the panel-flats neighbourhood is that there is not a problem with the parking yet, while in the central parts this is a huge problem.

*I asked F. what he missed in his old neighbourhood on an everyday basis. "Well, it's the parks – here I am surrounded by parks and it's in the center of the city. And psychologically, here's another class of people. When I go back to visit my parents in my old neighbourhoods I get scared, it's awful." Km. answer on the question was similar – he also referred to the parks and a nice place for jogging.*

## **2. What are their expectations towards the development of the socialist neighbourhoods?**

*On my question about the future of the panel flats, my interviewee Km. answered: "I think it will remain a ghetto. Lower class people will be living there because of the lower prices." My next question was about their renewal: Km. said that part of them will be renovated. Because of the economic crisis, no investments will take place, which is normal, but also no new blocks will be built in between."*

*My next question is about the attraction of private investors to work with the panel-flats neighbourhoods. Km. explained about the program "Energy efficiency", which allows you to renovate the building, which is partly subsidized by the Government – you are allowed to take a loan and pay back the investment in several years as Km. explained. "The private investors use the low prices – they come and build and then leave misery behind them."*

*I asked Km. whether he thinks it is possible that the private sector manage the open spaces on the same principle as they placed new children playgrounds on the center, earning from advertisement: "No chance at all! They will do something that gets them real money. They don't think from the other side. If they manage the open-spaces and they turn the neighbourhood or parts of it into nice places, the price of the flats will get higher and so on. Really, they can make money out of that. However, nobody does that. What I envision is that there is already a parking, a river on the side. It's nice for living. It could be nice for living there. The landscape is quite nice but because of private investors that require quick and easy money, everything is ruined."*

*I asked my second interviewee F. what is his opinion on the subject: "Renovation with the assistance of the Municipality – financial. They already started something. Nobody will invest in something new. Perhaps the life-expectancy is above 100 years, so ..."*

*I asked my interviewees whether they assume it is possible the future of the panel-flats to be like the ones in Germany for example – ruined and built afresh: "In Bulgaria – very hard, if financed by the Government", answered Km. F. said: "How would you make it, when you have a 16-storey building?" Km. concluded that the fact that there are no new blocks being built in the open spaces in between the existing blocks is due to the economic crisis – once it is over, they will start, you will see."*

*On my question about the Government and whether it works on programs for the renovation of the panel flats Km. answered: "Yes, something is being done. It should be doing something. But we do not feel it. If something is visually changed or managed – this is done by the inhabitants. Besides those playgrounds they built."*

*I continued the interview asking Km. whether he would remain living in his neighbourhood or would move out if he had the possibility: "I've though a lot about this and I don't have an answer*



on that question. Perhaps, I would move out.” He continued by explaining that he is growing up and he would like a calmer place, next to the mountain. At the same time he said that the people living in those places he envisioned are with noses up in the sky, which he dislikes. “I don’t know – he said at last.” *I asked him whether his neighbours would like to move out:* “Yeah, certainly. In the block I live at the moment, there were houses and the people from the ex-houses live in the block now. The block is nice, we have our garden in front – it’s nice. After some thought my respondent said that the people from his block would not move out because they are at a certain age already. They do not go out of the neighbourhood and for them it is no use to move out. “The neighbourhood is very calm for them.”

*I turned to F. and asked him about his previous neighbours and whether they would move out:* “Well, some of them moved out – towards the center. The rest desire a closed neighbourhood, close to the mountain. But they offer worst conditions than the one they live in at the moment (*Km. supported the idea*). The things they desire are not to happen in Bulgaria.” *Here Km. concluded:* “Better don’t ruin the panel-flats. The new buildings are worse than the panel-flats. Seriously!”

### 3. What are their wishes towards the development of the socialist neighbourhoods?

*I asked my interviewees about what they desire to happen with the panel-flats. If you had a magic stick what would you do with the panel-flats, I asked:* Km. said: “If I could move out the criminals and the neighbourhood will be a nice place for living. The panel-flats neighbourhoods are more or less managed. There are no miseries. Get out the criminals and the drug-dealers and it will be perfect for living.” *I tuned to F. and asked him about his opinion:* “I think that we should go one step behind and everything centralized now in the malls should be de-centralized back to the neighbourhoods. Each neighbourhood should have a cinema, clubs. It shouldn’t be like it is at the moment – centralization in 4-5 buildings and everyone goes there. Each neighbourhood should have cinemas, bars, etc.

*The interview finished with a discussion about the good old times when each neighbourhood had a cinema.*

Interviewee: E.  
Date: 26.02.2012  
Time: 16<sup>30</sup> - 17<sup>00</sup> (duration 30 min.)

## DESCRIPTION OF THE INTERVIEWEE

**Age group:** 30 – 40

**About:** HR, originally not from Sofia, lives in a panel-flat in Sofia for about 10 years now.

### 1. What kind of meanings and values do they attach to the socialist neighbourhoods?

*After introducing the topic of my research and the aim of the interview I asked my first question which was about the opinion of E. about the socialist neighbourhoods, specifically the one that she lives in. She responded that she can’t give a definitive answer. I asked her about some positive and negative things that she encounters.* “Well, positive is that it is comfortable. Although it is an outer neighbourhood there is a lot of transportation means and you easily get where you want to go. But on the other hand it so not cozy, there is no place where you can go for a walk. There is no park.”

*I asked how she feels when she comes home with regards to the neighbourhood in genera:* “It is a pleasant feeling.” *And she adds:* “I don’t know many people. They are not my type I guess.”

*That lead me to my next questions about the social issues as the neighbours and whether they are active, whether they participate in common activities, etc. To those questions E. said that there are about two groups of people who mingle.* “There are some interactions. You greet your neighbours.” Some of the neighbours are responsible for common issues. Our entrance is one of the badly maintained. We are one of the families which would participate for common activities. And some of the other would do the same. But not all - definitely! Well, if I can afford it, of course, I am not going to get a credit to participate in fixing the open-space outside.”

*Then I asked about the feeling of safety and security in the neighbourhood:* “Safety?!? No! And I am definitive that I would not feel safer anywhere else – look at the grids in front of the windows, the security doors ...” *I asked how she feels on her way home from the bus-stop, for example.* “How would I feel? It’s full of homeless dogs everywhere. To be honest, if I have to get home at 11 I would get a taxi which would stop in front of the entrance. I am scared otherwise.”

*My following question was whether she wants to live somewhere else:* “No – she said – I don’t live with the idea of getting away.”

*Do you think that the panel flats offer an adequate living environment, I asked. And I added, if you had a little child what would you do?* “There is no place for him to live; I can’t go outside without being worried – garbage, homeless dogs, ... What I have to do is get the car and take the child in the centrally-located parks – and she marks them.”

“Otherwise, there are enough supermarkets. I don’t need a Mall or a shop for cloths nearby”.

*To my question of what she misses in the neighbourhood E. responded immediately:* “A nice park, a sports center, that’s it.” *I asked whether there is a space in the neighbourhood which is preferable for living, or she would change – she thought for a few seconds and gave a negative answer.*

### 2. What are their expectations towards the development of the socialist neighbourhoods?



*I asked what is E's idea about the future of the neighbourhood. She said that she doesn't expect anything good to happen. "They will decay and will be continuing to decay!" I explained about the pv panels and the idea of the government to place them on top of the panel-flats. Her response was that there should be something done with the buildings themselves and added: "Those buildings are falling apart."*

*I asked further about the way she sees the Government and whether according to her there are some programs for the reconstruction of the neighbourhoods. She answered: "The programs are idealizing the situation. Things should be applicable. The people themselves should be active. When there is an initiative .... I don't know ... perhaps the other people have their own problems and those things seem too much. But everyone has his own problems and they are the most important ..." "There should be some social responsibility" – E. continued a few seconds later.*

*Well, then, I asked, do you think the private sector can help with doing something for those open-spaces? – "If the private companies participate in improving the open spaces it would be much better, I guess!"*

### **3. What are their wishes towards the development of the socialist neighbourhoods?**

*Finally, I asked about her wishes for the future of the neighbourhood. E. started with the need of the panel-flats to be reconstructed. "I would like to have a park, a playground for the children, just to be able to go outside for a walk, to get out of your earth; to have enough parking spaces." And she concludes: "If we are contemporary and thinking people we should work for a better environment."*

Interviewee: Gn.  
Date: 10.05.2012  
Time: 19<sup>10</sup> – 19<sup>40</sup> (duration 30 min.)

## **DESCRIPTION OF THE INTERVIEWEE**

**Age group:** 20 – 30

**About:** Works in a computer company

### **1. What kind of meanings and values do they attach to the socialist neighbourhoods?**

*After introducing the topic of my thesis and the aim of the current interview I continued by summarizing the information that I already have that the interviewee moved several times into different neighbourhoods (all of them from the socialist type of panel-flats). Prior to that he was living in one of the best neighbourhoods of Sofia – centrally located, close to a big park, all surrounded by green spaces. Along with that the neighbourhood is located close to one of the major road arteries of Sofia. My main question here was: What is the major difference that you perceive between the panel-flat neighbourhoods and Iztok? Gn. answered straight away: "So, a major difference number one is the total missing of parks. It's just that the close vicinity of the park "Borisova gradina" is something of great importance. Secondly, the panel-flat neighbourhoods are over-occupied and there are no park spaces. It is a matter of luck whether you can park your car. Last, the panel-flats are occupied by cheap-looking Cafes and shops which ruin the whole perception of a nice area." And he confirmed that the most important thing that he misses is a park. I asked how he feels living in a socialist neighbourhood: "Except the lack of a park and infrastructure, it's all the same. The greater number of neighbours is not something that causes a difference. Generally, my opinion is that the panel-flat neighbourhoods are not something bad. It's just that in the context of where I live in what disturbs me is the lack of adequate infrastructure for the needs of the people. I guess in some other parts of Drujba might be different but here is like that." My next question is: Do you think that the panel-flat neighbourhoods would provide an adequate living environment if they are renovated and the open-spaces managed? "Yes, certainly, if the panel flats are renovated the least that will be noticed is unification of the outer look and we would not be seeing those ugly buildings, partly renovated, which ruin the whole vision of the neighbourhood. Additionally, not to be discussed, many of the expanses of the dwellers will be lowered. Thus, the life will be cheaper and better." Do you think that, even though they are not well managed, they offer an adequate living environment? "Certainly, after all the price of a flat in a panel-flat block is way lower than the ones in better neighbourhoods or in the central parts of the city. My idea is that with a small enthusiasm we can achieve a lot and receive more than there is at the moment." I asked Gn. Whether he partakes in managing the surrounding space and he was negative. I continued with asking whether we could discuss comfort and desire to go out for a walk in the neighbourhood. Gn. responded: "This is the greatest contrast with my life in Iztok where the atmosphere makes you go out. I guess the people that are used to the environment here know where to go they go out and perhaps have an adequate social life. It does not happen to me. I am not sure I should blame the neighbourhood for that. It's just that ones you are used to a specific way of life it's really hard to change it." Does that mean that you would go back to live in Iztok if you have the possibility. "I will definitely go back to Iztok, or in a neighbourhood similar to it."*

*My next question is related to the sports complexes and sports possibilities that the neighbourhood offers. "Well, the lack of park answers this question pretty well. Similar to most of the neighbourhoods no possibilities for bike ride are offered or another normal sport. I guess there*



are some fitness centres but I don't attend those. I guess if an open-air fitness is placed outside it will be very nice – that's something very good. The possibilities of sports and recreation are one and the same with all of the rest of the peripheral neighbourhoods. (*When speaking of peripheral the citizens of Sofia mean socialist neighbourhoods*). What I mean is that the lack of a park is a main factor in that."

*The next questions are related to the children and the places they have to play. I also asked Gn. how comfortable he would feel to let his child play outside alone after a certain age.* "In the context of the place I live at the moment – there are well-managed places for little children. Also, all the people come here – it's relatively safe and comfortable. When we talk about teenagers I am not sure how much the neighbourhood plays a role in whether it's safe or not. I think here is more or less the same compared to the rest of the neighbourhoods."

*Are the homeless dogs a problem for you?* "Well, not for me. I meet them rarely. I know they are there. However, in most of the cases they are either lying on the ground or totally not caring about me."

*Criminality is the topic that I touch here: Compared to the previous place of living for you – Iztok – how do you feel here. Do you feel safe?* "I don't think there is a difference. There are homeless dogs in Iztok as well." *I explained that I talk about lights on the streets, criminality, etc.* "Iztok was specified by its vicinity to Pliska – one of the major bus-stops in Sofia. That makes all type of strange people gather there. Personally, I felt disturbed in the evenings. In the evening you could meet all kind of strange people, who do not live there and that made me feel uncomfortable. Here, in a neighbourhood that is distanced and not that tensed I feel calmer. I guess these counts for all centrally located neighbourhoods." *And what about the lights in the evening, I asked.* "Well, I notice the lack of such in some streets. Sometimes you can notice bulbs which are not working properly, some places lack lamps at all. This is the same as in my previous neighbourhoods. There, we had lamps on the streets but they were not working. Well, this is one of the small and cheap things that could be done to achieve more comfort."

*What do you miss the most in Drujba? What would you want to have around in the vicinity?* "Nice places for going out – quality cafes and bars. The neighbourhood cafes and restaurants are disreputable. I need something nice where you can have a social life. I mean the closer you go to the center the better places you have. This is a fact!"

## **2. What are their expectations towards the development of the socialist neighbourhoods?**

*I moved to the second part of the interview questions asking about the future of the socialist neighbourhoods. I explained about the life-expectancy? Do you think they will be taken care after? Do you think that the Government is involved with their future? After all, they are a big part of the territory of the city. Do you think something is happening? Gn. asked me whether the question is about whether he thinks the Government is involved or whether he thinks the Government should be involved. I responded that it is the first case.* "Such information has not reached me. I have heard of programs for renovation several times similar to the ones that have been done already in Eastern Germany. But I haven't heard anything of those to be applied in practice. I guess the Municipality of Sofia have people working on that; or perhaps an accident should happen which is more real to think about."

*Who do you think is responsible for managing the open-spaces?* "Mmm, the Municipality – but not the municipality of Sofia, but the regional administrations – the ones working for each neighbourhood plu the people living in the blocks – the people should not make garbage or ruin; for the trees, plants, etc. – we pay tax and the local administration should do what is needed. I don't believe it's normal that you go out and plant grass, let's say."

*Generally speaking, do you think that if we take all of these flats and renovate them – unify them, with differing details, and manage the open-spaces, the neighbourhoods would offer an adequate environment?* "Yeah, certainly, if somebody does not believe, he or she may personally go and see how the problem is solved in Eastern Berlin. These are block as all of the rest, except the specific construction method. If we manage the look and the open-spaces, the problem would be solved. Perhaps, some below the land parking lots will be needed and park-spaces because I am sure that when these neighbourhoods were built they were not planned for such a big number of cars. In the moment there are no parking lots."

*Well, do you personally think, that in 10-years-time, let's say, somebody would think about them and would renovate them or ruin them and build them afresh. What do you think should happen to those neighbourhoods?* "Look, in order to activate such a process a critical amount of people should gather and signal the problems in the media. I do not stand behind the opinions that if we await the municipality to initiate something that would actually happen. Enough people live here – 50-60 thousand. These are only in this neighbourhood. In Mladost there are more than 85 thousand. If these people initiate something, a difference might happen. It is a fact that this Government is let to be led by people's initiatives. This is not simple. But if committees are formed, something might change. If we wait for the administration – I doubt that something would change."

*Are you personally pro or against the construction of new blocks in the open-spaces in between the existing flats?* "Of course I am against. If somebody is for he can move out to Borovo, where there are no open-spaces left and say whether he likes it. After all, the open spaces are planned for playgrounds for children and recreation. Their aim is not for new blocks. There is a Master plan for that. There is space for Sofia's expansion and there is no need to place new buildings in existing territories."

*Do you think it's realistic to think that such neighbourhoods would attract the private sector? I explained what I mean by sharing some private initiatives for playgrounds in centrally located territories.* "In order to attract private investors, there should be income from that whole thing. The only way to attract private investors is the local administration to assign this task, have a contest and pay them to manage the renovation. No investor would come and do this work on good will. Let's be realist. They need to earn from something? What is it there to earn from? In the case of "Actavis" it is about advertisement. Here we talk about a lot of money. For private initiatives – it will be very difficult. I am not sure how this could happen. Generally, this is a work of the Government, on the other hands it's not. I am not sure as these flats are constructed in totally different times. The people own the appartments so perhaps it's them who should invest in the renovation. From that point of view, why should the Government do something about these flats? I think the municipality should work on European programs and partly cover the investment. The bad thing is that this is highly related to the people's mentality in Bulgaria."

*We discussed the topic of people's desires to move out or stay in the complex.* "I think the people that live here for ages do not want to move out as they are used to the life they have here. In



reality with a good outer and inner renovation – it’s not that bad to live in such a neighbourhood. I know many people who can afford to move elsewhere but they haven’t as they are used to it and feel comfortable. You know that when the people create their comfort zone do not move out of it.”

### 3. What are their wishes towards the development of the socialist neighbourhoods?

*In the third phase of the interview I asked Gn. what he would wish to happen with these neighbourhoods if he was given a magic stick. “Firstly, I would like to see unified buildings and renovated, with managed open-spaces, with distinctive places for dogs and playgrounds for children, with an adequate street lights and park-problem solved; also very important – an adequate public transport.”*

*I asked Gn. whether we can conclude that in his words the panel-flat neighbourhoods have future if somebody takes appropriate care for them. “In my opinion, the panel-flat neighbourhoods have their future because you don’t have the alternative to change them for something else. This is a huge amount of people. Whether you want or not, the work should be done.” If you were given the possibility to ruin them and build something afresh what would build? “Well, small blocks. But this is not realistic because you can accommodate this amount of people in small blocks. The city is developed in a way that ruining them is not adequate in reality. The neighbourhoods are here and we need to manage them.”*

Interviewee: Id.  
Date: 19.05.2012  
Time: 12<sup>15</sup> - 12<sup>30</sup>(duration 15 min.)

## DESCRIPTION OF THE INTERVIEWEE

**Age group:** 30 – 40

**About:** Works in the construction business

### 1. What kind of meanings and values do they attach to the socialist neighbourhoods?

*I introduced the topic of my research, informed Id. about all the formal issues of the interview being anonymous and the information that I take out of it will be used for the purposes of the current research only. As usual, I started off the interview asking about Id’s opinion about the panel-flat neighbourhoods. He answered: “I relate them to a necessity and I call them dormitories. They are a place for sleeping – this is the only thing they satisfy successfully.” I asked him why. “Because they satisfy the necessities limited. They are the so called sleeping dormitories.”*

*Do you see any positive or negative characteristics, I asked next. “First of all, the aim of creating these neighbourhoods is ... well, they divide the community, let’s start from here. The reason they are constructed is that they needed to accommodate the people working in the industry. The luxury neighbourhoods are such because they accommodate people from the administration – the managers of the city, directors, culture-involved people – mainly artists, painters, etc. This is initially thought when constructing the neighbourhoods. The neighborhoods that are in the center and close to it has many embassies, and other administrative and foreign trading companies, which are placed there ... they create another atmosphere and neighbourhood culture. The panel-flats neighbourhoods are ghettos and because of that the position towards them is neglectful. With the beginning of their exploitation they are like that. After that through the years the population mixed a little bit. But they are still like that. That is why I can’t see any positive characteristics. I see an advantage only when related to the most central parts because the open-space is more – you can’t breathe there.”*

*I interrupted to ask Id. whether he thinks that his negative attitude is cause also by the fact that the neighbourhood is not well managed. I asked him to think about the fact that the blocks are badly looking and the open-spaces not managed, full of garbage, etc. and if they were nicely managed would this change his opinion: “Yes, of course, the good-looking space creates respect in the people and thus it has good consequences. Respect is what makes people do not do indecent things.”*

*Well, then I continued, do you think that even though they are not managed the infrastructure is well-developed – talking about road network, public transport, supermarkets, kinder gardens, schools, etc.? “Except the additional construction that took place with the restitution of land, these are the only neighbourhoods that have good infrastructure. They have the capacity to take, well-planned of course, not the capacity to accommodate chaotic actions.” Are you bothered by the time you need to get to the center? “Not any more, we have the subway already.”*

*What about the children? You have two children – are there places where you can take them for a walk or play? “The region that I live in, the nearby space around us offers such places – there is a small park, schools and kinder gardens. This is without crossing big boulevards. The nice thing about that is that these are parks around schools, the local municipality, etc. and thus they are managed by the Municipality and the inhabitants as well. The rest of the green spaces are such in*



between the blocks and they are not managed in a similar way. This is the positive characteristic of the place I live in.” *Here I wanted to confirm that according to Id. there are other parts of the neighbourhood that do not offer the same comfortabilities, and he confirmed:* “No, this is the region I live in, the other parts of the neighbourhood are not like that.”

*My next question is about the safety in the neighbourhood. Do you feel safe - I asked - are the streets well-lit in the evenings?* “No, they are not well-lit, but there much worse places, where I have been. There is much to be done.” *I asked Id. whether the homeless dogs are a big problem, compared to other neighbourhoods!* He confirmed they are a problem. *My next question was about how does his wife feels when she comes home in the evenings:* “She feels threaten every day she comes back, especially in the evenings – it’s the homeless dogs and the idea of someone attacking her, both of these.” *I asked Id. whether it would be different in another neighbourhood, but he said it would be like that in every neighbourhood.*

*If you have the possibility would you move out, I asked Id.* “Well, I haven’t thought about that issue. For me it is certain that we will live here because we have two apartments already. It is comfortable for us by means of habits that we have at the moment. That’s the reason why we wouldn’t change it. As a way of living this is.”

*I asked Id., whether he knows if his neighbours would like to move out because of all the negatives the neighbourhood offers them. He explained that some of his neighbours are moving out because of the conditions in the block, but he doesn’t know if they move out of the neighbourhood.*

## **2. What are their expectations towards the development of the socialist neighbourhoods?**

*I moved to the second part of the interview asking Id. to look realistically and tell me what is the future of the panel-flat neighbourhoods:* “If we compare their development, or better the way of exploitation of those neighbourhoods in Bulgaria and other countries – the development is down – both as a price and as a condition of the panel-flats, they are not managed. Even if there is a possibility for the management to happen, everyone does it on his own and this does not the end result better. It is a temporary decision for each apartment.”

*Referring to what happened in other countries, I asked Id. whether he thinks the Government is engaged with programs for the renovation of the panel flats:* “As far as I know such programs are being developed but we are a little interested in those. We use a little of those. Because if the Government does a small part, and then this small part is of interest to the population, it is possible that this little part is being built over and then we’ll get the big thing. In a way, the Government can do nothing big if the population is not involved. This is a type of economic commitment because it is money-dependent. If this thing is used it will be developed, if it is not used it will be ruined. Plus, there already examples of completely renovated panel-flats and they look like any other brand –new building – just a few of course but they are a good example“.

*I asked Id. whether in his opinion a PPP is a solution to the problem with the huge territories of the panel-flat neighbourhoods.* “Perhaps it is possible. I am not aware of the mechanism. Within the next ten years there is still the possibility of getting the situation better. After that it will be too late. The end of the life-expectancy of these blocks is coming – in about 10 years, the things will much harder at that time.

## **3. What are their wishes towards the development of the socialist neighbourhoods?**

*I asked Id. to imagine that he has a magic stick and then asked him how would he change or transform the negihbourhoods if he had that possibility.* “I will construct underground parking spaces. In fact, the cars are what take more than 50% of the space – the open space than can be used for nice purpose from the population.” *I asked Id. whether he would transform in any way the blocks into smaller ones or houses and he answered negatively:* “First of all, the panel flats have a very good density. Realistically, there is a space between them. The only thing that is missing is parking spaces because now the open-space is taken over by the cars.”

*After finishing the interview I met Id. later and he wanted to share his opinion with me but without the recorder. Here’s what I could manage to write down:*

“I would like to talk about the issue of renovation that you asked about during the interview. The municipality has some kind of participation. About the condition of these blocks – the part of the Administration that deals with the territorial issues – they do not have much work at the moment because the levels of construction are pretty low and thus there is no money flow. So, not only in the interest of the inhabitants but also in the interest of the Municipality, a money flow will be created. Let the Municipality attach the inhabitants directly. The hole is in the Municipality – they do not have work, they do nothing. The panel-flat blocks are standard – the Municipality needs to make unit prices and an advertising campaign with the inhabitants on their monthly gatherings. The only difficulty is that the Municipality can’t suggest an executor. But providing the inhabitants with unit prices they can choose and executor themselves. The professional unit is there. It is a plus that the blocks are standard and at the same age.

Another thing is about the open-spaces. They are used by a lot more people than the open-spaces in other types of neighbourhoods. In the panel-flat negihbourhoods the open-spaces are for everyone, while in the other neighbourhoods they are more private. Being a place used by many people but managed by few is the issue. The humans should not only use the space but also take care of it.



Interviewee: Ja.  
Date: 18.05.2012  
Time: 19<sup>50</sup> - 20<sup>15</sup> (duration 25 min.)

## DESCRIPTION OF THE INTERVIEWEE

**Age group:** 20 – 30

**About:** Ja. has a private business in the construction business.

### 1. What kind of meanings and values do they attach to the socialist neighbourhoods?

*When I met Ja. and while I was preparing to get starter with the interview questions he just started off talking about the panel-flats: "The reason I would move out of this neighbourhood is that the land below the block is not mine." He stopped for a second, while I was trying to inform him that the interview is anonymous and about his purpose. However, he ignored my words and continued, apparently wanting to say what he has to say: "Problems are the common spaces in the block itself and the payments we have in common. I can't change the water pipes and the whole installation because the people living in the apartments below me can't afford it, or do not want to do it. So, if I want to make my apartment better I have to pay for all of them because I can't change only my system. Everyone below me has to do it as well. It is a similar situation with the roof. I am on the last floor and I have problems with flooding, but my neighbours from the first floor do not have this problem and they are thus against fixing the roof, or in other words against spending common money for that purpose. An inconvenience is the parking places. If you get home after 5.30 there's no place for your car. It is dirty around the blocks. I don't know who but there are people that throw out their garbage out of the window." I asked Ja.who cleans around the block: "We do clean. Sometimes people from the Municipality clean." He also explained that the three families that are on his floor (including himself) are pretty organized and they do some gardening in front of the block, they clean and take care about the open space around. After that he continues himself: "It is impossible to manage with the awful neighbours. But what freaks me out the most is the fact that I can't give up the central thermal heating. You always have to pay, even if you cut all the heating installation in your apartment because you have the vertical pipes that go through your apartment and the emit heating."*

*Ja.next words were, without even letting me ask a question or say something: "These are some of the negatives, now let's see the positives. It is relatively easy to manage the apartment, compared to a house. Also, even that they are ageing, the construction method is good, I can't complain about that." And he goes back to the negatives: "The open-spaces are really dirty." I asked Ja.whether there is a park in his neighbourhood. He explained that in his neighbourhood there is no park, but there are three parks around, at about 20 – 30 minutes walking distance: "I go for walks in one of them which is around 20 minutes away from my block, and I go jogging there." What about the sports places? Does your neighbourhood provide you a possibility for practicing some sports? "Well, there are bars here and there. The municipality constructed football/basketball playgrounds which are quite nice."*

*My next question is related to the Ja's neighbours: "We have troubles with my neighbours when there are payments involved. Again, the neighbours that I have on my floor are very nice and we have social activities. There is a group of people in my block and we take care about the open space around. The bad thing is that there are Cafes and Bars around and is really noisy."*

*Do you think, I asked, that the homeless dogs in your neighbourhood are more than in other central parts of the city: "I am not afraid of them and I don't notice them. However, they are a problem for me because they wake me up in the middle of the night."*

*What about the feeling of safety that you have in the neighbourhood? "I feel calm and safe. I don't know about the others." I asked whether the lights on the streets are fixed and Ja.answered that the lighting is more or less ok.*

*I asked Ja.whether in his opinion the panel-flat neighbourhoods offer a good living environment: "Well, yes, they are a perfect alternative of the expansive and land-taking one-family houses. The city is over-populated – the panel-flats are cheap and many people can live in small areas."*

*I discussed the infrastructure in the neighbourhood and I asked Ja.about his opinion. He explained that the roads are well-developed but they are badly managed: "Typically for Bulgaria", Ja.said. "I am totally satisfied with the public transport though."*

*Here I asked Ja.about his opinion about the children playgrounds and he said: "They fixed them a few years ago – the children playgrounds."*

*If you had the possibility – I said – would you move out or would you stay? Ja.said: "I would stay – Ja.answered straight ahead - I have a gorgeous view."*

### 2. What are their expectations towards the development of the socialist neighbourhoods?

*My next question is related to the future of the socialist neighbourhoods: What do you think is the future of the panel-flat neighbourhoods if we look realistically on the situation? "The will detonate them and they will have to build something new on their place." I asked him whether this realistic and he explained that these block – the panel-flat blocks – have a 65-year life expectancy and this is the solution. "The best option to be chosen is to detonate them and build them anew; in the worst case they will renovate them." I asked Ja.whether the blocks that are to be rebuilt if the old ones are renovated are to be with the same size and location or something needs to be changed: "They need to be precisely the same, only built again with new materials."*

*I asked Ja.whether in his opinion the Government has plans about the future of those neighbourhoods or is about to initiate a new management for them and Ja.was negative about that. I then asked about the PPP possibility and whether he thinks this is all possible: "There are such programs. Unfortunately, it's all about interests of different people."*

*My next question is related to J's neighbours and their desires to move out. He explained in depth that they would like to move out because most of the people have a specific attitude towards their living environment. "It's really strange. They hardly do anything to make the space around them more comfortable and cozy but a lot of these people live with the idea that if they move to a "better" neighbourhood their class will be a level higher. Idiotic way of thinking that is."*

### 3. What are their wishes towards the development of the socialist neighbourhoods?

*My last question is about the wish of Ja.about the panel-flat neighbourhoods. I asked him if he had a magic stick what he would do. "I would change them for passive buildings. I wouldn't change them for houses. The blocks are a very good option, as I said already, houses take a lot of space – at the same time this is an overdevelopment and damaging the environment."*



Interviewee: K.  
Date: 23.02.2012  
Time: 20<sup>30</sup> - 21<sup>30</sup> (duration 1h.)

## DESCRIPTION OF THE INTERVIEWEE

**Age group:** 40 – 50

**About:** engineer, but he repairs bikes for living. K. is a sporty person – he is very active and bikes all the time. If for some reason he can't use his bike, he uses a car.

### 1. What kind of meanings and values do they attach to the socialist neighbourhoods?

*K. starter the interview with a very definitive answer to my question "What is your opinion about your neighbourhood?" by saying: "Generally, the socialist neighbourhoods are totally inhospitable." And he continued: "besides all the necessities that you just have for granted – and I mean electricity, heating, water, etc – all the rest are negatives. Living in panel flats is like living in a forest of flats. There are no trees, no green spaces."*

*What is it precisely that you do not like, I asked? K. structured himself: "I will talk about negatives then: there are no trees, it is a forest of flats. There is a lack of alleys – for both pedestrians and bikers, there are no pavements. Oh, sorry, they made this bike-alley. But guess what? It literally ends in the middle of a round-about. Everything that we have is halfway done. There is mud everywhere, black roads, etc." And then he goes quiet, obviously thinking, for about half a minute. Noticing he was going to say something I remained quiet and waited. And then, he continued: "The worst of the flats is that you hear everything, every noise of the neighbours, the elevators, everything. That is terrible!"*

*Is there anything positive that you find about your neighbourhood? K. immediately answered: "Yes, it's cheaper than living in a house. And that's it"*

*How about sport complexes, I asked? You are an active person, I said. K. laughed and answered that there are no such. He gave the example that when he was young he and his friends used to play football in the schools play-yards. My following question was related to the provision of schools and kinder-gardens, but he said that he never noticed whether there are enough or not, because his son studied in different schools in other neighbourhoods, so he was never interested.*

*The conversation naturally flowed into the topic of the neighbours of K. Importantly, he does not find them in any way different to any other group of people – no matter, he stresses, and whether they live in centrally located neighbourhoods or anywhere else. "The people are everywhere the same." He continues explaining that he likes his neighbours: " They are quite active, they gather down where the entrance area of the flats is, where they have put some benches and have some tea / coffee / bier (in the summer) – and they talk and laugh." K. defines the environment that he lives in as dynamic. "The people are active, they maintain the space in front of the entrance – we have now trees and flowers and it's nice". And he emphasizes: "We are no longer living in the times (the 1990s) when people were throwing their garbage baskets out of their windows. You can't see that anymore".*

*I went deeper on the social issue asking about the activities of K's neighbours and what do they do in the neighbourhood. I also asked whether there is a park, where people can go for a walk. K. enthusiastically confirmed and said that there is a park, which is nice but small. He explained further that it is not very well-maintained, but it's not bad. There are benches and alleys. He was enthusiastic about the way he takes with his bike to go there, passing through some industrial*

*zones, and next to a cemetery. Impressed, I asked whether other people do the same, but he was negative? And he emphasized – "it is too small of a park for me, I don't find it attractive".*

*K. then went back to the infrastructure in the neighbourhood, saying: "Well, I use my bike to get downtown. However, I know, from before – and that has not changed – the road-structure is terrible. For such a big neighbourhood, there are only two main roads leading out of it in the direction of the central zones. All the bus lines go around and around, and it takes forever to go downtown. There is one line – out of the three consecutive lines that you have to use to reach the central areas – which passes the railway lines. In certain times you catch the bus and then you spend 20 minutes waiting on the barrier. And then you have to get out – get another line – and then a third one. It takes you about an hour and a half to do that". K. gives the example when he was studying in the university. "Every day, he said, every single day. And I started using my bike – I move and I depend on myself."*

*Well, then, I continued, asking whether he would you say that people feel safe in the neighbourhood? Can you walk freely in the night, getting late home, or going for a walk on the park, I asked. K. said that in his opinion his neighbours do not feel the environment criminal. According to him, the people feel safe. Knowing the problem with the homeless dogs I asked him about them and whether there are a lot in his neighbourhood? He laughed and said that they are not a problem. Confronting him, I said that maybe for him not, but that is rare and people are usually afraid and feel threatened, for example, to go home in dead hours. To my words, he started explaining that in the last years, the homeless dogs are much less. "And besides - he continued – you are bigger than them. If they attack you, you have to kneel and they will run away".*

*I asked my interviewee does he feel safe in the neighbourhood: "Well, I am used to it. I can't say I like it, but I am used to it. Lately, there are too many supermarkets – there is no need for all of them." Well, I said, I guess you need more open-markets? K. blinked and said that there is such somewhere in the neighbourhood but he prefers to go to the "Jenski Pazar" (this a famous open-market in the central area of Sofia, where you could buy fruits and vegetables from villages around the country).*

*Next, I asked K. whether he meets friends in the neighbourhood and whether he has any activities in it: "No! I go to the "Borisova gradina" (a park located in the center of Sofia, of about ... ha). I meet my friends there – we play badminton, we bike, we just talk. That is what I do".*

*My last question from the first set of questions is whether he would move out if given the chance: "I would like to move to live in a house somewhere outside of Sofia, in a village – to have my garden and get away from all the comfortabilities that the big city offers. But that is not possible, I can't afford it." I asked whether he's thought of the idea of celling his flat for a house. However, he pointed that he lives with his mother, who is above 70 and she feels comfortable in the flat. "She likes it, that is it!"*

### 2. What are their expectations towards the development of the socialist neighbourhoods?

*I started off the second part of the interview by asking K. what he thinks the future of the panel-flat neighbourhoods is and whether he is positive or negative towards it: "What I feel is that in Sofia, the rulers are not interested in changing things for better. I notice that the central administration does "something" to be able to say – "we plan, we build, we construct", whatever. An example is the bike-alleys. In my neighbourhood they made a bike – alley, which starts in the*



middle of nowhere and ends in a similar way. Everything is half-done.” *Would they be renovated, was my next question:* “No, they won’t, because they are already old. Nobody has thought of their deconstruction either. There is no method found. Nobody cares. The easiest way is for Sofia to move. When the flats are no longer suitable for living, we will abandon them and move somewhere else, in a new territory.”

*When I asked K. about his opinion on the possibility of PPPs and their influence on the discussed neighbourhoods he said:* “We have a play-ground for children built in the space between the panel-flats from a private company. Perhaps, they will do the same in other areas. I hope so!”

*My following question is whether he thinks the Government works on programs for the renovation and management of the panel-flats:* “There is nothing that can change. It is initially not well-constructed. Everything that we have besides the flats, it is us – the people, who have accomplished it. I will give you an example – every single tree is planted by somebody from the neighbours. The government has not done anything with regards to that.”

*I explained, that is a tendency with some panel-flats neighbourhoods for the government to allow private companies to build flats in the spaces between the panel-flats. K. laughed to that and said that he is happy he hasn’t seen such an absurd.* “There is not enough space even now, and they want to construct more. It is the opposite that should happen, due to the fact that for example now everybody has at least one car. There is no space. What should happen is the opposite – on the space of three panel flats there should be two left and the left space should be turned into parking lots. Or better, but that is not possible in our environment, because when we have some construction everything is ruined – underground parking spaces, and the space above to be turned into small parks, with playgrounds and sport zones.”

*Following this answer, I explained about a suggestion of the Government to place pv-panels on the roofs of the prefabricated blocks:* “This is insane! They are expensive. They need maintenance. They need protection – hits, etc. They will install them and what? – forget about that. If they install such panels they need to be somehow owned by the inhabitants. That is the only way to make somebody take care or maintain something – if he earns from that; if he knows that if he doesn’t maintain it he will lose something. They shouldn’t be collectively owned”.

*I asked K. whether in his opinion his neighbours would move out if that was possible:* “I do not know. But there are a lot of young people, young families with small children.”

*Next I asked whether it is realistic to think that in 10-years-time the discussed neighbourhoods could be nicely renovated and cozy:* “Absolutely not!”

*Do you think the panel-flat neighbourhoods have a future, I asked:* “No, they do not! And the reason is that they have a life-time of 70 years. What, they have already had about 30-40. And the fact that nobody maintains them shortens the period. It’s a huge investment to reconstruct them. Nobody is going to do that!”

### **3. What are their wishes towards the development of the socialist neighbourhoods?**

*To my question of what he would wish to happen with the panel-flats, K. gives a straight answer:* “For them to continue the bike alley!” He goes on, “I am used to living in this neighbourhood, I

made it ok for me! What I want is more trees and plants! And again, there are too many supermarkets”

*It seems that you are not able to get K. out of the everyday life. To my question of what he wishes to happen with the neighbourhood he says:* “There is no happy future for those neighbourhoods. We will reach the point of collapse and this would be it. Prior to that moment nobody will put his hand on anything. The future of those neighbourhoods will be decided last-minute”.

*Following these words, I thanked K. for the time and effort:* “This is a nice end of the interview! Thank you for your time and priceless view upon your neighbourhood! Thank you!”



Interviewee: K.G.  
Date: 26.02.2012  
Time: 15<sup>30</sup> - 16<sup>15</sup> (duration 45 min.)

## DESCRIPTION OF THE INTERVIEWEE

**Age group:** 50 – 60

**About:** Works in the Bulgarian Academy of Science – an associate professor.

### 1. What kind of meanings and values do they attach to the socialist neighbourhoods?

*As usual after introducing the topic of my research and the aim of interview I asked how is K.G. feeling about his neighbourhood and whether he likes it. To my question, he immediately answered: “Generally speaking, I don’t like it. I fancy family houses or something similar to the type. I am fan of those ... what were they calling them – lying skyscrapers”. By his description I understand that he is talking about the row houses, located next to each other. “What I like is the little garden that you have, where you can take care of flowers, onion, whatever you like, a swimming pool.” And he adds: “It’s far more natural – you are not dependent on the others and they do not depend on you.”*

*K.G. explains about all everyday noises – “balls, children playing, your neighbor decided to get up earlier than you planned to do so yourself – you just hear everything. The neighbours upon me have a cat – and I can smell it in the bathroom – it’s terrible”.*

*And he continues himself, without me questioning at all: “Another thing is the entrances – there are too many people. We are 27 families, that times 6 entrances makes it around 180 families. And what happens is if you are discussing one and the same thing some of them would agree but some of them would not. And besides, some of them would say they don’t care but after we start doing it- they will be against. That’s about common issues. And it’s all the same with regards to cleaning, gardening, cleaning the snow in front of the entrance. And those negative reactions are having their consequences in a personal plan of course”. And K.G. concludes: “THESE are the reasons why I wouldn’t live in such a flat, if I had the financial possibility. But I don’t. I can’t afford buying a house with my celery.” Following this statement I asked whether he would change the neighbourhood for another apartment but he was definitely negative: “Look, I don’t want to live in a flat. I don’t understand the idea of it. If I am going to move somewhere it would be to live in a family house”.*

*What is the main problem that you find in the neighbourhood, I asked: “There are too many people. Look at the central heating. Everybody prefers a different temperature and have a different view upon it. All that creates a bad inter-neighbour environment because the bills for the central heating are set on a basis of all the accumulated heating. Thus, we pay the bills of the neighbours which are not the conscious about it. On a vertically-located central heating you can basically never be fully disconnected of the central heating because of the tubes that pass the heating to the upper floor and heat your apartment as well. Consequently, you always have to pay, even if you don’t use the central heating, as you actually do use it.”*

*My following question was about the neighbours and whether they communicate among themselves and they are active. K. G. explained that there are some groups formed “with a common life”: “In my old neighbourhood (another socialist neighbourhood) we were gathering every other night with other 5-6 families but this was back in the socialist times.” K.G. explains that this was due to the fact he could afford it because his salary then was not high at all but he could afford*

*some things that he can’t know. He also shared that he works on different projects now so that he can make the month and thus such gatherings are coming too much as it is cheaper than staying at home and eating by yourself (with your family). “It was similar here (and he means the neighbourhood where he lives now) but most of the people got richer and they built their own houses or apartments in more prestigious areas and moved away.”*

*I asked about his neighbours now. He responded that it is very important to note down that there are young families. He explained that when they had the last common gatherings of representatives of each family (something that happens every month or so) they were discussing to arrange something like a garden with a playground for the children: “It was proposed that we put some benches, plant some grass, and put a swing with some sand-playground for the children, because it was noticed that there are a lot of little children and there is no place for them or their mothers where they can stay, play, etc. What they – and I mean the mothers responded is that they don’t like each other and if one of the mothers go there with her children the other ones would not. Besides, experience of the other entrances show that when they put some benches in front of their entrances the local drunks came and stayed there during the whole nights.”*

*Having all these issue, what is your opinion, would you stay here or would you change the neighbourhood, I asked. With this question I wanted to check whether discussing all these bothering him issues wouldn’t make him think that there might be better neighbourhoods. However, I heard the same: “As I said I have the wish to move away but I don’t have the possibility. And there other people like me. All of these inter-neighbours problem are because of the people gathered there. And of course the flats kill the individual property – green spaces, plants, trees; the idea of creating better environment; better attractiveness. And this way except for sleeping, the neighbourhood could be used for recreation or some sports activities.”*

*My next question was about the positive and negative characteristics of the panel-flats. K.G. answered that the best thing is about the transport infrastructure. “I live at the almost perfect place. There is the public transport – different lines – which take me to the central part of the city for about 15-20 minutes. I have my car and my block is located really close to the urban highway and it takes me 10 minutes to be downtown. It’s merely the same with my work – I have a very good public transport connection and I easily and quickly get there with my car.”*

*I asked K.G. what he misses in the neighbourhood: “A park and sports complexes – swimming pool, fitness, tennis courts. There is nothing. There is one fitness, which is miserable. I heard of another one – I have to check it. But either way – that’s it. Even though the river (river Iskar) is really close, also the Vranya camping and the Vranya park – which was a really nice park years ago – what? The park next to the river is filled with garbage and homeless dogs everywhere. This makes unusable. The Vranya park and camping are closed for some reason. I don’t know why. What they could do is use the space between the two parts of the neighbourhood and turn them into a park, like Zaimov (one of the centrally located parks). What happened is – they turned this area into an industrial zone instead. And it is sad coz it would solve the problems.”*

*K.G. continued on his own: “We can’t even talk about sports. I can’t say there is a lack of supermarkets – they are too much even”.*

*I asked what he would do if he had a little child now: “If I had a child I’ll take him with the car to Borisova gradina (another centrally located park), Zaimov or another one. But you don’t have that time every day. About the playgrounds in the neighbourhood? Well, I can’t say they are not well-planned. But they decayed with the time – it is on the one hand the inhabitants and on the*



other the lack of municipal maintenance. What I think is all kind of such equipment shall be behind a high fence and impossible to enter during the dark time of the day”.

*And K.G. continues:* “They should do what they showed the other day on the news – like in East Berlin – ex socialist neighbourhood: the garbage bins shall be put in some cages and the look in completely another way. My point is, if you go home with a good feeling than you are overall better”.

*On my question about the security in the neighbourhood K.G. answers:* “No! The factor is the homeless dogs. While going home you look like someone that is going to steal something coz you look around all the time. And besides there is still high criminality – we are not moving forward with that.” Having heard that I asked about lights in the streets. K.G. said that it is generally well-lit: *“I can’t say that the main routes are not well-lit.”*

*To the question of the existence of some zones of the neighbourhood that offer better environment, K.G. was negative.*

## **2. What are their expectations towards the development of the socialist neighbourhoods?**

*The following questions were about the future of the socialist neighbourhood. K.G. answered:* “I would really like those neighbourhoods to disappear. But it is not realistic to think so – there are too many people living in such blocks. There are like circulation flats. It seems to me that this tell-tall story is non-reversible. In our panel-flat there are 180 families as I already mentioned. That means that there should be 170 houses built for them. That is not possible.” *K.G. continues to calculate the area needed and the need of other homes for those people while they construct the houses. He concludes:* “That is not possible. I don’t even have a clue how would this problem be solved.” We continue the conversation with K.G’s explanation of something that he saw in Hungary – some panel flats in which all the apartments were on different levels “and by going up the stairs on your level it’s only you. That makes is much more independent. They are 4-5 floors, don’t know precisely.”

*After that K.G. said that “this living can only be compared to living in a hotel, with the exception that there is nobody that you can order room service to.”*

*I asked him whether he thinks the Government feels responsible. He said that he doesn’t think so:* “The Government is (he emphasized) for the fact that blocks are still being constructed in general. Otherwise, I don’t think the Government can take any decision with regards to those neighbourhoods”. *And he thinks for some seconds. Then, he went on:* “Something could be done with the outer look of the buildings themselves, to make them more colourful in order to compensate the lack of plants. There should be some sports complexes planes, playgrounds. The availability of those things higher the level of comfort. Because for the inner side of your apartment you need some amount of money to make it better.” *He explains that every wall is not straight, there are no right corners and if you would like to live in a good-looking and nicely designed apartment you have to put some money in it.*

*Here I explained about the photovoltaic panels and the idea of the Government to put those on top of the panel flats. K.G. is positive towards the idea and its future.* “Also the gasification. There should be some independence of the separate families.”

*To my question about K.G’s expectations towards the coming years K.G. went quite politically:* “The only way something to change for the neighbourhood is if it turns into a highway. Then the Government will be interested.” *He wraps it up:* “I don’t think the Government is concerned.”

*I asked whether there is anything that would make him stay. K. G. said:* “There is nothing that could make me stay if I had the possibility to move away. The conditions here are nowhere close to what I always aimed at.”

*After several second K.G. said:* “I take care of the bushes in front of the entrance. When I do it I see people passing by who think – My God, what an idiot, why would he do it? And the other ones, who just pass and pretend that do not notice me at all. I have heard some people saying: Dude, why are you even doing that – saying it quite ironically. And besides, there still are people who throw their garbage out of their window.”

*Having heard that I thanked K.G. for his time and priceless words. I did not ask the questions of the third part about his wishes because he already answered them by answering prior questions.*



Interviewee: Ka.  
Date: 24.05.2012  
Time: 17<sup>15</sup> - 17<sup>30</sup>(duration 15 min.)

## DESCRIPTION OF THE INTERVIEWEE

**Age group:** 40 - 50

**About:** Works in the Bulgarian National Television

### 1. What kind of meanings and values do they attach to the socialist neighbourhoods?

*I introduced the topic of my research, informed Ka. about all the formal issues of the interview being anonymous and the information that I take out of it will be used for the purposes of the current research only. As usual, I started off the interview asking about Ka's feelings about the panel-flat neighbourhoods and what is his attitude towards them. He answered: "A public sleeping rooms, in my view." And he continued by himself: "My feeling is positive?" I asked why as I was surprised by the answer following the "public sleeping rooms" answer. Ka explained: "Because it is a possible way out of the situation for many people, that's why, a way to be "put" in the same place." What about the environment that these neighbourhood offer, I asked my interviewee: "It's terrible. A city of concrete."*

*I asked Ka. Whether if the neighbourhoods were better maintained they would offer a better environment and he answered negatively and added: "A cell remains a cell whatever you do." Here, I argued that perhaps if the open-spaces around are nicely looking, perhaps the overall impression would be better. Ka said: "Well, perhaps on the general ground it could be a kind of consolation. In general, all such improvements of the open-spaces are cosmetic effects."*

*I moved to discussing the infrastructure in the neighbourhoods and I asked Ka. whether in his view the infrastructure is well developed considering the road network, public transport, supermarkets, etc.: "No, the situation is very, the neighbourhood is flowing in and out of two main entrances or exits, depending on the view. It is not a very big neighbourhood however the connection with the main road networks is very bad. It is not initially planned, it is made post factum." I asked about supermarkets: "By means of supermarkets, there are such. In this respect, it is very nicely developed, all big supermarkets are around. All big chains have one supermarket in the neighbourhood. There are smaller ones as well." Does the surrounding spaces offer possibilities for sports and recreation, I asked Ka.: "No, there are not. Not even one playground is as it should be. There is one of the schools' yard which is used by some people for playing football. There is one garden which is in between the blocks. It is really small and on top everything it is made out of asphalt."*

*I moved to the next topic asking Ka. whether he feels safe in the neighbourhood. He responded: "Well, nobody has bitten me yet (he laughs)." I went deeper in the topic by asking about lights on the streets: "Where I live it is relatively well-lit. I don't go around the neighbourhood around. In another part, where a friend lives it is not nice, it is very ..."*

*My next question is whether if given the chance Ka. Would move out and for what reasons: "I would change it only for a house with a yard. Otherwise, wherever I would go – the conditions are all the same in the neighboruhoods. Perhaps, it is also a matter of being used to it. Well, otherwise my neighbourhood is not a bad one. It's not overpopulated. There are big supermarkets. The roads are in a tragic condition. There is less and less space because people bought three cars each. This is valid for all panel-flat neighbourhoods. Why would I change then?"*

*I asked Ka. whether it could be concluded that what he misses is his private space, if he would change for a house: "No, it is not a personal space. I have my private space – my home, my harbor. I feel good. However, outside ... I miss the contact with the nature. You go out and see the neighbor in front of you. However, this is very individual."*

### 2. What are their expectations towards the development of the socialist neighbourhoods?

*I moved to the next topic asking Ka. what is the future of the panel flats, realistically looking: "Realistically, they would remain for a long time more and they would be a way in the situation for a great number of people to live in them." I said here that the condition of the socialist neighbourhoods is not good. Ka, interrupted my saying: "I am not that sure that they are not in a good condition. Perhaps some are in not so good but others are in a good condition." I explained that I talk about partial thermal insulations, different colours, etc. Ka. continued: "That is ... I am not sure whether this is not just the next action for finding work for the "elite" engineering companies. It was the same with the thermal insulation. At first, we couldn't do it without it. Then, ... well, I am not 100% sure that it would be a fair game with the overall renovation. And the worst is that in the panel flats and in the mass owned buildings, the people do not own the land below the land below the buildings. Automatically, that makes them not real owners. Why would you then invest? It is better to find a way out."*

*Here, I asked Ka. whether in his view the Government is actually concerned with the future of the panel-flat neighbourhoods: "100%. Well, not the Government, the politicians. 100 % they are concerned." I asked Ka. whether it is possible to attract the private sector in the renovation of the panel-flats and PPPs to be formed: "Yeah, it is. But these people would want money, what else would they like. And where would the neighbors take them from? Most of the people have not completely paid their panel-flats yet and they would give additionally money for renovation. If you make a quick calculation, I have heard that it comes to half an apartment this renovation. For what reason would I give this amount when I could sell it and buy something with the money and add the money for half an apartment?"*

*I asked Ka. whether his neighbours are engaged in maintaining the open-spaces around the block: "My neighbours are half-idiots in general. No! In this flat, in this block ... what should I say? They are extremely engaged (Ka. continues ironically). You can't even make them not throw their cigarettes out of the balcony and their garbage down."*

### 3. What are their wishes towards the development of the socialist neighbourhoods?

*Having reached the final part of the interview I asked Ka. what would he do with the panel-flat neighbourhoods if he was given a magic stick? "I have never asked myself this question. What would I turn them into? The bad thing is that I am a realist and I don't see anything else that they could be turned into if not panel-flat neighbourhoods. In not panel-flat neighbourhoods, in brick-constructed blocks." Hearing those realistic words I asked Ka. whether he would change the space, the way the buildings are placed, etc. He explained that "by means of landscape design I would change it, yes. A lot of gardens, and in between them erects are an ugly quadrangle block. A little bit dishes with grapes but ... at least there would be gardens and plants. Trees, but trees do not grow by themselves. Who would plant them, who would take care of them? Twenty something years are needed for a tree to grow big, at least, for a landscape design. And the panel-flat*



neighbourhoods are not the worst. Those new neighbourhoods are much worse. Each centimeter is occupied so that to be sold for thousand euros. You stretch and give five to the neighbor – “Hi, brother!” The panel flats, in this respects, are way better than the neighbourhoods for the rich.”

Interviewee: Td.  
Date: 08.05.2012  
Time: 18<sup>30</sup> - 18<sup>54</sup> (duration 24 min.)

**DESCRIPTION OF THE INTERVIEWEE**

**Age group:** 20 – 30  
**About:** Works in the Bulgarian Academy of Science – master in Physics and Mathematics.

**1. What kind of meanings and values do they attach to the socialist neighbourhoods?**

*After introducing the topic of my thesis and the aim of the current interview I started with the questions straight ahead. My first question, similar to the other interviews is related to Td's overall opinion about the socialist neighbourhoods. He answered straight: “Yeah, I like it in general. I mean, what difference does it make if it is a panel flat, brick one, ... it doesn't matter at all. I don't see any big difference.” My reaction to this was related to the environment surrounding the socialist panel-flats. I asked whether it makes any difference to him if the open spaces are managed, the atmosphere. Td. answered that certainly he would like the open spaces to be taken care after. “However, that does not depend on the neighbourhood and its kind but on the ones who are responsible. I don't know but I think it should be the municipality, isn't it?” I immediately asked Td. Whether he thinks somebody is really responsible. “It's a good question. To be honest, I am not really sure about that. I really don't have a clue. I guess there are people responsible for that but I am not sure how much they really do anything at all is outside my knowledge.”*

*Having a respondent who is really straight to the point without describing in depth his feelings about the neighbourhood in long words I moved to the topic of the location of the neighborhood: What do you think about the location of the neighbourhood and the time that it takes to reach the central parts. Is the suburban location seen as an obstacle from your side? “Actually, the neighbourhood that I live in is with the best location from all other suburban neighbourhoods. I am really comfortable with that. Also my job is just outside the neighbourhood. So, reaching my job place is not a problem. The central parts either.” I asked Td. about the public transport: You use the public transport every day. Do you think it is well-developed? – “Well, the one that I use is relatively good. You can always strive for more, of course, but it is relatively good”*

*And what about the environment, the neighbours – I asked my respondent. Td. answered that he doesn't communicate much with his neighbours. And he added: “Besides my friends are from different parts of Sofia. However, the people that I know are nice people.” Here I wanted to confirm about his contacts with the neighbours and I asked whether he doesn't communicate because he doesn't find his neighbours “appropriate” for contact or because it just happened that way. Td. was quite positive that it is the direction of the life that met him whit people from outside the neighbourhood rather than anything else. I asked Td. whether he uses the neighbourhood as a dormitory – for sleeping and dining and having no social activities in it: “It can be said like that. Besides work which is located just around the corner. I go out here with some friends that I have and that's it.” Do you think this is just because your friends are not here? Do you think that if the neighbourhood would offer you some entertainment you would remain here more – like sports centers, cinemas, a park – I went on: “No, I think it's more because of my friends. Do you think there's a park needed? - “A park is always needed. I think it will be great if we develop the existing one, which is quite miserable now – Hydro-park Iskar.”*

I moved to the next topic: *Could you describe some positive and negative characteristics of the socialist neighbourhoods compared to other neighbourhoods – centrally located, Izhgrev, Iztok?*



*As a negative characteristics Td. described the time to get downtown. However, he emphasized on the fact that it is quitter and the open-spaces actually exists. In the central part everything is on top of something else. The open spaces in the rest of the neighbourhoods are either too small or do not exist at all. There are only streets and parking lots. This he compared to the central parts. "Otherwise, he said, Iztok and Izgrev are better planned and managed. They have everything."*

*And do you think they are cozier?*

"Perhaps if I actually lived there I would find it cozier. However, I've only studied in Iztok so I can't say anything."

*What about the homeless dogs? Do you think this is a problem mostly for the panel-flats or is it an overall problem of the city?*

"What I've noticed is that the homeless dogs are everywhere. May be only in the central parts are less."

*Are they a problem in general?*

"Well, they bark me sometimes, but I haven't had an issue with them."

*It may be concluded that you use the neighbourhood to sleep, dine and ...*

"communicate with my parents. Yes, this is it."

*What do you think – would you stay in the neighboruhood or would you move out if you were given the chance?*

"Perhaps yes. Eventually I would move to Izgrev or Iztok, let's say Iztok, so that I am closer to the main road – Tzarigradsko shousse."

*So you prefer to be closer to the road than to be surrounded by trees and green spaces, I asked.*

"There are enough plants in these neighbourhoods. I presume that as granted there. My idea is to be close to the public transport so that I don't walk 20 minutes to reach the bus stop."

*So if you move out you would prefer a place which is less cozy and comfortable but closer to the road?*

"No! I want both and I am searching for that. In scope of open-spaces and public transport".

*I went back a little bit with my next question, sharing it with my respondent. I reminded him of our talk about the developed infrastructure and his words about it and Td. confirmed – "Yes, the infrastructure is overall well-developed". I continued asking what his opinion about the playgrounds and sports places that the neighbourhood offers is. Td. asked what I mean by sports activities. I explained that my question is related to whether he thinks that the neighbourhood has places and spaces suitable for sports. To my explanation he responded: "It depends on the kind of sport. In general it has quite a lot of spaces suitable for sport. What I mean is that Drujba (the neighbourhood's name) is not a big neighbourhood. At the same time there are three schools there where you can play basketball and football. I am not sure whether there is a swimming pool. I think there were in the schools but I am not sure whether they can be used. You can cycle as the inner streets are not with big traffic. So I would say that you can practice some sports activities event though the grounds are not initially thought of such. But they are used."*

*And what about the chinldre playgrounds, although, you are not yet in a phase of thoughts for children's activities?*

"I haven't used them in a while? :)"

*What I mean is if you have a child now is there a place where you can take it, a playground?*

"Well, there is a playground in front of every block. A few years ago they changed them, more or less. I don't know whether all of them are nicely managed. In front of my block they changed the playground."

*Well - I said - if you have a child now would you feel safe and leave it playing outside on the playground, alone if it is at an appropriate age?*

"No! Not in this country. It is not about the neighbourhood. I can't leave it alone. Of course, the age matters. But in general, no!"

*Speaking, of that topic I asked about the criminality in the neighbourhood.* "Well, generally speaking, the criminality ... I think the dealers are the mass because there are people searching for that. I haven't heard of killings, kidnappings or something like that. I guess there are such activities but I haven't heard of them. That means that they are not that much. This is a problem everywhere."

*Related to the topic of criminality, do you think the neighbourhood is well-lit? When you come home in the evening is it lighted up?*

"I have come home during the night walking and I walked on the main street of the trolley bus. This street is lighted up. I don't know anything about the inner streets in between the flats because I haven't used them."

*And on your way from the bus-stop? Is it well-lit? Do you feel comfortable?*

"In general - yes. There is only one part along the kinder-garden which is not lighted up. The rest is ok - it is lighted up."

*What do you miss in the neighbourhood and what would you want to have in the vicinity – were my next questions. Td. immediately responded that he lacks a park, more centrally located, well-managed.* "But if there is no park, he said, we can always go to the neighbouring neighbourhood and stay there a while."

## **2. What are their expectations towards the development of the socialist neighbourhoods?**

*I moved to the second part of the interview questions asking about the future of the socialist neighbourhoods. I explained about the life-expectancy? Do you think they will be taken care after? Do you think they should remain as they are or shall they be restructured?* "As I said – Td. continued almost interrupting me – I don't have a problem. So I think they should remain or if something is getting old or getting deconstructed it should be fixed. Perhaps there are people that dislike them and would like to change them. I don't know." *What is your attitude towards the newly constructed blocks in the open-air spaces in between the existing flats – I asked. Td. said that*



*he is definitely opposing the idea.* “As we said the children need a place to play. I have played there and I know how pleasant I was feeling back then.”

*Who do you think should be responsible about the open-spaces?*

“The municipality –Td. answered straight to my question. As this land is municipal it is expected that the municipality takes care of it.”

*And do you think that your neighbours are in a way taking care of this environment – do they manage it, plant flowers, etc.?*

“There are people who take care of the little gardens/open-spaces in front and on the back side of the block. There are such people, yes.”

*Do you think that the Government is in a way related to the problem of the panel flats? (Here I explained about the talks of the Government that we hear every now and then, about the solar – panels and the ideas of the Government, etc.*

“I guess the Government should be responsible for things like that but I haven’t seen them actually making something on the issue. And this with the panels – there is some time ahead that they need to be worked out. Even in the world they are not that much used, as far as I know.”

*The conversation went back to the neighbours and the social life around the block. I asked Td. whether his neighbours communicate among each other. Is there a community?*

Td. said that there are people who communicate. It’s not everyone at the same time together but there are groups of people – 5, 7, 10, ... “I see them in the Cafes, the open-spaces when I come home after work.”

*You don’t see it necessary that you move out but do you think some of your neighbours would like to move out and live somewhere else because of the environment?*

“I guess there are. I have two neighbouring families who moved out about a month ago and went living in Krivina – a village in the suburban parts of the city. They bought a house together – two floors – one for each family. Now, I can’t say whether they moved out because they dislike the panel-flats or they just want a house in a nearby village. But I guess there are people who would like to move out coz I’ve heard them moaning about ... what not – the public transport, the garbage, the environment, what else ... And that everything is far away.”

*And do you think this is adequate? I mean I understand that you like it but afterall ...* Td. interrupted me saying:

“Well, if they expect to reach a specific point in 5 minutes – yeah, it would be adequate. But you can’t be everywhere in five minutes. Even if there is a subway.”

### **3. What are their wishes towards the development of the socialist neighbourhoods?**

*I explained that the last questions of the interview are related to Td’s wishes about the future of the neighbourhood. I asked Td. what he expects to see in 15 years-time.* “Certainly I would like to see more little children playing outside instead of staying at home or not having them at all. Lately, I see that more and more.

*In general, could you say that the panel-flats do not have more problems than the rest of Sofia’s neighbourhoods in general?*

“As they are constructed in the moment, without the planned newly constructed flats in the open-spaces, I may say they are a nice place to live. It is quite nice to live in such a neighbourhood.



Interviewee: D.  
Date: 15.05.2012  
Time: 20<sup>30</sup> – 20<sup>50</sup> (duration 20 min.)

## DESCRIPTION OF THE INTERVIEWEE

**Age group:** 20 – 30

**About:** A PhD student in the Netherlands, have lived for about 20 years in a panel-flat neighbourhood in Sofia, moved out because of her PhD in the Netherlands.

### 1. What kind of meanings and values do they attach to the socialist neighbourhoods?

*I started my interview by introducing the topic of the research and the need to conduct this interview. My first question was related to D's attitude towards to panel-flat complexes and what she associates them with: "Well, in general ... well, it's difficult to say whether my attitude is positive or negative. On the one hand, I like living in flats, where there are several neighbours on the floor. It's not a house, I mean, or an apartment house with only a few families living in, there are more people living around me. The negative side is that more and more of the panel-flats, including the panel-flat block that I lived in is with a very bad maintenance. And the negative characteristics originate in that – in the condition of the building." I asked D. whether speaking of these issues she includes the open-spaces around the blocks: "Yes, I do, I include the open-spaces."*

*My next question is: "What is your relationship with your neighbours. Is there a community formed" D. answered: "Yes, there is a communication. Whether positive or negative it depends on each case separately. For example, in my panel-flat, with the neighbours on the floor (two families and ours) – we have always helped each other. When I was little and I had forgotten my key or something like that, I knew I could always knock on their door and stay there until my mother came home. And this continues today as well. When we are in need of something we look for them, and vice versa, of course. We keep in touch. Well, there are also dramas, generally speaking. But in general what I like is the fact that if you want you could communicate with the people around you."*

*Next, I asked my interviewee whether she has notices whether her neighbours from her block and around take care of the open-spaces around: "Well, we have had initiatives. There are also people that do something now. Like, our neighbours from the last entrance have made a garden and they maintain it aggressively, if I may call it like that – they have put a fence around, planted different plants. And it started looking really nice. Generally speaking, there is no organized maintenance."*

*I asked D. whether in her opinion there is any class difference in the people living in panel-flat neighbourhoods and those living in the central parts or "better" neighbourhoods: "No! To be honest, I have been in apartments that are horrible in the central parts of the city, and at the same time I have been in really nice ones in panel-flats. It depends on how much a family has invested in the apartment to initially make it and maintain it afterwards."*

*I moved to the topic of the infrastructure in the panel-flat neighbourhoods asking D. whether she thinks it is well-developed in the socialist neighbourhoods: "Well, the neighbourhood I live in is actually a big transport connection. For a pity, there are no parks and we are dependent on the small in-between-the-blocks little gardens. However, there are hospitals, police departments, schools, etc. I would say that these are well-planned neighbourhoods. Well, yes, there is a lack of trees. And also, as infrastructure, the roads are a big problem for Sofia in general. However, in*

general, it's not bad. To me, looking at my ex neighbourhood, there are much worse places. "I asked additionally about the public transport: "It's good. We have trams, trolley buses and buses. We will even have a subway soon. I can't complain about that. Wherever I want to go to in Sofia, I can go directly or with 1 stop the most."

*I asked my respondent about her opinion for the possibilities for sports: "A few years ago a football ground was constructed. We had this open-space used for playing football. However, they made it really nice, surrounded it with a net, with a grass, with projectors which can be used. And I think it is Municipal as the lights are not on in the evenings. But I am sure there is a way to put them on. A lot of people play. Not only children but also grown-ups."*

*My following question is about the children playgrounds and whether they are in appropriate conditions: "Well, a few years ago also the children playgrounds were renovated. These are the same old playgrounds but they are renovated, dyed, etc. This happened a few years ago as well. To be honest, I notice a lot of young mothers and little children which walk around. I have played my own on these playgrounds, I don't think they are bad or they lack anything. Of course, they could be much better, but it's ok now. They have been in a bad condition for years – they were old and rusty, some were broken. They remained like that for years but are renovated now and they look nice. Definitely better looking than 10 years ago."*

*I asked my respondent whether she thinks the Municipality is engaged in maintaining the open-spaces and whether the open-spaces are nicely managed: "I would say that they are nice at the moment. They could be better. I remember last summer people complained as the municipality had not cut the grass and it had become a snake place. Well, now perhaps because it is spring now, but it looks nice."*

*I moved to the next question, asking D. whether she feel secure in the neighbourhood: "Well, you have to keep in mind that this is the neighbourhood located between the central station and the central prison (locations with bad reputation) and I have always thought it is not the safest neighbourhood. We have had problems, my brother has been attacked, out apartment has been robbed. In general, there are some homeless dogs, but those are such that live in the place for years and you know them. Drunk people or other such elements, I have not seen. However, when I get home in the evenings if I am with a car or a taxi I ask them to leave me in front of the entrance." I asked D. about the lights on the streets: "There are lights, but not around my blocks. Perhaps, this is because of trees which are around the lights. To be honest, when I have to get home and I am alone, I am quite alert."*

### 2. What are their expectations towards the development of the socialist neighbourhoods?

*I moved to the second part of the interview asking D. about her realistic opinion about the future of the socialist housing estates which are a huge part of the territory of the city and what is the attitude of the Government towards those neighbourhoods: "I will start with the attitude of the Government as I have read something about that. I think the Government works on some laws which are ready or not about the renovation of the blocks. To be honest, in my opinion the panel-flats have future – they have a long life period and besides the population of the capital is still growing really fast. We cannot, speaking of population per square meter to have lower buildings, as in the Netherlands, with bigger suburbs. The panel-flats if renovated they could be made far better than now with these patches here and there, insulation here and there ... At the*



same time, as far as I know those buildings have a long life-expectancy period. Well, without maintenance this will be less.”

*I asked my respondent whether in her opinion if well renovated and maintained the panel-flat neighbourhoods would offer a nice living environment:* “Yes, of course. There are enough young families who cannot afford luxury apartments, or students, etc. For those groups ... I have lived in such a neighbourhood and I haven’t noticed anything bad. If well maintained it could be a fantastic place for living.

*I asked D. whether if she returns back to Bulgaria she would come back to the panel-flat apartment or she would try to get a flat elsewhere:* “In my case, this is not the case, as I have a flat, which is half-mine, half-my brother’s, and if I come back I would certainly live there. Whether I would move out afterwards, I don’t know, it depends on where the life takes me.”

**3. What are their wishes towards the development of the socialist neighbourhoods?**

*Last, I asked D. what would she wish would happen with the panel-flat neighbourhoods and what would she turn them into if she was given a magic stick:* “I wish the people living in the neighbourhoods to start doing something and not to think that the maintenance should be done by somebody else and not them.”

*I asked my respondent whether it is realistic to think that in 10-20-years-time, the neighbourhoods could be better looking and nicely managed:* “Yes, I think. The things are changing really fast because of the connection with Europe, the experience that we gain, etc. Yes, I think it is realistic as the panel-flats are a problem which is there for years and little by little it should be fixed.”

**DESCRIPTION OF THE INTERVIEWEE**

**Age group:** 30 – 40

**About:** Works in the construction business

**1. What kind of meanings and values do they attach to the socialist neighbourhoods?**

*Ek. refused to be recorded but she wanted to share her opinion. At the same time she went really quickly with the answers and her attitude made be very short, seeing she is in a hurry and does not want to spend a lot of time on the interview. Knowing she recently moved out of a panel-flat neighbourhood I asked her what is the main difference that she notices between the two neighbourhoods (Her new neighbourhood is located right next to the center and has a good reputation.)* “The main difference between the panel-flats and the brick-wall ones is that it is far colder in the panel-flats, it get condense, it’s more expensive to live in such an apartment. In the brick-wall apartment it is warmer and does not have any condense.”

*After that I asked Ek. about the open spaces. Ek. answered that it mainly depends on the neighbourhood:* “My previous neighbourhood is an old one and besides it doesn’t have any maintenance, as it is in the more elite neighbourhoods. In the more elite neighbourhoods, like in my neighbourhood now, the Municipality manages the open-space.” *Ek. explains that they get the grass gut and they also manage the open-space and the playgrounds. They have sports playgrounds constructed, which are well-lit and maintained.*

*I asked Ek. whether she feels more comfortable and cozier in her new neighbourhood and she was absolutely positive about that. On my question about the infrastructure she explained that the main roads are good but not the smaller ones in between the blocks, which is normal as she explained as this is a suburban neighbourhood, which is more like a ghetto.*

*She also explained that the major negative characteristic is the fact that within the neighbourhood everything is unified – like boxes, as she described it, it seems like a dormitory.*

*I asked Ek. whether if renovated these neighboruhoods will be attractive and she was positive. She referred to the fact that these are worker’s blocks, as initially built for the industrial workers and it is inhabited by a lower class of people, compared to her current neighbourhood.*

*She dislikes the neighbourhood because it is very distant from the central parts of the city.*

**2. What are their expectations towards the development of the socialist neighbourhoods?**

*Ek. supports the opinion that the Government is working on some programs for the renovation of the panel-flat neighbourhoods. At the same time she says:* “Nothing will happen. They need to be renovated, otherwise they will naturally fall apart. They need to be demolished and built again on the same principle.” *She also says that each building has a life-expectancy period and the people need to think about that.*



3. What are their wishes towards the development of the socialist neighbourhoods?

*If Ek. was given a magic stick she would turn the buildings into modern ones – with better and more attractive architecture. In the open-spaces she would place more sports playgrounds where children and also the grown-ups can practice some sports.*

Interviewee: I.

Date: 15.05.2012

Time: 12<sup>30</sup> – 12<sup>45</sup> (duration 15 min.)

DESCRIPTION OF THE INTERVIEWEE

**Age group:** 20 - 30

**About:** Works in an engineering company. She moved out to a newly constructed block in a newly constructed neighbourhood.

1. What kind of meanings and values do they attach to the socialist neighbourhoods?

*I started my interview by introducing the topic of the research and the need to conduct this interview. My first question is what does I. relates the panel-flats with and whether her position is positive or negative. I's answer to that question is: "The panel-flats ... I relate them ... my position is negative because they are grey, boring, they do not have any details and they are all alike. She stopped awaiting my next question. I asked her whether besides these facts the neighbourhoods offer a contemporary dwelling environment: "Yes, I do. If their outer look is not like it is, if they are restavrated. The nice thing about them is that they have better constructed inner grounds or ... open-areas, they are not that densely built as the newly constructed neighbourhoods, there is more space." What about the infrastructure compared to your new neighbourhood, I asked (I explained that by infrastructure I understand the road network, together with the supermarkets that the neighbourhood offers, kinder gardens, schools, etc. that the neighbourhood offer: "When it comes to infrastructure it is better in the panel flats, there is a better public transport, and supermarkets, the road network ... At the moment, where I live, there are no such road networks." This answer lead me to my next question: What is the reason for you to move out – is it because you do not like the neighbourhood? I. explained that it is because of the age of the neighbourhoods and their exploitation period, which is lowered. "The other thing is that they are not well insulated – more expanses for heating. Besides the thermal insulation, the noise insulation – you hear everything – you hear the talks of your neighbours – when there is no management of the buildings that's what happens." Next, I asked whether the panel-flats in I's opinion offer places for recreation and sports activities? "Yes, it's better – there are inner spaces where playgrounds are constructed. On the other hand, those open spaces are rarely taken care after. They have not been managed ever since they have been constructed. This is not good because they turn into dumping-ground – garbage is thrown there, homeless dogs are attracted. But if they are well managed it could be far better." You have little children – I said – do you think that if you were still living in the panel-flat neighbourhood there would be a possibility for them to play and walk around? "Yes, from this point of view it is good because this open-space that each block has is closer (referring to now). If the playgrounds that were constructed are managed it will be perfect. At the moment, you have to go somewhere far away in some park – in the neighbourhood that I live at the moment there no parks at all, neither a place for the children to play."*

*My next question is about the criminality. I asked I. how safe did she feel in the panel-flat neighbourhood. "It depends on the neighbourhood. In my neighbourhood, there was no light regularly. One of the reasons is that there are many people that you have to organize. Some of them do not want to pay. This is a negative side of the panel-flat neighbourhoods – there are just too many people that you have to organize and depend on. When a decision needs to be taken about the surrounding environment you have to take into account all of the people and their opinion. This is compared to the smaller blocks." Here I asked specifically about I's opinion about*



*the lights on the street: "The lights in the street is far better in the panel-flat neighbourhoods." Are the homeless dogs a greater problem in the panel-flat neighbourhoods compared to your new neighbourhood, I asked: "I don't think so. It's the same. This does not depend on the type of the neighbourhood. It matters only if you live in a closed neighbourhood."*

*What about the criminality – is my next question: "I was more afraid when I was living in the panel-flat neighbourhood. Now, I feel more comfortable."*

*My next question is related to the neighbours that I. had in the socialist neighbourhood that she was living in and whether there is a difference with the ones in her new neighbourhood: "Yes, there is. The people living in the panel-flats now are from an ageing group as when the flats were built there was no option. At the moment in block that I live in there are more young people which I like." I interrupter I., seeing that she expects my next question, to ask her whether her neighbours in the panel-flats were actively managing the open-space around the block: "Perhaps it depends on the people. With some of them we managed the open-space around our ex-block – we kept clean and in order the space, we'd taken the decision to manage the space." I asked I. what happens in the new block. She explained that they are preparing such a meeting now which has not been placed yet and she clarified that the open-space they have at the moment is really a small one.*

## **2. What are their expectations towards the development of the socialist neighbourhoods?**

*I moved to the second part of the interview. My first question is about the future of the panel-flat neighbourhoods from a realistic point of view. "If no actions are taken – all of the panel-flats to be managed and renovated, which is possible, they will start falling apart. This has already started and it will continue. If no actions are taken, these flats will have to be demolished. This is for sure.*

*Do you think the Government is actually working on programs for the renovation and management of the panel flats? "I guess there are such programs – I've heard about such. Nothing has been decided yet. Nothing is being done. There is no financing. It is unclear who would finance it – perhaps it will be partly from the state and partly by the owners." I asked I. whether she thinks that private initiatives might take place, which by a PPP to manage these spaces: "Yes, I think something like that is possible to happen if a decision is taken. Such a decision is really needed. I think it is possible is somebody initiates it."*

*Do you think – I asked next - that the people living in those neighbourhoods would like to move out? "Personally, I think the people would like to move out if they have the possibility and (she emphasized) if they are not managed. If actions for the management of those neighbourhoods are taken, most of the people would stay. Everything is related to finances.*

## **3. What are their wishes towards the development of the socialist neighbourhoods?**

*I moved to the third part of the interview and I asked I. what she would desire to happen in those neighbourhoods if she had the possibility to change them: "Well, I would like the neighbourhoods to stay and not to be demolished. I just want them to have another vision – to be renovated, surrounded by plants and playgrounds as they were initially constructed. All I want is for them to be managed."*

*What would make you move back to the panel-flats neighbourhoods? If your wish comes true as you described it would you move back? "Yes, I would definitely go back. If that happens I would prefer to move back and live in a panel-flat neighbourhood."*



Interviewee: Li.  
Date: 22.05.2012  
Time: 12<sup>45</sup> – 13<sup>00</sup> (duration 15 min.)

## DESCRIPTION OF THE INTERVIEWEE

**Age group:** 30 – 40

**About:** Works in the construction business

### 1. What kind of meanings and values do they attach to the socialist neighbourhoods?

*Li. refused to be recorded. He said he would feel uncomfortable. I took notes during the interview. Hopefully, he was speaking quite slowly and I could take down a lot of what he said and explained. To my first question of how was he feeling in the panel-flats neighborhood and what Li. associates them with, he answered: "I relate them to my childhood. I have a positive feeling about them. We were a lot of children, playing all they long. It was really a lot of fun. And besides, we were at the same age."*

*I asked Li. about the infrastructure and whether it is well-developed in the panel-flats. He answered that if talking about road network and pavement for the pedestrians it is ok but only related to that. He added, that the public transport is relatively good but during the winter, when deep snow covers the ground, it's not good because the neighbourhood is not well-cleaned which makes it more difficult. He explained that except schools and kinder gardens, and the supermarket, there is no cinema, library, restaurants or cafes and this is a problem in his opinion.*

*On my question about the open spaces in between the blocks Li. explained that they are not maintained – they are huge, covered with grown grass and bushes and garbage.*

*My following question is related to the children and the spaces for playing. He said that there are not much playgrounds but even where there are some playgrounds they are outside of any discussion – old and dangerous.*

*When talking about the sports playgrounds, Li. told me that the schools' yards could be used or the mountain – if you want to go for a walk or something.*

*I asked Li. what made him move out. He answered that he didn't want to live in a panel-flat neighbourhood – it is old: "Besides, you pay the amount for the flat and then you need to spend a lot of money on thermal and sound insulation and other commodities to make it comfortable and a nice place for living. The financial part is also important as there are costs above the payment for the flat itself which could make the price even higher than for a newly constructed flat."*

*To my question about the criminality Li. answered that both of his neighbourhoods – the ex and the current – are ok: "Well, if you need to walk through my current neighbourhood for the first time, you would feel scared – bushes and garbage all around. But ones you get to know it you find out that it is quite a peaceful neighbourhood. In addition, The panel-flats neighbourhoods have many, many people. In my current neighbourhood there are less people, and thus the traffic is less intensive."*

*I asked Li. what he was missing in his previous neighbourhood and he said that he missed a park and a cinema. But he also confirmed that he doesn't have those in his neighbourhood now.*

*Compraed to his current neighbourhood he misses from the panel-flat neighbourhood the wide streets and pavements for the pedestrians and the open-spaces.*

### 2. What are their expectations towards the development of the socialist neighbourhoods?

*On my question about the realistic future of the panel-flats neighbourhoods Li. explained that they need to be technically checked and renovated and they could have a quite extended life-period. According to him, that ought to happen.*

*Li. is positive about the idea that the Government works on action-plans for action for the panel-flats neighbourhoods.s*

*About the PPP's Li. supports the idea that a PPP is possible when it comes to the open-spaces and the playgrounds. However, his statement is that, when it comes to the blocks it is the inhabitants and the Government that need to cooperate.*

*I asked him whether he thinks his neighbours from the panle-flat neighbourhood would like to move out because they don't like the neighbourhood. He told me that he doesn't think so: "It is a matter of personal desire – if you live with the idea that you would like to live in a house – well, that's it. Otherwise, I don't think, they would move out just because it is a panel-flat block and not a brick-wall one. The more serious ones invest in full renovation."*

*Here, I asked him whether his neighbours from his previous block were taking care of the space in front of the block. He explained that some of them did take care of the space – but only a group of the: "It's a matter of personal view. If you want the space around you to be nice, you would take care of it."*

*I asked Li. whether if overall renovated the panel-flat neighbourhoods would provide a good living environment: "If completely renovated – yes, the neighbourhood would be a nice place. But if you would like to live in a house you wouldn't like it even then. Moreover, if completely renovated, these neighbourhoods will be far better than the rest of the new neighbourhoods, which are stuck with buildings and out of space."*

### 3. What are their wishes towards the development of the socialist neighbourhoods?

*If Li. was given a magic stick she would turn the neighbourhood into one-family houses with private yards.*



Interviewee: J.  
Date: 25.02.2012  
Time: 22<sup>45</sup> - 23<sup>20</sup> (duration 35 min.)

## DESCRIPTION OF THE INTERVIEWEE

**Age group:** 40 – 50

**About:** Industrial marketing. He is a Head of Logistics in a construction company. He has lived in a socialist neighbourhood for 3 years. He moved now to a newly built neighbourhood in brick-constructed flats.

### 1. What kind of meanings and values do they attach to the socialist neighbourhoods?

*I started my interview by introducing the topic of the research and the need to conduct this interview. My first question was related to his attitude towards to panel-flat complexes and what he associates them with. J. answered that his attitude is in no means positive – it is gathering of people, with one function only: “The greatest problem that I see is that those neighbourhoods are initially built without infrastructure. Everything related to infrastructure – roads and traffic is additionally constructed or is still to be constructed. The social is not thought about”.*

*The conversation then goes about his feeling living in the socialist neighbourhood: “I felt discomfort! – it is all about concrete and a huge clustering of people. The in-between gardens are just for the sake of appearances. They are not maintained, not nice; they do not give a pleasant feeling. I miss plants. You have the feeling of living in a concrete. And that all is besides the fact that the neighbourhood that I lived in was considered a wealthy one. I remember in the 80s when I was going to school there (and then I moved out there, later) it was newly built and it was considered prestigious to live there. There were artists and painters living there. There were mansards and double-floor apartments.” And then J. goes back to the playgrounds: “There are playgrounds but they are either broken or at the moment before breaking down. They are not maintained. And there is little that could be done in order to make them pleasant, because they are already constructed. Oh, and another thing – gypsies. There is garbage and homeless dogs everywhere. The overall feeling is negative to me.”*

*To my question of the feeling of being safe in those neighbourhoods, he goes straight: “Well, I am looking at it from a man’s point of view.” - J. strongly emphasized that he is a man, and the position is different - “I am not afraid of the homeless dogs or of somebody attacking me. However, I am not feeling secure when I know my close ones are outside.”*

*What about the lights, I asked him: “Well, yeah, it is ok.”*

*I asked my interviewee whether there is a place in the neighborhood that is better and more nicely managed: “One word only – no! The whole region is the same: the people, the atmosphere. There are no playgrounds, no sports areas.”*

*I asked J. about the social aspect of the neighbourhood and whether the people having some kind of interaction? “Oh yes – he said – there is one, especially of the people that live there from long ago. Look at my land-lord, for example, she has moved out from there 10 years ago, however, she was still coming to visit her neighbours, some group of people, and she was saying they are quite close.”*

*Then I asked about the space in front of the entrances, the little gardens, whether the people organized themselves to manage them. To my question J. answered that there are certain people,*

*emphasizing that these are out of the 150 living in the block, that gather themselves and clean the gardens or maintain the entrances from the inner side: “There is some kind of organization – perhaps it is 1/15<sup>th</sup> of the whole, but it helps”.*

*Do you think your neighbours aim at moving away, I asked? “Well, I don’t think so, generally speaking. This was definitely not my place. Even if the flat was mine – inherited or given as a gift, I would either rent it, or better sell it.” And J. repeated this several times. What is the age group there, I asked? “Well, the people are middle-aged. Perhaps, above 50-60. Well, not too old. But if there were more young people you could feel it. And again, I moved out because I am running away from the region. Now you made me think of it. I just don’t like it!”*

*J. then gives the example of his neighbourhood – the one he grew up in, which is more centrally located, it is a nice neighbourhood, with trees and a huge park next to it: “It was terrible when they built some panel-flats on the place of the family houses. They (the panel-flats) were in no way part of the environment. They were just put there and it was terrible. Besides, there was a community and the people which moved in were not part of the whole.” Were they less educated or ... I tried to ask and he immediately responded: “No! I don’t know! But they were outsiders!”*

*Then the conversation goes again about the environment in the socialist neighbourhoods: “It all depends on the people after all. You can make something they are not matured for. I will give you the example of the concrete garages which they placed there. It was the people, not the Government. I will tell you what happened. After having a car for some years they decided they needed a garage. And a group of people ordered those awful concrete garages and placed them on the laws. And now they have garages. But they are terribly looking, not a part of the whole picture and it is awful. But they are still there – first the Government does not care and have not removed them and second and most importantly – it is THE people who placed them there. They look at them all the time. What do you want more? It is a matter of mentality!”*

### 2. What are their expectations towards the development of the socialist neighbourhoods?

*I lead the conversation to the future of the neighbourhoods: “What future – J. asked – they are decaying more and more. Yes, I would like them to be regenerated but I don’t think that is possible here”. I asked him whether he thinks if the complexes are regenerated they would offer a nice environment. He stressed: “If they are maintained they would offer a really nice environment. They are not badly constructed but they lack specificity. Everything looks the same. I hope for the programs of the Government to start working. But I doubt it!”*

*My next question is whether in his opinion the Government works on programs for the renovation of the panel-flat neighbourhoods: “I don’t have a clue! There is no continuity in the works of the Government – every new government comes with new actions and plans, there is no succession. Nothing is related. And it is every time like that. And besides, the position of the space matters a lot – close to the mountain or not. There is a separation of neighbourhood belonging. The environment has its consequence on the people. It is all about their mentality.”*

*I explained about the suggestion of the Government to place pv panels on top of the panel-flat blocks: “It’s only talks. That is crazy. Now is that, two months ago were the air conditions, but at the end nobody does anything. It is all talks! Like always.”*



*J. goes back in the discussed topics:* “But you made me think: I moved here because in 10 minutes I am up in the mountain! Also, I am close to the main roads and it takes me 5-10 minutes with the car to be downtown, visit friends, whatever. We also have some good public transport connections, but I never use the public transport. It is slow and you never know when it will come. It is not useful. But when my children would start using it – it is there, they can go to school or just go out.”

### 3. What are their wishes towards the development of the socialist neighbourhoods?

*My last questions are about the wishes of my interviewee for the future of the socialist housing estates, if he was given a magic stick and could play with them:* “The newly-constructed flats and neighbourhoods after all are inhabited by young people. Here is Vitosha (the mountain located very close to Sofia). There is a park here, and a sport complex – several ones. I feel comfortable. There are the supermarkets nearby. And again – in 10 minutes time I am in Vitosha (the mountain). The feeling is different. The block is better looking and much better maintained. And even though I do not like some of the people the overall perception is different. Again, the garbage and the not maintained space in the panel-flats disgust me. It creates an overall perception. It is the gypsies which are the big problem. There are some places but they are a few which are maintained with personal funds. It is not that somebody does it for you. You do it for yourself!”

I thanked J. for his time and priceless words!

Interviewee: N.  
Date: 21.05.2012  
Time: 21<sup>55</sup> – 21<sup>10</sup> (duration 15 min.)

## DESCRIPTION OF THE INTERVIEWEE

**Age group:** 20 – 30

**About:** A master student in the Tourism studies

### 1. What kind of meanings and values do they attach to the socialist neighbourhoods?

*As usual, I started my interview by introducing the topic of the research and the need to conduct this interview. My first question was related to his attitude towards to panel-flat complexes and what he associates them with:* “For a pity, I relate the panel-flat neighbourhoods with a great part of Sofia. At the moment I relate them to many disorders, but at the same time a potential for development.” *I asked N. what are these disorders that the panel-flat neighbourhoods have different from the ones in his current place of living. He answered:* “In my opinion, they are mostly related to the number of people living in those neighbourhoods. It is extremely difficult to manage those people – a minimum of 10 floors with three apartments per floor. These people are all owners and each one of them has the right to speak – that makes it extremely difficult to accomplish something. For each decision, even a minor one, there needs to be a majority of voices, etc. This is the main problem that leads to many of the disorders.”

*The following question was related to N's feeling in the panel-flats. I asked him how he was feeling on an every-day basis in the neighbourhood:* “I wouldn't say I was feeling comfortable and cozy; when talking about the time that it took me to get downtown – medium level.” *Here, I asked N. why he was feeling uncomfortably:* “For the reason that the open-spaces are really not taken care of, the parking spaces are not managed – there are chaotically parked cars all over, the entrances of the blocks are not well-managed and they stink.”

*I asked N. whether the panel-flat neighbourhood offered him a possibility for sports and recreation:* “I wouldn't say so – yes, there is space where you can take a walk, but these spaces are related to the open-spaces in between the blocks which are completely unmanaged and not taken care for, as I have already explained. Here and there, there are some entrances where the inhabitants are taking care of the open-space just in front the entrance – in about 3-4 sq. m. – and they made a little garden or something. These are rare cases and they can't change the overall picture of the neighbourhood. If talking about sports grounds – to be honest I haven't noticed any other sports playgrounds except the ones in the school yards – and these are not really nice. And that's it.”

*My next question is related to the feeling of security in the panel-flats neighbourhoods. I asked N. whether he was feeling safe in the neighbourhood when talking about criminality, lights on the streets, etc. He answered:* “Yeah, I wouldn't say that there should be more criminality compared to other parts of the city. Well, yeah, there is a difference in the feeling. But I would say that my previous neighbourhood is having a “not-so-criminal” look.” *I asked N. whether the neighbourhood was well-lit and if not whether this made him feel unsafe:* “It's dark, it's not well lit and it's not comfortable to go home during the evening and nights.” *Here, I asked N. about the homeless dogs:* “No, they are not a bigger problem than anywhere else in the city.”

*What did you miss in the neighbourhood?* “Well, perhaps some every-day needs like chemical cleaning, but overall not.” *And he added:* “A park and a place for recreation.”



*Do you think – I asked – that if these neighbourhoods were well managed they would be a nice place for living? "Yes, definitely." And do you think, then, that this overall renovation of these neighbourhoods is possible? N. answered negatively straight ahead.*

*What were your motives to move out, I asked N.? "The quality of the building is very important to me – the quality of the panel-flats is low, in my opinion, the insulations are not good and not on the least place – the outer look."*

*With my next question I took the conversation a little backwards asking about children and whether there are spaces in the neighbourhood that provide children playgrounds: "I think they are not well-managed. I can't think of a space that is well-managed and provide a nice playground. Although, I have to admit, I have never thought from that side because I haven't had the need."*

## **2. What are their expectations towards the development of the socialist neighbourhoods?**

*My next question is related to the future of the panel flats if looked upon realistically on the situation with these negihbourhoods? "I expect that they would degrade reaching a moment that they would be dangerous for the people living in those. Then, the state should get involved in some way." Having that answer I asked N. whether in his opinion the Government is actually working on a plan for dealing with those neighbourhoods – for their future, renovation and management: "I don't think so."*

*Do you think that a PPP is a way to work with those neighbourhoods – to renovate the buildings and manage the open space, I asked N.: "I doubt it. It's possible, but I actually doubt it."*

*I asked N. whether he knows if his ex-neighbours would like to move out if they have the possibility. He answered that he has no idea. The way he answered left me with the feeling that he didn't communicate much with his neighbours. At this moment he added: "Ten floors with three apartments per floor – I actually didn't know 90% of my neighbours."*

## **3. What are their wishes towards the development of the socialist neighbourhoods?**

*I asked N. what he would do with the panel flats negihbourhoods if he had a magic stick and he could transform them in any way: "I would turn them into maximum 3-floor-blocks with a private open space. I would try to make them not that isolated and fragmented if talking about functions. I would try to mix it all – the flats with working spaces, places for recreation and fun. I would try to use a bigger space mixing more functions making it more attractive and more interesting and last but not least – more comfortable for the people living in."*

Interviewee: T.  
Date: 26.02.2012  
Time: 09<sup>30</sup> – 10<sup>00</sup> (duration 30 min.)

## **DESCRIPTION OF THE INTERVIEWEE**

**Age group:** 30 – 40

**About:** Director HR in a big company. She moved now to a newly built neighbourhood in brick-constructed flats.

### **1. What kind of meanings and values do they attach to the socialist neighbourhoods?**

*I started my interview by introducing the topic of the research and the need to conduct this interview. My first question was related to his attitude towards to panel-flat complexes and what he associates them with. T's answer was that they are much the same. She added that you can hardly have any orientation: "Otherwise, they are not bad, with well-planned surrounding spaces. But again they are all the same." T. currently associates the panel flats with garbage, grass (not maintained), and all the playgrounds, benches, etc. are either gone or completely ruined and not suitable for use: "In general the idea of those neighbourhoods is very good – they have spaces for a walk, for the free time, for playgrounds, but those things are just not there." And she goes, without me asking about the reason she moved out: "It was a choice of another type of construction and a neighbourhood with infrastructure, supermarkets, public transport and sport complexes. And the biggest advantage of it all is the isolation from your neighbours".*

*On my question of whether she felt safe in the neighbourhood she touched the topic of the homeless dogs and the lack of lights here and there. Additionally, she emphasizes on the idea that she has never seen police officers going around: "But that is everywhere. I don't think in another neighbourhood would be different."*

*My next question is what my interviewee was missing in the panel-flats neighbourhood. T's first response was about the lack of a sports complex: "In general, a few years ago there were no big supermarkets. Another thing is the time that it takes you to get downtown, or where you want to go. It is very comfortable when you have a car. But if you use the public transport –ahhhh – it is not regulated, it is slow and you can't know when it would come."*

*The following questions in the interview were related to the neighbours T. had in that neighbourhood. I asked whether they were united or whether they formed a kind of community. T. said that it is a kind of community. She gave the example of the socialist times when for example the 2-room flats were being given to people from The Bulgarian Academy of Science, while the 3-room flats to journalist, etc.: "That formed your community. I mean you are situated in a community. You have similar education and background, it's all educated people. Nowadays, getting a panel-flat apartment is caused by different issues – you either inherit it or you buy it because it's cheaper."*

*I asked about whether the people organized themselves for cleaning or repairing activities, etc. T. said that there are such activities, and they are also happening nowadays: "And besides, the space where you live shall be maintained and taken care of by both the municipality and the inhabitants. It is a matter of worldview not a matter of where you live".*

### **2. What are their expectations towards the development of the socialist neighbourhoods?**



*To my question about the future of the neighbourhood and the similar neighbourhoods in Sofia, T. was quite definitive: “Oh, I don’t have a clue. Brick-constructions are much better and they have longer life as far as I know. A lot of money are needed, the state does not have them; and rules! I just can’t imagine it. Again, it is a matter of a worldview, of mentality. We are not disciplined! It is about common rules and mentality.”*

*I asked whether she thinks private or public-private partnerships can help with regards to children playgrounds or sports places to be constructed in the open spaces in between the panel-flats. T. explained that there are companies with such policies: “It is trendy to have a CSR program right now. Especially for some companies that need advertisement. However, they are mainly foreign companies with a foreign management. If you have local management you would never get anything like that. I don’t think, with the exception of when private (Bulgarian) companies have some kind of financial response, would be participating in the maintenance of the open-spaces. There should better be some public programs of the Government, perhaps.”*

*Do you think, I asked then, that the Government is responsible and prepares an action plan or programs for development of those neighbourhoods? “I can’t decide/judge. It shall have some responsibility, otherwise there is no chance. The stairs are already common when you go out of your apartment. There is no public awareness or consciousness.”*

*I then explained about the idea of the Government to place pv panels on top of the panel-flats asking about the opinion of T. “It is again about awareness and consciousness. It should be that you sign a contract with some company and she manages it after that. Otherwise it wouldn’t work.”*

*On my question about whether T’s ex-neighbours would like to move out of the panel-flat neighbourhoods, she answered straight: “I don’t know”*

### **3. What are their wishes towards the development of the socialist neighbourhoods?**

*Finally, I would like to ask you what you would wish to see for those neighbourhoods in the future, the coming years, I said?*

T. went straight ahead: “clean streets, green spaces, and playgrounds. The people must be given the chance to live actively.



