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**GEOGRAPHICAL ANALYSIS OF GATED COMMUNITIES AND THEIR  
CHALLENGES FOR URBAN DEVELOPMENT IN HUNGARY**

Theses of Ph.D. dissertation

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## **Introduction: aim of the study**

In the course of my research, I observed the characteristics typical of the Hungarian gated community phenomenon, with a special focus on their influence on settlement development, as well as their urban impact. The gated community – in Hungarian: “lakópark” (“zárt lakóközösség”) – is a very specific residential form of our times, widespread throughout the whole world. According to its most commonly used international definition, gated communities are a group of privately owned residential properties that are established by real estate developers, and are physically separated from their surroundings, for instance by fences or walls. The residents finance the costs of keeping up the infrastructure and the services, which are only available to them. Another possible characteristic feature of gated communities is that they may have a legal regulation of their own (BLANDY, S. 2003).

The choice of this topic is supported by the fact, that the gated community is a current settlement phenomenon spreading both globally and in Hungary at a great speed, however – especially in the above-mentioned country – it is neither properly researched, nor to an adequate degree (WEBSTER, C. et al. 2002). The establishment of enclosed communities raises a number of questions and problems regarding settlements and society in general. Therefore it is an issue often treated by public opinion as well as by the media, both in Hungary and abroad. Nevertheless – or rather perhaps due to this – the term “gated community” is interpreted in different ways. Not even the Hungarian Central Statistical Office uses an unambiguous definition of this phenomenon, so unfortunately their data bases cannot be considered fully reliable.

Although the scientific research of gated communities has already begun in Hungary as well, there are yet only a few publications that deal with specific cases on a local level. Despite the significance of the topic, there are only very few studies that analyse the spatial relations between people “living within and without the fences”. The number of studies applying empirical methods is likewise very small (CSÉFALVAY Z. 2008, CSIZMADY A. 2008, CSANÁDI G. et al. 2010). A further characteristic of the research in Hungary is that a significant majority of the studies focus on the Budapest Metropolitan Region, actually, on the capital itself. However, the gated communities have already appeared in and spread to other Hungarian towns as well, predominantly in form of new real estate developments. Therefore their study is justified by all means.

On the basis of what has been mentioned so far, the main aims of my study are as follows:

- Interpretation of the gated community phenomenon – only seldom studied in Hungary so far – based on the analysis of international and Hungarian special literature and their results.
- Developing research methods that enable the study of enclosed community characteristics appearing in Hungary.
- For the sake of official data collection and registering, a standardised gated community definition should be recommended and used. In addition to this, the typification of the settlement type should also take place.
- The establishment of primary databases and the study of the spreading of this phenomenon in Hungary.
- On the basis of the case study results, analytical introduction of the more significant gated community types, as well as the major groups within a settlement or society affected by their establishment.

In addition to the aims sketched above, the most important question of my research:

- In how far do the Hungarian gated communities correspond to the real estate developments described by special international literature?  
Detail questions related to this:
  - How can one explain the establishment of enclosed communities in Hungary on the basis of certain models in special literature?
  - What spatial factors are there – global, regional and local motives – and how do they motivate their establishment?
  - How does this characteristic form of housing estate fit morphologically and functionally into its wider local environment?
  - How are the investments judged by the residents of gated communities, the people living in their neighbourhood, by the real estate developers, municipalities, and the representatives of civil society?  
This is my basic hypothesis related to the questions above:
- The majority of gated communities in Hungary correspond morphologically, functionally and with regard to their social and environmental effects to their counterparts mentioned in international literature.

## **Methods, research areas**

During my study, various kinds of quantitative and qualitative methods were applied.

- With regard to the first and second detail questions, I did an analysis of the special literature, as well as content analysis and statistical data collection. A survey of the foreign and the more restricted Hungarian special literature on the topic was also done.
- In order to answer the second detail question, I created a primer statistical database on the spread of gated communities in Hungary. To fulfil this task, I applied following methods: analysis and archiving of real estate development homepages, field survey, phone data collection, map analysis as well as photo documentation.
- Answers for the latter three detail questions were mainly sought with the help of case studies. To do this task, I chose research areas with differing types of enclosed communities, on the basis of my special literature analysis.
- The comparison of the researched real estate developments was done on the basis of several considerations. For this, I mainly used following methods: interviewing, content analysis, questionnaires, field surveys and photo documentation.
- Altogether 57, half-structured interviews were done with representatives of the settlement groups mentioned earlier. I studied the documents of settlement development and planning belonging to the research areas within the framework of content analysis – and also the respective materials of their electronic media. Apart from the gated community of Kecskemét case study, the questionnaire method was also used among people in the neighbourhood of two further, similar real estate developments (with a sample of 223 persons).

## **Summary of the results in theses**

### *The main results of the special literature analysis*

On the basis of international publications, I tried to compare, interpret and adapt the processes and connections concerning the gated community phenomenon to the Hungarian characteristics. These are the main results of this research phase:

1. The definition of gated communities is not uniform in international special literature, either. Most often, the term is defined in the described way in introductory part of theses (HEGEDŰS G. 2007h). Research on the topic is characterized by an inter- and multidisciplinary approach.

Numerous theories aim to explain the phenomenon itself. One of these is the theory of “*social-spatial polarisation*”, which puts the effects of the global economy entering its Post-Fordian phase into the focus of interest. Another one, the theory of “*special dwelling expectations*”, interprets and describes the move to gated communities essentially as an individual consumer’s choice. According to the so-called “*economic theory of clubs*”, certain goods of the enclosed communities, i.e. their “club goods” can be run effectively – in an economic sense. The “*bankruptcy of state*” theory claims that there is a withdrawal of the welfare and control functions of our contemporary state, and that the real estate developments mentioned above can be interpreted as a reaction by various private agents to this tendency (GLASZE, G. 2003, HEGEDŰS, G. 2007g).

2. The establishments in Hungary defined and studied as gated communities by me do not yet have a long history. In contrast to public opinion, they do not resemble American, but European models of establishment (Glasze, G. et al. 2006). Thanks to the polarisation of society and cultural globalisation, from the 1970’s onwards, these characteristic settlement formations first spread in the United States, and then from the 1980’s, they appeared on a global scale. In East Central Europe, they first emerged at the end of the 1980’s. This can be partly explained by the ongoing liberalisation and deregularisation processes, accompanying the political change after the end of Communism in the region. Currently, they are present in nearly all states of the world, so that they are characteristic real estate types of globalisation (WEBSTER, C. et al. 2002). Their research followed with delay abroad as well. A great number of different real estate development types are known, that also vary according to their spread. The gated communities in the United States are characteristically family house investments built in the suburban belt. These are well-equipped with community establishments and services. Generally, members of the upper middle class live in them (BLAKELY, L. – SYNDER, M. G. 1997).

3. Enclosed communities have all kinds of different effects on their environment, as far as nature, economy, society and architecture are concerned, and often they also trigger significant social conflicts. The most often recurring problems are the questions related to the “privatisation of public spaces”, the segregation of enclosed communities from their environments, and the “double taxation” of gated community dwellers.

Apart from foreign special literature, appropriate conclusions may also be drawn from domestic, Hungarian publications:

4. Hungarian studies define the term in many ways, although the aspects of “concrete spatiality” only seldom appear in them. Some of the authors explain the appearance of gated communities with a Neo-Marxist approach

(BODNÁR J. – MOLNÁR, V. 2010), while others put economical and political reasons in the foreground. The essence of this view is that the local municipalities are financially far too dependent from the state, so that they cannot perform their public service functions properly, so that the upper middle classes move to into gated communities (CSÉFALVAY, Z. 2010b). The similarity between block-of-flats and enclosed real estate developments is also stressed in certain studies (CSIZMADY A. 2008).

5. Gated communities appeared in Hungary from the end of the 1980's onwards, first in Budapest and then also outside the capital, most of all in its suburban areas. The features of their diffusion are the same in other countries as well, which supports my hypotheses.

6. On the basis of publications issued in Hungary, it can be stated that the main motive for the move into enclosed communities is the demand for high quality residential environment. On the other hand, security, or the possibility of living together with people sharing a similar social status are less significant factors. Gated communities exert a significant impact on their environment in Hungary as well, often triggering local conflicts (CSÉFALVAY Z. 2008).

#### *Spread of gated communities in Hungary – study results*

Taking the official statistical definition of gated communities as a basis, a number of problems arise with the terminological interpretation of this phenomenon. During my research, I formulated a “specifying” definition that can be employed for Hungarian conditions. This enables a more accurate investigation of the spread of this phenomenon in Hungary, as well as the typification of the real estate developments treated here.

These are the main results of this research phase:

7. The way I defined gated communities, sets out from the most generally accepted international professional definition. There are only two differences: I specified the size of real estate developments as exceeding at least twenty housing units and the legal self-regulation of enclosed communities is not seen as an obligatory criterion (HEGEDŰS, G. 2009d).

8. Different types of gated communities are not evenly distributed across Hungary. The process of their establishment is mostly determined by economic, settlement planning, political and to a lesser degree by physical and social geographical factors. The effects of these features are visible in the apparent differences between various Hungarian real estate developments with regard to type and number. They also have an effect on the expansion of these communities (HEGEDŰS G. 2007a, 2007c, 2007d, 2008b). Enclosed communities are generally most widespread on the higher levels of settlement hierarchy and in the most developed regions

(HEGEDŰS, G. 2006a, 2008c, 2009a, 2009c). This is quite similar to the situation described in other countries.

**9.** In Hungary, these real estate developments are mainly concentrated in the capital city and the surrounding territory of settlements belonging to the Budapest agglomeration zone (Figure 1., 2.). Within the Budapest Metropolitan Region, I recorded 206 gated communities that fitted my definition, having altogether around 33 300 housing units. Within the boundaries of the capital alone, there are 183 gated communities, with 31 200 housing units (HEGEDŰS G. 2008a, 2011).

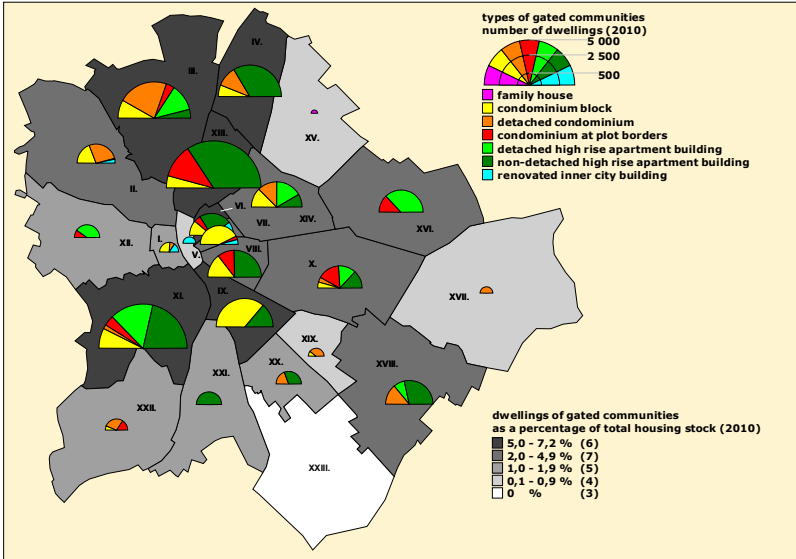
**10.** Within the capital, the most enclosed communities can be found within the districts of the so-called “brown-belt”. Since these are the parts of the city, where most of the former industrial areas are available that the real estate developers could build up relatively densely, with a high number of housing units. Though others also occur in the inner city and in the outer districts, but far more rarely.

**11.** The “condominium” type, being smaller in size and having less households, occurs to some extent more rarely. This type is the most numerous in the “brown-belt” neighbourhoods and in the inner districts of Budapest (Figure 1., 2.).

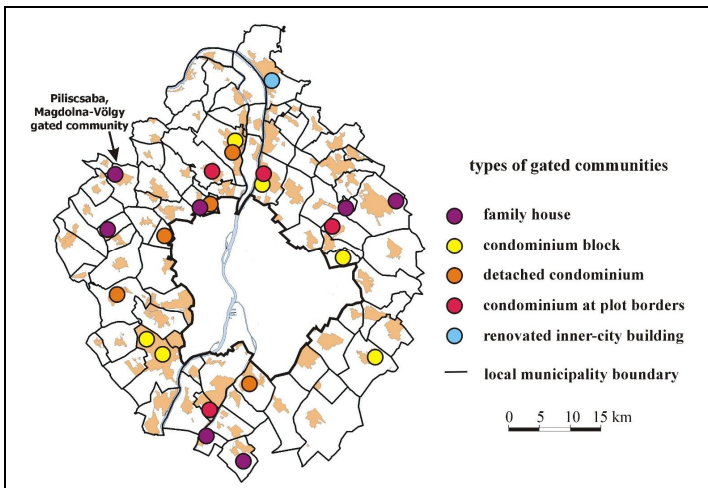
Due to the ratio of price of plot /and investor’s profit and the development regulation, the “family house” type occurs in Budapest merely individually; it can only be found in one single outer district of Pest. However, in the settlements of the agglomeration around the capital – especially in the ones far from the city – this is the most frequent form.

The “renovated inner-city building” gated community type was established mainly with the transformation of tenement houses from the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy era into luxury estates. Due to the high investment costs, they are primarily concentrated in the inner districts of the capital, but on the whole, they occur quite rarely.

All of the types mentioned here have equivalents abroad, yet among the latter, the proportion and significance of family-house-type enclosed communities – built in the suburban belt – is generally far greater.



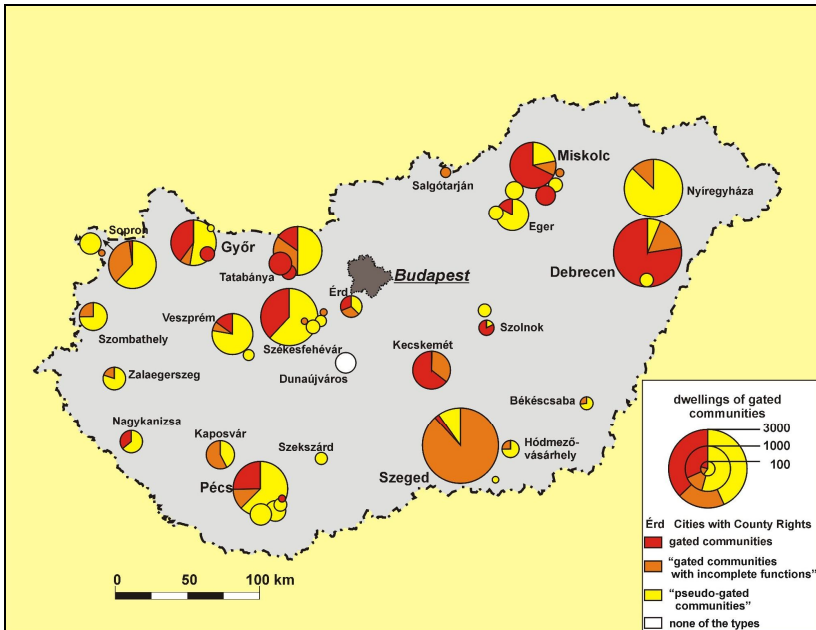
**Figure 1.** Spatial distribution of gated communities in Budapest (Source: compiled by the author. Source of data: data collection and calculation of the author)



**Figure 2.** Spatial distribution of gated communities in settlements of Budapest agglomeration zone around Budapest (Source: compiled by the author. Source of data: data collection and calculation of the author)



12. In the cities of Hungary with county rights and in their suburban belts, the term “gated community” is used in a rather broad sense. However, only a small part of these real estate developments fit my specifying definition. These investments first appeared in greater numbers around the turn of the millennium in these cities. In 2009, I recorded forty-two such establishments, with altogether around 5 900 housing units (Figure 3.). It can be ascertained, that the gated communities in Hungary – partly in line with other global phenomena – spread similarly to the “hierarchical-neighbourhood combined diffusion features of innovations” (RECHNITZER J. 1993, BOROS L. – HEGEDŰS G. – PÁL V. 2007a).



**Figure 3.** Number of gated community dwellings in the cities of Hungary with county rights and in their suburban area.

(Source: compiled by the author. Source of data: data collection and calculation of the author)

13. According to my research, the total number of these enclosed communities amounts to around 270, having a population of about 96 000. Thus it can be stated, that nowadays, gated communities are a widespread phenomenon in the cities of Hungary belonging to the higher settlement hierarchy mentioned earlier.

*Results of case studies about the establishment of gated communities, how they fit into settlements and about various settlement groups*

In my case studies, I researched gated communities and settlements selected on the basis of special literature and data analysis results. They are depicted in Table 1. I ranked the real estate developments of the research areas into different groups, according to the social status of their inhabitants and the type of the gated communities. Then, I compared their most significant features to each other.

My main research results related to the case studies are as follows:

**14.** The differences between various gated communities – as described by special literature – can be shown in Hungary as well. They are different in terms of type, category and their way how they are established. These results may lead to the conclusion that the connection between basic types and various social statuses – as shown in Figure 1. – is in most cases probably also valid for other enclosed communities outside our research areas.

**Table 1.** Relations between gated communities investigated, according to type and social status (Source: compiled by the author)

Type of gated community	gated community category (social status)		
	„low”	„middle”	„high”
„family house”			Piliscsaba, Magdolna-Völgy
“condominium”		Kecskemét, Arborétum	
„apartment house”	Szeged, Tisza Palota		

**15.** The closely observed real estate developments of my research areas (Piliscsaba, Kecskemét, Szeged) basically correspond with the respective foreign types – except for the legal governance encompassing everyday life of the people living there. Due to the lower purchasing power of the Hungarian population, investors establish less communal facilities in comparison to developed countries, yet this is not a substantial difference (HEGEDŰS G. 2011).

**16.** The gated communities that were studied, generally do not really fit into the settlement morphology of their environment, because they are often more densely built and also differ in terms of their architectural approach. The same is true in the case of the foreign gated communities as well, which

supports my hypotheses. From a functional point of view, they may not be seen as independent settlement entities, for they only satisfy principally the living- and leisure needs, the social geographical functions of – one might as well say – the local mode of existence. People living in enclosed communities have to rely basically on their settlement in all cases, or on other ones more far away – in the case of Piliscsaba, Magdolna-Völgy, on Budapest. This shows another kind of similarity with the foreign gated communities, which also confirms my hypotheses.

**17.** The relationship between the various settlement actors examined – real estate developers, local municipalities, civil society, and people living within or around these gated communities – is more likely characterised by conflicts. I ranked these into different conflict fields.

**18.** The “establishment” conflict field affects most of the settlement actors significantly. The outstanding function of the real estate developers is indicated by the fact, that when enclosed communities are established, supply and demand for such real estates both play a significant role, yet the emphasis is more on the former one. Investors stand up efficiently to their interests against other settlement actors, during the realisation of their projects, they often even change development plans into more intensified ones. Professional marketing, or the so-called “Lefebvre’s production of space” prove the dominance of real estate developers. Similar cases are known in international special literature as well. A further characteristic is that gated communities are – from the point of view of investors – a type of profit-increasing real estates that are more easily realised in comparison to other forms of investment. During the process of their establishment, choosing the appropriate place is one of the most important decisions (HEGEDŰS, G. 2009d). Municipalities usually play only a passive part in the establishment of gated communities, though their “control” over real estate developers has increased since the end of the 1990’s. The point of view of civil societies varies with regard to the establishment of enclosed communities, the majority of their organisations is disinterested. Yet there exist a small number of associations, which vigorously protest against the projects mentioned (HEGEDŰS G. 2008b, 2009e, 2009f).

**19.** Most remarkably, it turned out from the study of the “establishment” conflict field of Hungary, that the leading motives for moving into gated communities differed from the ones pointed out in special literature. The “club goods” of superior quality or their more cost-effective maintenance were not the most important factors. In Hungary, the desire for security and the expectation of sharing the company of people with similar social status play a more important role. The significance of this latter factor grows in direct proportion to the rising prestige of gated communities, and the role of

security is even more important in the case of women and family men (HEGEDŰS G. 2011). These findings correspond to international literature, while the results of Hungarian publications stand in contradiction to them (LOW, S. 2004, CSÉFALVAY Z. 2008).

**20.** The relationship between the residents of enclosed communities and their local municipality is also often burdened by conflicts – this is what we may call the “operational” conflict field. In the case of the Piliscsaba research area, financial and legal differences were in the background and the good interest endorsement of those living in Magdolna-Völgy that even led to the – so far unsuccessful – endeavour of the gated community to break away from Piliscsaba administratively.

**21.** Within certain settlement groups researched, there are also “inner” conflict fields. They can be shown within the community of enclosed communities between those, who pay the joint costs and those, who do not (Magdolna-Völgy), or between the richer and the less well-off residents (Tisza Palota, Arborétum). Within the group of real estate developers, changing development plans into more intensified ones during the process of establishment, provide sources of inner conflicts of interest (HEGEDŰS G. 2011). These inner conflict fields are often mentioned by foreign studies as well.

**22.** As for the conflict field “segregation” it can be stated that the upper middle class population of the researched gated community projects has a generally higher status than their environment. So the segregating effects of the real estate developments introduced here can hardly be disputed. The separation of these people from their neighbourhood is also verified by the study of the of affected group relations. Between gated community dwellers and the population of the nearby settlements, there is usually a sort of “mutual lack of contact”. The former have mostly an indifferent opinion of their closer or wider neighbourhood, while in the case of Piliscsaba, it is a negative one. Those, who live next to them, have only seldom been inside the gated communities, and – also due to the symbolic separation of the latter – they do not even take advantage of the few chances that arise, to go there. The segregation effects increase in direct proportion to the status categories of these projects. A further characteristic of the conflict field treated here is that the separation of the gated community dwellers can be observed not only within the researched area, but even outside it. This is something that resembles the cases described in international specialised literature (HEGEDŰS G. 2007b, 2007e). It is also indicated by the fact that people living there, take their children to nursery schools and schools with a “better reputation”.

23. The enclosed communities are judged differently by the various settlement groups researched. This can be followed up in the development and regulation documents, as well as in the media (HEGEDŰS G. 2007f, 2009b, 2011). The residents have a basically positive view of the investment, both in terms of architecture and community. Real estate investors and some local government experts also consider the enclosed communities as positive developments. Yet other government members have a negative opinion about them. The residents of the neighbourhood consider the gated communities of “higher” standard to be architecturally and structurally better, while those of “lower” standard are considered from a critical or neutral point of view. The different ways how various settlement groups judge enclosed communities is also mentioned by international literature.

24. On the basis of my results, I have drawn the conclusion that the establishment of these enclosed residential areas contributes to the fragmentation of the local societies, as well as to an increase in the number of settlement conflicts.

### **Suggestions based on the research results**

It can be expected, that the number of enclosed communities will increase both in Hungary and abroad, due to the assumption that the triggering causes for establishing gated communities and the legal environment will also remain unchanged.

Therefore, the local social problems revealed during my research on gated communities may even increase in future.

In order to avoid this, following suggestions were made:

- A standardized gated community definition should be used for statistical data collection and registering.
- Comparative Hungarian and international research based on this, laying greater emphasis on spatiality.
- Working out alternatives to gated communities, for instance taking over certain Western models, for example the “defensible space theory” of NEWMAN (NEWMAN, O. 1996).
- Unified building- and other guidelines, as well as legal regulation valid for the whole of Hungary should be elaborated and consistently applied thereafter.
- Related to the proposal above, I suggest that the residents of settlements affected should have a greater say in the planning and establishing process of gated community projects (communal control).

- On the whole, it would be justified to exploit the advantages of this housing form to a greater extent and to moderate its disadvantages more vigorously.

### Publications in the topic of dissertation

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2. **HEGEDŰS G.** 2007a: Szeged lakóparkjainak általános jellemzői. In: KOVÁCS CS. – PÁL V. (szerk.): *A társadalmi földrajz világa.* Szegedi Tudományegyetem, Gazdaság- és Társadalomföldrajz Tanszék, Szeged. pp. 193-203.
3. **HEGEDŰS, G.** 2007b: The review of the effects of the gated communities caused on the space use of their area and surroundings. In: KOVÁCS, CS. (szerk.): *From Villages to Cyberspace. A falvaktól a kibertérig.* Szegedi Tudományegyetem, Gazdaság- és Társadalomföldrajz Tanszék, Szeged. pp. 207-218.
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5. BOROS L. – **HEGEDŰS G.** – PÁL V. 2007a: A globalizáció városképi hatásai a Dél-Alföldön. In: SITÁNYI L. (szerk.): *I. Terület- és vidékfejlesztési Konferencia.* Dél-dunántúli Regionális Fejlesztési Ügynökség Kht., Kaposvár. pp. 167-174.
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8. **HEGEDŰS, G.** 2007f: A Few Features of the Gated Communities Located in the Budapest Agglomeration. *EUGEO 2007,* Amsterdam, absztrakt, elektronikus kiadvány
9. **HEGEDŰS, G.** 2007g: The review of gated communities in Hungary from a geographical and an economic point of view. In: KERÉKES K. (ed.): *The Proceedings of the International Conference Competitiveness*

- and European Integration*. Universitatea Babeş-Bolyai, Editura Alma Mater, Cluj-Napoca. pp. 44-48.
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  13. **HEGEDŰS G.** 2008c: Az elzárkózó helyi társadalom – lakóparkok a vidéki magyar nagyvárosokban. In: SZABÓ V. – OROSZ Z. – NAGY R. – FAZEKAS I. (szerk.): *IV. Magyar Földrajzi Konferencia*, 2008, Debrecen. pp. 285-291.
  14. **HEGEDŰS G.** 2009a: A lakóparkok elterjedésének vizsgálata Magyarország megyei jogú városaiban. *Geográfus Doktoranduszok IX. Országos Konferenciája*, 2009, Szeged. Szegedi Tudományegyetem, Gazdaság- és Társadalomföldrajz Tanszék, CD kiadvány
  15. **HEGEDŰS, G.** 2009b: Features of Gated Communities in the Most Populous Hungarian Cities. In: SMIEGEL, C. (ed.): *Forum IfL – Gated and Guarded Housing in Eastern Europe*, Leibniz-Institut für Länderkunde, Leipzig. pp. 91-99.
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  17. **HEGEDŰS, G.** 2009d: A Review of Gated Communities in Some Hungarian Cities. *Geographica Pannonica*, 13. 8. pp. 85-96.
  18. **HEGEDŰS G.** 2009e: A szegedi lakóparkok társadalomföldrajzi vizsgálata. *Közép-Európai Közlemények*, 2. 4-5. pp. 167-174.
  19. **HEGEDŰS G.** 2009f: A lakóparkok és lakóparkszerű létesítmények általános jellemzői a magyarországi megyei jogú városokban. *Jelenkori társadalmi és gazdasági folyamatok*, 4. 3-4. pp. 219-223.
  20. **HEGEDŰS G.** 2011: Lakópark és környezete társadalomföldrajzi vizsgálata a piliscsabai Magdolna-Völgy példáján. *V. Magyar Földrajzi Konferencia*, Pécs (megjelenés alatt)

## Other publications

1. BOROS L. – **HEGEDŰS G.** – PÁL V. 2006a: Globalizációs hatások alföldi városainkban – a városszerkezet és a településkép átalakulása. *III. Magyar Földrajzi Konferencia*, Budapest. CD kiadvány
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