

Housing preferences and the image of inner city neighbourhoods in Budapest

ESZTER BERÉNYI B.¹–BALÁZS SZABÓ²

Abstract

The study presents an analysis of inner-city neighbourhoods of Budapest. The major findings are as follows: (1) The real estate prices increased in all parts of the inner-city in the last decade but the rate of change was varied. The most deteriorated quarters rapidly developed because of the reconstructions and the new constructions, however the highest prices are still recorded in the traditionally most prestigious neighbourhoods. (2) The social structure of the inner city significantly changed. The new inhabitants – who moved to the inner city after 2000 – are younger, more educated than the traditional inhabitants who did not leave the inner-city after 1990. The reasons for moving into the inner-city are different in the two groups. The location became the most important factor, and some special quarter related reasons emerged (good reputation). (3) The inhabitant's views about the inner-city also transformed, mainly because the housing preferences of the old and new inhabitants are different. The older inhabitants have a more critical attitude toward the inner-city than the new ones. The family house in the suburban greenbelt is their most preferred housing type. The satisfaction with the neighbourhoods depends on mostly the condition of buildings and the new functions of the quarters. The emergence of different social groups in the neighbourhood is already perceived by the local population.

Keywords: Budapest, inner-city, image of the city, housing preference, urban regeneration.

Introduction

The aim of this paper is to examine how the transformation of the inner city is seen by members of local society. Our hypothesis is that population change has strengthened in all areas though only a small part of the inner city has experienced renewed during the last years. There have appeared certain social groups which obviously prefer to live downtown, namely students (about 100,000 students are enrolled in the universities and colleges of the capital) and foreigners who study or work in Budapest for a few years.

The preferences of the newcomers are different from those of the traditional local population. The central location is supposedly favoured by both. The traditional dwellers

¹ Development Council of Budapest Agglomeration. H-1184 Budapest, Üllői út 400. E-mail: berenyibeszter@gmail.com

² Geographical Research Institute, Hungarian Academy of Sciences. H-1112 Budapest, Budaörsi út 45. E-mail: szbabsz@gmail.com

(mainly the older ones) emotionally connect to the quarter where they know their neighbours and the local shops, while the newcomers move in to be close to the universities or work places and bars, cafes, restaurants, and cultural institutions.

Though the transformation of the inner city is a visible process, its mental perception might be quite varied. There could be significant differences between the opinion of the traditional and the new inhabitants. This latter group may claim the inner city more preferable than the traditional dwellers.

The analysis of inner city transformation is based on two different sets of information. One is a series of official statistical data³, the other is a sample survey⁴ carried out in 2007. The first part of our paper gives a short overview of the changes in inner city neighbourhoods (and especially in our case study areas) as reflected in the statistical data. The second part of the paper will focus on the inhabitants' opinion and preferences revealed by the results of the sample survey.

Inner city transformation in the capital of a transition country

Briefly, Budapest can be divided into the following principal zones. In the centre of the town can be found the city (central business district) where offices and administrative and cultural institutions are concentrated. The inner residential area – surrounded the city – where 25% of the population of the capital live is the eldest part of Budapest. It was rebuilt after the flood of Danube in 1838, but the recent building stock originates from the period between the unification of Pest, Buda and Óbuda in 1873 and World War II. This densely built historical city center is surrounded by public parks, stations and industrial areas in Pest side, and by villa quarters in the Buda side. The industrial zone is mixed with old deteriorated residential areas and some socialist housing estates. The outer districts – the settlements which attached to the capital in 1950 – contain large housing estates and continuously built family houses.

The inner city of Budapest has been greatly transformed during the last twenty years. The most spectacular changes have been the emerging urban functions. The number and variability of shops, services, and offices increased while the building stock more or less remained the same. In the early nineties, the housing market was mainly driven by functional conversion of the flats in the inner parts of the city (KOVÁCS, Z.–WIESSNER, R. 1996). Some new houses were already built in the nineties but the majority of construction projects started after 2000, partly as a result of the new housing policy (HEGEDÜS, J.–TELLER, N. 2006). At the end of the 1990s, the housing market

³ These data are produced by the Central Statistical Office. Their major sources are regular surveys (housing statistics, population census) and officially registered price information in the real estate business.

⁴ The survey is a part of a DFG project: Between Gentrification and Downward Spiral: Socio-spatial change and persistence in residential neighbourhoods of selected CEE urban regions. Our analysis is based on 536 questionnaires (125–150 in each case study areas).

intensified mostly because of favourable mortgage loans which attracted investors. The inauguration of new rehabilitation programmes (Corvin-Szigony) and the continuing SEM-IX project also contributed to the boom in the housing market (Kovács, Z. 2006). The demolition of old deteriorated buildings and the construction of new ones generated changes in the local population. After the fall of the state-socialist regime in 1989, the decrease of the inner city population strengthened not only because of the general demographical decline but also as a consequence of the migration trends. During the housing privatisation the majority of the flats were sold to tenants, thus the new owners could decide whether to stay in their old flats or to sell them. Those who could afford moved to the suburbs while the older and poorer population remained (CSANÁDI, G.–CSIZMADY, A.–KŐSZEGHY, L.–TOMAY, K. 2007).

Comparing the housing prices in the different quarters of Budapest in 1997 – before the real estate boom – and in 2006, we can conclude that the most expensive areas have remained the same (Fig. 1). The highest prices are registered in the traditionally high class districts of Buda and in the 5th district because of its good central location (near to the most important institutions) and its valuable building stock (SZÉKELY, J. 2006).

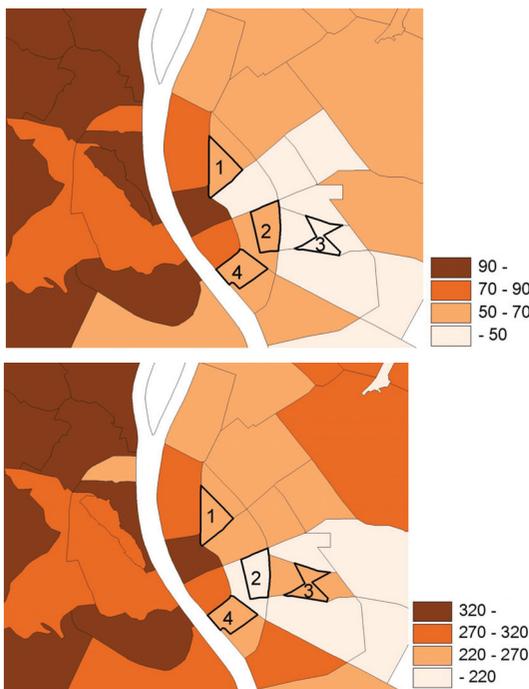


Fig. 1a,b. Housing prices in 1997 and 2006 (1,000 HUF/sqm. Source: KSH Ingatlanadattár 1997, 2006

While in 1997 the cheapest quarters were the entire 7th and the central part of the 8th districts, ten years later this situation had changed entirely. The cheapest quarters can no be found in parts of Central-Józsefváros. The increasing prices of Central-Ferencváros are the result of rehabilitation programmes (EGEDY, T.–KOVÁCS, Z.–SZÉKELY, J.–SZEMZŐ, H. 2005). The strongest rise of prices was recorded in the 8th and 7th districts where the cheapest quarters are located (Fig. 2). This dynamism is explained by the high number of new constructions. A research project carried out in 2005 revealed that the share of renovated buildings is much higher in the inner part of 8th and 9th districts than in central part of the 8th district, and the whole 7th district (Fig. 3).



Fig. 2. Change of housing prices



Fig. 3. Proportion of renovated buildings (%), 2006/1997/2005. Source: KSH Ingatlanadattár 1997, 2006. Source: own survey.

Renovation of housing blocks in the most cases meant re-painting of the buildings (except of rehabilitation programmes) and didn't result sufficient change in the structure of flats nor the dwellers. The growth of housing prices is the highest in those quarters where the buildings are deteriorated, but there are lots of new constructions.

We have selected four case study areas in the Pest side (Fig. 4). All of them are in different phase of the renewal. Their housing stock is relatively old: 80–90% of the buildings were built before 1945, most of them are 3–5 stories buildings, but there are differences in their condition. Taking a good look at the data on the size of dwellings (Table 1) and the maps of housing prices and renovation, we can notice that the biggest flats and renovated building stock can be found in Inner-Ferencváros. Inner-Józsefváros also has large flats and renovated building stock, but its flat prices are still much lower. This probably has to do with the fact that the density of restaurants, pubs is smaller in Inner-Józsefváros than in Inner-Ferencváros. By contrast, the

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Table 1. Some features of case study areas in 2001

Case study areas	Ratio of children below 14 (%)	Ratio of population over 60 (%)	Ratio of population with diploma (%)	Ratio of dwellings over 80 m ² (%)
1. Inner-Terézváros	8.8	29.9	30.4	27.1
2. Inner-Józsefváros	10.0	25.2	29.6	27.1
3. Magdolna- quarter	16.0	19.3	14.1	13.6
4. Inner-Ferencváros	11.2	23.8	30.5	32.3

Source: Census 2001.



Fig. 4. Location of case study areas

concentration of cultural institutions and cafés is higher in Inner-Terézváros (FÖLDI, Zs. 2006), however, its building stock is in worse condition for lack of renovation.

Magdolna-quarter is characterised by small flats, not yet renovated building stock, lack of shops and services and its inhabitants are traditionally poorer than those living in the inner parts of the city. The rehabilitation programme of the quarter started in 2005 (KONDOR, A.Cs.–HORVÁTH, D. 2008).

The number of inhabitants was about 3,000–4,000 in all of the case study areas in 2001, but the composition of local society and the structure of housing stock are quite different (Table 1). Our sample survey has also detected many and various opinions of local people about their local environment, local society and mobility.

Socio-demographic differences between the old dwellers and the newcomers

In our survey we examine the two major groups which are: the old dwellers, who lived in their flat before 1989 and the newcomers who moved to their flat after 2000 (the boom of the housing market started at the very end of the nineties). Each of the groups covers the 40% of the total sample.

Table 2. Socio-demographic characteristics of the old inhabitants (moved in before 1990) and the newcomers (moved in since 2000)

Percentage of the	Inner-Terézváros		Inner-Józsefváros		Magdolna-quarter		Inner-Ferencváros	
	-1989	2000-	-1989	2000-	-1989	2000-	-1989	2000-
Single person households	40.3	21.7	30.9	21.3	30.2	15.5	34.4	21.6
Families with children	14.9	23.9	14.6	34.1	15.1	38.0	21.3	21.6
More-generation households	17.9	0.0	16.4	6.4	24.5	8.5	16.4	2.7
Flat sharing communities	1.5	23.9	3.6	12.8	0.0	1.4	1.6	16.2
Young people (below 35 years)	7.5	73.9	16.4	61.7	9.4	47.8	8.2	60.4
Elderly (above 60 years)	67.2	6.5	54.5	8.5	50.9	11.6	59.0	2.9
Primary education or less	6.0	6.5	18.1	6.4	29.3	31.0	26.2	2.7
Higher education diploma	53.7	56.5	30.9	46.8	9.4	23.9	41.0	56.8

The proportion of newcomers is the highest in the Magdolna-quarter (47.7%, while 30–37% in the others) but the share of young people (below 29 years) among these newcomers is much lower than in other districts.

The newcomers are significantly younger and better educated (Table 2) in every sample district. The proportion of the elderly (who are generally less mobile) is below 20% even in the Magdolna-quarter where the share of young is lower than in the other districts. This shows that the reasons of moving to Magdolna-quarter are different: in this area proportion of the less educated newcomers is the highest of the young people are the lowest. The more generation households are also numerous in Magdolna-quarter (18.8% while only 10% in the other areas) not only among the traditional dwellers, but also among the newcomers. The high proportion of this household type in the inner city is the result of poverty: several young couples with children move to their parents home because they are not able to buy or rent a flat of their own.

Less of the newcomers than the old inhabitants live in single person households, more of them in flat-sharing communities. This latter type's presence is strikingly strong in Inner-Terézváros. The flat sharing community – which is a typical solution for students and young employees who need cheap flats – is very rare in Magdolna-quarter.

Table 3. Reasons of moving into the quarter (% of movers who mentioned the given reason)

Reasons of moving into the quarter	Inner-Terézváros		Inner-Józsefváros		Magdolna-quarter		Inner-Ferencváros	
	-1989	2000-	-1989	2000-	-1989	2000-	-1989	2000-
Working place is nearby	15.8	37.8	9.3	27.7	20.0	27.1	21.6	19.4
Family/friends are living here	17.5	17.8	11.6	12.8	10.0	25.7	33.3	8.3
Restaurants, bars, cultural venues are nearby	1.8	8.9	0.0	4.3	0.0	1.4	0.0	5.6
The area is well served by public transport	8.8	26.7	11.6	29.8	20.0	25.7	7.8	38.9
The good reputation of the residential area	0.0	2.2	2.3	4.3	0.0	0.0	5.9	19.4
Family reasons, assignation, didn't find any dwelling elsewhere	40.4	11.1	51.2	27.7	50.0	40.0	27.5	16.7

ter despite the fact that the rent must be lower here than in the other areas. This quarter does not seem to attract students, which is not only explained by its deteriorated building stock but also by the composition of its local society.

Reasons for moving into the inner city

The decision about moving to a flat primarily depends on the apartment's characteristics and on the building's location. Except Magdolna-quarter, there are not crucial differences between our sample areas in the importance of flat parameters. The dwellers choice is mainly influenced by the area and price (*Table 3*).

A separate analysis of newcomers and older inhabitants motivations allow us to compare the reasons of moving to new areas during two very different periods: before the change of regime and during the last decade. The most frequent explanation of those who moved in before 1990 was that they did not have other options. The housing market didn't function; the inner city flats were owned by the district council in most cases. Because of neglect and lack of care and renovation (and for lack of comfort in some cases) these flats were not among the most favoured.

The central location became the most important factor in all of the examined quarters after 2000. In Inner-Ferencváros, the reputation of the area also had an important impact, thanks to the revitalisation of Ráday street (it was mentioned by almost 20% of the newcomers). The survey results do not confirm our hypothesis: the concentration of restaurants and cultural institutions wasn't a major factor of the newcomers' choice. Nevertheless, its impact is clearly visible in inner-Terézváros where this concentration is significantly stronger than in the other quarters (especially in Magdolna-quarter).

The reasons of moving in show the imagination or the expectation of the newcomers (near 80% of newcomers lived in another part of the city or outside before). The satisfaction based on the experiences of the dwellers (and their expectation).

Satisfaction with the neighbourhood

Table 4. Share of the most important sources of satisfactions/dissatisfaction as a percentage of those respondents who reported to be satisfied/dissatisfied with their residential area (open question)

Indicators	Inner-Terézváros	Inner-Józsefváros	Magdolna-quarter	Inner-Ferencváros
Share of satisfied	55.9	71.4	40.3	78.4
Sources of satisfaction (% of satisfied)				
City center	73.7	67.8	43.3	60.2
Condition of buildings, calm, clean environment	13.2	20.0	11.7	22.4
Cultural and night life	18.4	6.7	0.0	9.2
Reconstruction/new construction	2.6	7.8	10.0	7.1
Share of dissatisfied	25.7	19.8	48.3	15.4

Sources of dissatisfaction (% of dissatisfied)

The level of satisfaction is shown by the answers to the question "Would you recommend a good friend to move to your residential area? And why?" There isn't significant difference between the newcomers and the traditional dwellers in this respect, their preferences are similar. In Magdolna-quarter half of the inhabitants would not recommend their own neighbourhood to their friends. The dwellers of the other three areas are less critical (mostly in Inner-Ferencváros where 78.4% would recommend it), probably because of the revitalisation of the quarter which improved its reputation (Table 4).

The most important source of satisfaction is the central location and the easy availability which is evident in the case of inner city quarters. In Inner-Ferencváros and Józsefváros the condition of buildings and streets was a more positive factor than in the other two areas. However, it is a more important factor contributing to the dissatisfaction in every case, mostly in Inner-Terézváros, because of the lack of renovation. In Inner-Terézváros one-sixth of the respondents mentioned cultural amenities and night life as a reason for moving in. Interestingly enough, this share was only 9% in Inner-Ferencváros where the concentration of cafés and restaurants is higher than in the other inner city neighbourhoods. Though it is a well known fact that the revitalized Ráday street (transformed into a pedestrian area full of open air restaurants

and cafés) improved the reputation of its environment, the local people do not regard it as a completely positive factor (there are permanent conflicts between the inhabitants of Ráday street and the owners of the restaurants).

In Magdolna-quarter the major source of dissatisfaction is the composition of local society. Half of the dissatisfied respondents mentioned the local people in general (9.7% named the gypsies) and other 9.7% the public security. Though the condition of buildings is much worse here than in the other inner city districts, “only” 23,6% mentioned it as a factor of their dissatisfaction.

Potential moving plans of inhabitants

The local population’s attitude toward the residential area can also be examined through an analysis of the migration potential, the moving plans of the present inhabitants. A significant part of population (32.8%) want to leave the inner city districts. This rate is about 30% in the Magdolna-quarter and almost 40% in Inner-Terézváros (Fig. 5). However, the share of potential movers is higher in the areas where rehabilitation projects were not carried out, their lack isn’t the only reason to move. There are differences between the potential movers: in Inner-Terézváros three quarters of the families with children want to move, while in Magdolna the household types do not seem to influence the moving intentions. The age-impact is similarly varied: while in Magdolna-quarter half of the young (under 40) want to move, in Inner-Terézváros 80% of them have similar intentions.

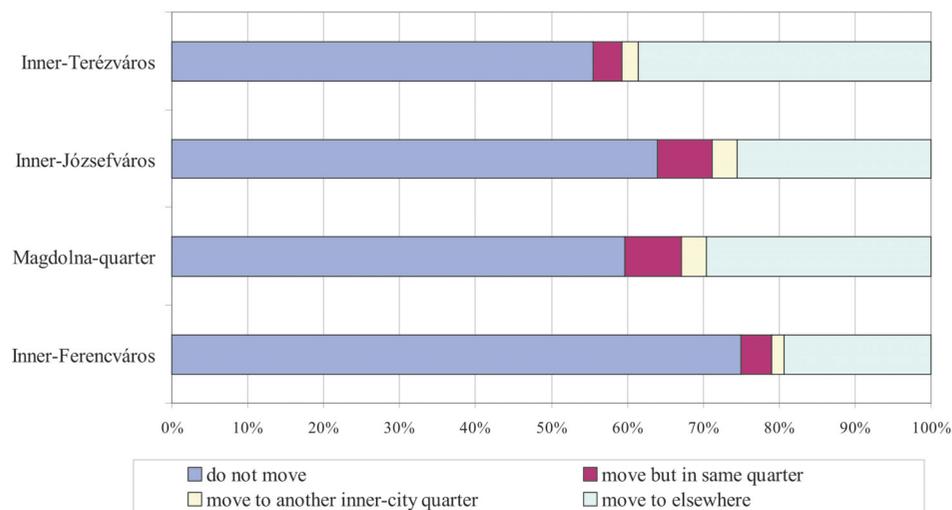


Fig. 5. Moving plans of the inner city inhabitants

The main reasons for moving are connected to the insufficient size of flats, and to lifestyle and family changes in all case study areas. Beyond these motivations, the characteristics of the neighbourhoods also have some impact on the moving plans. The lack of green areas, the noise and environmental pollution seem to be an important factor mostly in Inner-Terézváros where more than 40% of those who are willing to move mentioned these problems (BERÉNYI, E.–KONDOR, A.Cs.–SZABÓ, B. 2008). In Magdolna-quarter the strongest push factor is the unpleasant social surrounding, almost 40% mentioned it as a factor of moving out. The bad status of buildings was also important: 22% mentioned it in Magdolna-quarter, 13% in Inner-Terézváros, while in the other areas it did not have a significant impact on the moving plans. The problems in Inner-Terézváros are connected to the physical condition of the quarter, its deteriorated state explains that so many inhabitants want to move to the agglomeration or to the countryside.

Despite of the above mentioned problems, the overwhelming majority of inner city population (67.2 %) wants to stay. Not only the elderly but also the inhabitants between 40 and 60 years are 'faithful' to their district. Those who live in more-generation households are especially willing to stay. The reasons of staying are similar in every quarter: half of the inhabitants are satisfied with their flat, 20–30% is satisfied with the location of the quarter. The answer "I can not afford another dwelling" was also frequent. Numerous people (35–38%) of the respondents explained their intention to stay in this way. This share was below the average (only 17%) in Inner-Terézváros. In this quarter only the old dwellers referred to financial difficulties, while in the others the new inhabitants also gave us an explanation of that kind.

Opinions about local society

The opinion of inhabitants about the change of local society suggests that moving into the inner city has intensified for the last years. In the Magdolna-quarter one third, but in the other districts about half of the respondents claim that certain social groups (which are different from the traditional residents) have emerged recently.

In the Magdolna-quarter the share of gypsies has increased according to almost half of all respondents (*Table 5*). Another newly emerging group is a segment of foreigners (Arab, Chinese and Vietnamese). About 11% of the respondent mentioned their arrival, but none of them used the term "foreigner", they named their racial group. Both the language and the actual composition of foreigners are different in Inner-Terézváros where half of the respondents claim that foreigners (not differentiated by their country origin) have moved to the quarter. They are supposedly students and young employees of inter-

Table 5. Is there an increased moving in of certain household types during the last years? Share of the respondents who mentioned the specific household types (%) open question

Household types	Magdolna-quarter	Inner-Terézváros	Inner-Józsefváros	Inner-Ferencváros
Families with children	3,6	3,2	5,6	1,5
Young	20,0	33,9	59,7	69,7
Foreigner	5,5	51,6	20,8	19,7
Chinese, Vietnamese, Arab	10,9	–	2,8	–
Gypsies	45,5	–	2,8	–
Poor	3,6	1,6	2,8	–
People with high income	1,8	9,7	–	6,1

national companies. Their emergence is also reported by about one fifth of the inhabitants in the other two inner quarters, where the young people were regarded as the dominant group of movers. A growing number of families with children was not reported either in the upgrading areas or in the low status Magdolna-quarter. Increased in migration of people with high income was only mentioned in Inner-Terézváros.

Views about the city

The mental map of Budapest seems to be equally conservative and stable in the most and less favoured areas (STUDIO METROPOLITANA 2006). Our sample survey results confirm this statement in general, but we can also detect some significant differences. A comparison of the views of traditional residents and newcomers reveals that the latter ones have a more positive opinion about the inner city districts in Inner-Ferencváros and Inner-Terézváros (Table 6). By contrast, in the Magdolna-quarter the newcomers' opinion is less favourable. This can be explained by their lower social status. The share of young and students is smaller among the new inhabitants in Magdolna-quarter than in the other inner city districts; and primarily these groups find the inner city preferable. In those quarters where new functions emerged the opinion of the new inhabitants was much better than the traditional dwellers.

Table 6. Share of the inhabitants who named the districts as the most valuable areas of the city (%) open question

Most valued area	Inner-Terézváros		Inner-Józsefváros		Magdolna-quarter		Inner-Ferencváros	
	–1989	2000–	–1989	2000–	–1989	2000–	–1989	2000–
Inner city (5 th – 9 th)	25.9	36.6	25.0	24.2	32.7	17.2	22.0	39.4
Buda (1 st , 2 nd , 3 rd , 11 th , 12 th districts)	63.0	58.5	59.1	57.6	55.1	58.6	58.0	54.5
Agglomeration	13.0	26.8	13.6	30.3	20.4	22.4	24.0	30.3

The traditionally most appreciated districts of Buda (first of all, the 2nd district where Rózsadomb – the symbol of wealth – is found) reach the higher rank in the mental map of the inner city inhabitants. The suburban settlements around Budapest are more preferred by the younger newcomers; this shows that the demand for suburbanization exists.

In the opinion of another segment of residents, the inner city neighbourhoods belong to the worst parts of the capital. The difference between the mental maps of the old and new population is obvious, mostly in the case of the 9th district which is much less liked by the old dwellers than by the newcomers (*Table 7*). The image of the 8th district is varied: those who live in the inner part of Józsefváros are less critical towards the district, than who live in the Central part. The new inhabitants of Magdolna-quarter differ again from the other newcomers, their opinion is similar to that of the older inhabitants.

Table 7. Share of the inhabitants who named the districts as the least valuable areas of the city (%) open question

Least valued area	Inner-Terézváros		Inner-Józsefváros		Magdolna-quarter		Inner-Ferencváros	
	-1989	2000-	-1989	2000-	-1989	2000-	-1989	2000-
Inner city (5 th -9 th)	68.5	62.5	78.6	57.5	93.9	86.4	82.0	76.5
6 th district	5.6	2.5	9.5	2.5	6.1	3.0	4.0	2.9
7 th district	18.5	5.0	16.7	2.5	18.4	15.2	14.0	26.5
8 th district	63.0	62.5	54.8	50.0	89.8	80.3	60.0	73.5
9 th district	24.1	12.5	31.0	10.0	14.3	13.6	18.0	5.9

To be summarised: the preferences of the newcomers and old dwellers are different. The members of the latter group are more likely to refuse to live in the inner city than the new inhabitants (*Table 8*). Only the inhabitants of the Magdolna-quarter do not refuse the inner city, supposedly they could not imagine to live in another type of housing and their dissatisfaction is related to the local society, not to the environmental problems.

Table 8. Regardless of your financial situation where would you like to live?

Rank of inner city	Inner-Terézváros		Inner-Józsefváros		Magdolna-quarter		Inner-Ferencváros	
	-1989	2000-	-1989	2000-	-1989	2000-	-1989	2000-
1 – First choice	32.8	28.9	18.5	41.3	32.7	22.7	27.1	27.0
5 – Last choice	25.0	13.3	51.9	13.0	2.0	6.1	39.0	13.5

Comparing the ranks with other housing types, we can say that the newcomers of the inner city however prefer the family houses in the green (half of them put it to first rank), they less refuse their recent living environment than the housing estates (70–80% except of the Magdolna-quarter where only 44%) and a bit more the suburban family houses.

Conclusion

The inner parts of Budapest have changed significantly both in terms of infrastructure, the physical environment and local society – hence the changes in the image of the city. The newcomers, who moved to after 2000 are younger, higher educated and while the old dwellers who lived in their recent flat before 1990 are elder, mostly live in single households. So the newcomers' and the old inhabitants' attitude towards the inner city is very different. Not only the good location but also the improving prestige (9th district) and the cultural and night life (6th district) seem to become important to the newcomers. Their view of the inner city districts is much more positive than that of the older dwellers though a significant share of them wants to leave for the suburban belt.

Whether or not the inhabitants find it advantageous to live in inner city quarters depends on the condition of the buildings, on the concentration of functions, and also on the composition of local society. The deteriorated building stock seems to be the most important factor of disappointment, except of the Magdolna-quarter where the local society. The lack of green area and the level of noise pollution are also problematic mostly in the Inner-Terézváros where these are strong connection with the moving plan. The traditionally most appreciated districts are in Buda side within the newcomers and the older dwellers, while the suburban settlements around Budapest are more preferred by the younger newcomers. The preferences of the inner city within of the newcomers and old dwellers are different. The members of the latter group are more likely to refuse to live in the inner city than newer inhabitants.

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