

# Impacts of gentrification, self-segregation, and the expansion of communities in Tehran

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# Chapter 1 – Introduction

## 1.1 Background and Urban Context of Tehran

Every morning, commuters crowd the platforms of Shar-e Rey, the southern entrance to the Tehran Metro system. As the train moves north, urban transformation slowly becomes apparent. Concrete apartments give way to flashy advertisements and, eventually, to quiet streets with villas and modern buildings near the Alborz Mountains. This daily commute reflects the main story of this thesis: a city shaped by uneven development, renovation, and the presence of enclosed residential areas. This every day journey captures how spatial inequality becomes visible through daily movement across the city.

Population growth in the city of Tehran rapidly accelerated in recent decades. Its population has increased from about 4.5 million before the 1979 revolution to nearly 9.7 million in 2025. Today, about one-tenth of Iran’s population lives in just a small area. In the 1980s, high birthrates encouraged by government policies increased population pressure. In the 1990s, many people migrated from rural areas to large cities. As a result, Tehran therefore expanded from the south into former agricultural lands and from the north into the mountain slopes.

After the revolution, governments shifted between tight state control and market-oriented approaches. A notable example aimed at addressing affordable housing the 2007 MEHR home program. This program provided developers with free land and low-interest loans to build affordable housing in the suburbs. By 2013, hundreds of thousands of units had been built, with many of these projects, located in complexes, such as “Parand” and “Pardis”, lacking adequate infrastructure and public services. Difficult commutes due to the lack of public transportation and poor living conditions led to high vacancy rates. These areas became known as “ghost towers”, showing the limitations of large-scale housing projects when space and services are neglected. In other words, housing provision without supporting infrastructure failed to produce livable urban environments.

By contrast, while public housing construction expanded outside the city, private investment increased in inner-city areas. Older neighborhoods such as “Behjat Abad” and “Bahar” Street began to attract developers. Small renovations, new cafes, and modern apartments slowly changed the face of these areas. Over time, rents and long-time residents were forced to leave. This process contributed to the gradual reshaping of neighborhood identity and social relations, not only transforming the buildings but also altering everyday social life. These patterns represent the early stages of renovation in the city of Tehran.

At the same time, in the north and northwest city of Tehran, gated residential developing rapidly, including areas such as “Niavaran” and “Saadat Abad”. These

developments were designed to provide security, privacy, and controlled access. Residents typically choose these districts because they feel safe and comfortable among similar social groups. Although some studies suggest that walkability and mixed land use are also important for quality of life, the practice of gated communities still creates strong physical and social boundaries. These spaces separate wealthy residents from the rest of the city.

Environmental conditions are also causing deep divides. In the south, over-extraction of groundwater has caused serious land subsidence, and infrastructure and homes for low-income groups are directly affected by these problems. By comparison, the better conditions are more common in the north, where people enjoy cooler temperatures, better air quality, and more reliable water supplies. Consequently, these benefits increase demand for housing higher elevations, fueling what is often called the “altitude premium”.

Tehran’s road networks also reflect this inequality. In the southern areas, there are busy streets with old local markets. By contrast, in the northern districts, streets are lined with neater, wider sidewalks and more suitable forms of urban design.

Official planning documents, such as the 2040 Master Plan, promote balanced urban increase. However, frequent changes in zoning and urban regulations allow high-rise towers to replace low-rise buildings in different neighborhoods. Critics argue that the system only benefits developers, driving up land prices and accelerating renovation. Economic instability and sanctions have also pushed people to invest in real estate to protect their wealth, driving prices beyond the reach of average residents.

Finally, Tehran’s geography adds further signs of risk. The city sits on several major faults, yet many new developments are often located on sloping or unstable terrain to exploit views and prestige. This raises important questions about who benefits from urban development and who bears its risks.

Taken together, Tehran represents an attractive case study in terms of the interaction of urban policies, market forces, and environmental conditions. These dynamics raise important questions about urban justice, inequality, and ultimately benefits from redevelopment. The remainder of the thesis examines their broader implications.

## 1.2 Research Problem and Rationale

Many studies have examined the changes in Tehran's housing. However, most of this research tends to focus on one process at a time. Some studies concentrate on urban renovation in central neighborhoods, while others focus on housing in the suburb's areas. As a result, we still do not fully understand how these two issues may interact over time, or how, from a broader perspective, they reinforce advantage and disadvantage in Tehran.

A second issue is that much of gentrification and urban modernization theory is based on the experiences of the countries in the global North (Smith, 1996; Lees, 2012). These approaches usually focus on sustainable land and housing systems and liberal planning contexts. Tehran, however, has developed different conditions, shaped by economic instability, sanctions, and oil revenues, and excessive state involvement. This suggests that the develop in the global North cannot be applied directly without adapting them to local institutional and political realities.

A similar gap exists in the global literature on the gated communities. Many studies describe gated communities as suburban "fortresses" (Lu and Smith, 2006). In Tehran, however, many gated projects are in the North of the city and also in the central Tehran. Rather than appearing as suburban enclaves, they often take the form of high-rise buildings or enclosed residential zones embedded within the existing urban fabric. This makes Tehran a useful case for questioning models that can challenge the prevailing international literature.

Because of this disparities, three main research gaps remain:

**Spatial gap:** There is still limited mapping of where urban renewal and gated development overlap, and where they follow separate patterns.

**Empirical gap:** Few studies examine residents' everyday experiences and how they balance issues such as safety, mobility, and social belonging.

**Policy gap:** Municipal strategies such as "balanced density" often overlook inequality and deprivation at the ground level.

Addressing these gaps is important for two reasons. First, Tehran's population is expected to soon exceed 10 million, placing additional pressure on housing and urban services (Statistical Center of Iran, 2024). Second, housing decisions can intensify environmental risks such as land subsidence, earthquakes, vulnerability, and water crises. Planning choices and relocation policies may therefore have long-term consequences for social life, safety, and resilience.

By examining the relationship between reinvestment in the city's core and enclave development, this thesis contributes to debates in southern urbanism that call for more context-sensitive interpretations of familiar urban process (Parnell & Robinson, 2017). Development in Tehran provides a useful context for testing and refining these debates.

### 1.3 Main Research Question and Objectives

This thesis is examining the roles of gentrification and gated communities' development together in shaping social and spatial inequality in Tehran. Rather than treating these processes separately, the study is explaining that how they are influencing everyday urban life.

The main question is how do the intertwined processes of gentrification and gated residential development reshape socio-spatial inequality in Tehran?

Specific objectives:

To map the chronological and spatial diffusion of gentrification and gated development across Tehran between 2000 and 2025, using cadastral data, price indices, and municipal permits.

To compare lived experiences in two contrasting case areas Ekbatan (large-scale modernist estate, non-gated housing) and District 1 Residential Park (a high-rise gated complex) based on 40 semi-structured interviews with residents.

To interpret how planners, developers, and long-term residents frame the benefits and externalities of each trajectory, linking these narratives to broader urban outcomes.

Working hypotheses:

Gentrification in inner-city areas creates indirect pressure on housing prices, pushing lower-income residents toward nearby working-class neighborhoods.

Gated residential complexes provide residents with a sense of safety and an improved lifestyle, while also at the same time reinforcing class-based spatial separation.

Municipal zoning incentives encourage both gentrification and gated development by allowing higher densities in exchange for revenue, often without limited protections for social equity.

## 1.4 Case Study Overview: Ekbatan and District 1 (Residential Park)

Ekbatan Town, inaugurated in 1976 as a state-sponsored modernist mega-project, lies 13 km west of Tehran's historic core. Three super-blocks of mid-rise concrete slabs house roughly 45,000 residents today. Ekbatan benefits from metro access and an internal commercial spine, yet remains formally open, with no perimeter fencing. Property prices here grew modestly about 120 % in real terms between 2010 and 2024, and recent demographic shifts show a gradual influx of young professionals drawn by relatively affordable units and a distinct street culture centred on cafés and graffiti.

By contrast, District 1 Residential Park (popularly branded "Park Complex") occupies a 12-hectare parcel in the affluent northern foothills. Completed in 2015, its five glass-and-steel towers encircle a private garden podium accessible only through biometric gatehouses. Asking prices surpassed US \$4,200/m<sup>2</sup> in 2024 triple the city average. Residents enjoy concierge services, underground parking, and on-site childcare, although the installation of guard booths has narrowed surrounding streets, rerouting pedestrian flow and local commerce.

Selecting these two sites enables a most-different comparison: one open, ageing, and centrally located; the other newly built, enclosed, and privileged by altitude. Yet both sit within Tehran's broader housing pressures, offering a useful lens to observe the interaction of gentrification and gating.

## 1.5 Structure of the Thesis

Chapter 1 grounds the research in Tehran's urban transformation and specifies the problem, questions, and objectives. Chapter 2, global and local scholarship on gentrification, gated communities, and urban segregation is reviewed, highlighting the theoretical lenses adopted here. Chapter 3 outline the mixed-methods design, case selection, data-collection instruments, and ethical safeguards. Chapter 4 then contextualises Ekbatan and District 1 within Tehran's planning history and socio-demographic shifts. Chapter 5 presents empirical findings. while Chapter 6 builds on these results comparative and theoretical analysis to answer the main research question. Chapter 7 concludes with policy recommendations, methodological reflections, and directions for future research. Front and back matter complete the manuscript with the abstract, references, and appendices.

## Chapter 2 – Literature Review

### 2.1 Gentrification: Process, Drivers, and Impacts

Gentrification is often understood as a socio-spatial process through which historically lower-income or working-class urban neighborhoods experience transformation following reinvestment, rising property values, and the arrival or consolidation of more affluent residents. Ruth Glass first introduced the term to describe changes in London, where working-class districts were gradually reshaped through the upgrading of housing and a shift in who could afford to live there (Glass, 1964). What was striking in her description is that gentrification was not simply a matter of physical improvement, but a social shift tied to changing power relations in the housing market and the urban hierarchy. The “improvement” of buildings was inseparable from the replacement or marginalization of earlier populations, meaning that gentrification was never neutral as an urban outcome (Glass, 1964; Lees et al., 2008).

Over time, scholars have increasingly described gentrification as a complex and multi-dimensional process rather than a linear, predictable one. Contemporary scholarship emphasizes that gentrification unfolds differently across cities and neighborhoods, shaped by local economic conditions, governance structures, cultural norms, and historical contexts. For this reason, scholars increasingly use the term “gentrifications” in the plural, to indicate that there is no single pathway or universal sequence that always applies (Lees et al., 2008). This plural approach is particularly important for a city like Tehran, where urban change does not neatly follow the classic Western storyline of inner-city decline followed by middle-class return. Instead, neighborhood change may take place through different combinations of commercial upgrading, redevelopment, state involvement, symbolic rebranding, and elite investment strategies (Forouhar et al., 2022; Lees et al., 2016).

Early academic efforts, to explain why gentrification occurs, particularly during the 1970s and 1980s, tended to focus primarily on sociocultural and demographic factors, often referred to as demand-side explanations. These perspectives emphasized the changing preferences, values, and lifestyles of emerging middle-class groups, especially young, highly educated professionals employed in service-sector and creative occupations. Scholars argued that these groups were increasingly drawn to inner-city neighborhoods offering historic architecture, cultural diversity, and urban amenities that contrasted with suburban living. (Zukin’s,(1982)) influential work on New York’s SoHo district illustrated how artists and professionals repurposed former industrial lofts, initially attracted by low rents and cultural authenticity qualities that later became commodified as the area

gained prestige. Similarly, David Ley (1996) linked gentrification to the rise of a new middle class whose cultural capital, liberal values, and consumption patterns supported a broader “back-to-the-city” movement. Other researchers, such as Rose (1984), highlighted shifts in household structure, including the growth of single-person households and the increasing economic independence of professional women, which expanded the social base of potential gentrifiers. Collectively, these studies framed gentrification as a process driven largely by cultural tastes, lifestyle aspirations, and demographic change. By the late 1980s and early 1990s, scholars increasingly sought to move beyond the polarized debate between sociocultural and economic explanations. Chris Hamnett (1991), among others, argued that gentrification is best understood as the outcome of an interaction between demand-side factors, such as changing lifestyles and occupational structures, and supply-side dynamics, including property markets, state policies, and investment flows. This integrated perspective acknowledges that cultural preferences may shape who moves into gentrifying neighbourhoods, while economic conditions determine where and when gentrification becomes possible. IN this sense, contemporary understandings of gentrification recognize it as a multifaceted process rooted in both social change and political economic restructuring, providing a conceptual foundation for analysing how gentrification unfolds in different urban contexts.

### 2.1.1 Gentrification as a Global Phenomenon

Although, first conceptualised in London and later observed in North American cities, gentrification is today widely understood as a global phenomenon. From the 1980s onward, similar patterns of reinvestment and displacement have been documented across cities in Western Europe and, by the 2000s, in rapidly urbanising centres of East Asia and Latin America as well. Several critics have argued that the term gentrification has been applied so broadly to these varied contexts that it risks losing analytical precision. However, others counter that its core dynamic a market- and state-driven class remake of urban space is evident in cities worldwide (Shaw, 2008). For example, Smith characterised turn-of-the-century gentrification as a global urban strategy: a deliberate policy approach employed by cities around the world to attract investment and a higher-income populace under the euphemisms of revitalisation or renaissance. Loretta Lees likewise notes that what began as a peculiar London term has evolved into a generalised mode of urban restructuring under neoliberal globalisation. By the early 21st century, gentrification had shifted from a niche process in a few Western cities into an increasingly prevalent urban trend across the globe (Lees et al,2008).

### 2.1.2 Economic, Cultural, and Institutional Drivers

One influential explanation of gentrification emphasises economic drivers, particularly the role of capital investment and the uneven geography of urban profitability. Neil Smith's rent-gap theory argues that gentrification occurs when a significant gap opens between the current value of land or property and its potential value under a more profitable use (Smith, 1979). This gap creates incentives, for reinvestment, as redevelopment, renovation, or land-use change can generate higher returns than the existing housing stock or its current social use of the neighborhood. This perspective moves the focus away from individual preference and towards the structural conditions that make certain neighborhoods "targets" for investment. It also helps explain why gentrification is often tied to broader cycles of disinvestment and reinvestment, in which some areas are neglected until they become profitable again (Smith, 1979; Smith, 1996).

The rent-gap approach is particularly useful for understanding why gentrification is not random. Instead, it tends to occur in places where investment can revalorize space. That revalorization may be physical, such as renovation and new construction, but it is also legal and institutional, such as including rezoning, redevelopment permissions, or policies that make certain types of investment easier. From this perspective, gentrification is about the transformation of land into an asset whose value can be increased, traded, and protected (Smith, 2002). This logic becomes stronger in contexts where housing increasingly functions as an investment vehicle rather than primarily as shelter (Aalbers, 2016; Aalbers, 2019). Even when mortgage markets or financial systems differ by country, the broader tendency to treat real estate as a store of value can still reshape urban development priorities and intensify inequality (Aalbers, 2016).

Alongside economic explanations, cultural and lifestyle perspectives emphasize that gentrification is not only a movement of capital but also a movement of meanings. Middle-class consumption patterns, symbolic attachments to particular neighborhood identities, and the cultural value of "authentic" urban life can all contribute demand for certain areas (Lees et al, 2008). Visible signs of this demand often include cafés, cultural venues, boutique retail, and aesthetic upgrading of streetscapes. A key point in the literature, however, is that these cultural shifts are not separate from economic forces. They often work together, as cultural branding can raise land values, attract investment, and justify redevelopment. "Place" becomes part of the commodity being sold, and neighborhood identity becomes something that can be reshaped for market appeal (Lees et al., 2008; Smith, 2002).

Another strand of research highlights the role of the state, planning institutions, and policy choices in enabling gentrification. Smith's concept of state-led gentrification are suggesting that gentrification is frequently embedded in broader development strategies rather than being purely market-driven (Smith, 2002). Public-sector

interventions such as infrastructure investment, redevelopment schemes, zoning changes, and public–private partnerships can reduce investment risk and guide where private capital flows (Smith, 2002). In many cities, gentrification is not simply an accidental by-product of improvement, but an outcome aligned with growth-oriented agendas. This aligns with planning critiques that show how urban policy often prioritizes competitiveness, land value, and “modernization” over social protection and affordability (Harvey, 2008; Fainstein, 2010).

### 2.1.3 Social Impacts and Displacement

Despite differing interpretations of its drivers, most scholars agree that gentrification produces uneven social outcomes. On the surface, reinvestment can improve housing quality, street conditions, and local services. However, research shows that these improvements commonly arrive together with rising costs that pressure long-term residents (Atkinson, 2000). The most widely discussed consequence, however, is displacement. Importantly, displacement is not limited to direct eviction. Scholars have identified indirect displacement, where rising rents or living costs gradually force residents out; exclusionary displacement, where new residents replace older ones because housing becomes unaffordable; and cultural displacement, where residents may remain physically but feel socially pushed out as the neighborhood’s identity, services, and everyday norms change (Atkinson, 2000; Davidson & Lees, 2005).

Cultural displacement matters because it shows that inequality is not only material. It also relates to dignity, belonging, and the right to feel at home in a place. When shops and services shift towards wealthier consumers, when public spaces become less welcoming, or when local networks weaken, long-term residents can experience the neighborhood as no longer “theirs,” even if they have not moved (Davidson & Lees, 2005). This is especially relevant for an interpretive thesis, as cultural displacement often appears in how residents describe atmosphere, social distance, daily comfort, and the feeling of being watched or judged. In this sense, gentrification becomes not only an economic process but a lived social transformation (Lees et al., 2008).

Gentrification also reshapes the city beyond a single neighborhood. As upgraded districts attract higher-income groups, lower- and even middle-income households may be pushed toward less connected, and less serviced areas, reinforcing broader patterns of socio-economic sorting (Lees et al., 2008). This can deepen inequality because location shapes access to employment, education, transport, and social opportunities. Over time, this produces a city where advantage clusters spatially and becomes harder to challenge, as urban space itself is reorganized around unequal accessibility.

#### 2.1.4 Types of gentrification

Gentrification is often discussed as a single process, yet research suggests that it takes multiple forms depending on how reinvestment happens, who drives it, and how neighborhood change is governed (Lees et al., 2008; Lees, 2012). Thinking in terms of “types” is useful for this thesis because the main question is not only whether gentrification occurs in Tehran, but how it becomes intertwined with elite residential strategies such as gated development, private security, and enclave-style living. Different types of gentrification also produce different pathways to socio-spatial inequality: some generate exclusion mainly through prices increases and tenure change, while others combine market upgrading with enclosure, privatised amenities, and a stronger “sorting” of everyday urban life (Davidson & Lees, 2005; Smith, 2002). In other words, typologies help clarify the mechanisms through which urban upgrading can translate into durable class boundaries, spatial fragmentation, and unequal access to the city (Atkinson, 2000; Caldeira, 2000).

#### 2.1.5 Classic residential gentrification

The most established form of gentrification is residential, driven by the upgrading of existing housing and the gradual replacement of working-class residents by more affluent groups. This form was first initially identified in London, where neighborhood reinvestment was accompanied by changing tenure patterns, rising property values, and shift in class composition (Glass, 1964). Subsequent political-economy research reframed this shift as less about personal tastes and more about reinvestment opportunities created by a gap between current and potential ground rent (Smith, 1979). Across many cities in the Global North, classic residential gentrification has been documented, as producing both direct and indirect forms of displacement, including “exclusionary displacement” (where new households are priced out) and more everyday forms of cultural marginalisation (Atkinson, 2000; Lees et al., 2008). In this study, this type is important because it shows how upgrading can reorganise social space even without explicit walls: market pressures alone can push lower-income residents away from high-opportunity areas, producing inequality through residential sorting (Atkinson, 2000).

#### 2.1.6 New-build gentrification

A second form of gentrification emerges through new construction rather than refurbishment. In case of new-build gentrification, older industrial or mixed-use areas are redeveloped into high-end residential projects that attract middle- and upper-class residents, often leading to rapid shifts the social profile of an area (Davidson & Lees, 2005). London’s riverside redevelopment is often cited as an illustration, where luxury apartment construction revalorised urban land and produced new forms of exclusivity even without “traditional” gentrifier-led

renovation (Davidson & Lees, 2005). This type connects closely to the focus of this research because new-build projects are frequently designed with semi-private or fully private features controlled entrances, concierge services, resident-only courtyards, and securitised circulation which can blur into a gated logic even when a development is not formally described as a gated community (Davidson & Lees, 2005). In many cities, new-build gentrification strengthens socio-spatial inequality not only through price mechanisms, but also through the production of exclusive micro-environments embedded within the urban fabric.

### 2.1.7 State-led and regeneration-led gentrification

Gentrification is often enabled or directly produced, through state action such as rezoning, flagship regeneration projects, infrastructure investment, and public-private partnerships that reduce risk for developers and accelerate increases in land-value (Smith, 2002). Comparative studies shows that government involvement can be central even in contexts where gentrification is popularly framed as a “market” process, including cases in which planning tools and redevelopment agencies actively reorganise urban land for higher value uses (Hackworth & Smith, 2001). Seoul is frequently described as a context in which redevelopment and property-based urban restructuring generate gentrification-like outcomes through redevelopment programmes, changes in land-use intensity, and speculative dynamics in housing and commercial space (Shin, 2019). This form is important it highlights how gentrification can be embedded within planning and governance arrangements: when regulation is weak, selective, or oriented towards land valorisation, the state can indirectly shape conditions under which enclaves, luxury compounds, and exclusionary forms of development become normalised outcomes (Smith, 2002; Fainstein, 2010).

### 2.1.8 Commercial gentrification

Commercial gentrification refers to the transformation of retail and service landscapes cafés, restaurants, boutiques, and leisure venues often preceding or intensifying residential change (Lees , 2008). It is especially relevant to everyday urban life because it can reshape who feels comfortable in a place, how public space is used, and which groups are catered for, even before large-scale residential displacement occurs (Lees., 2008). In Tehran, empirical research has shown how shifts in land-use policy and development pressures can contribute to commercial upgrading and to residents’ reported changes in daily life and neighbourhood quality, illustrating that gentrification can be experienced through the street economy as much as through housing (Forouhar et al., 2022). Global discussions of commercial change in cities like New York also emphasise how “authenticity” narratives and upmarket consumption can work alongside investment pressures to reorganise neighborhood identity and belonging (Zukin, 2010). This type particularly useful because it helps interpret accounts of changing neighborhood atmosphere, rising

costs of everyday life, and more subtle forms of exclusion linked to new consumption spaces.

### 2.1.9 Cultural displacement and symbolic exclusion

Across different forms of gentrification, one of the most important mechanisms shaping inequality is not only physical relocation but the transformation of neighbourhood meaning. Residents can remain in place yet experience “displacement pressure” through rising costs, loss of familiar services, changing social norms, and feelings of being out of place within their own neighborhood (Atkinson, 2000; Lees et al., 2008). This is sometimes described as cultural displacement: the gradual erosion of social belonging as neighborhood identity is remade for a different class audience (Lees et al., 2008). From this perspective, the concept is crucial because it links socio-spatial inequality to lived experience: inequality is produced not only through where people live, but also through unequal comfort, and everyday access to space. It also provides a bridge to gated development, as a symbolic boundaries can harden into physical ones when residents and developers prioritise controlled access, private amenities, and separation as solutions to urban “difference” (Caldeira, 2000; Low, 2003).

### 2.1.10 Enclave, securitised, and “fortified” gentrification

In many cities, upgrading is increasingly intertwined with security practices and enclave-style design. Research on “fortified” urbanism highlights how fear, inequality, and privatised security can reshape residential forms, leading to landscapes where walls, guards, and controlled entry become normal features of middle- and upper-class life (Caldeira, 2000). Studies of gated living in the United States similarly show how enclosure can become a lifestyle infrastructure, promising safety, order, and social homogeneity, while also reproducing segregation through design and governance (Low, 2003; Blakely & Snyder, 1997). From an analytical perspective, this type is central because it makes the connection explicit: gentrification does not only raise prices; in some contexts, it also reorganises urban life around securitisation and withdrawal from shared space. Enclave-oriented upgrading can consolidate inequality by giving affluent groups private alternatives to public space and public services, deepening fragmentation and reinforcing socio-spatial distance (Caldeira, 2000; Low, 2003).

### 2.1.11 Financialised and investment-driven gentrification

More recently, contemporary scholarship increasingly emphasises gentrification as part of broader housing financialisation, where housing becomes an investment asset and neighbourhood change is shaped by speculation, credit, and the search for returns (Aalbers, 2016). This matters because financial logics can accelerate the speed and scale of upgrading, intensify volatility, and prioritise exchange value over

lived use value, often making displacement pressures sharper and more widespread (Aalbers, 2016; Aalbers, 2019). In such conditions, affluent households may also seek to protect property value and lifestyle through enclave strategies, including gated developments, private management, and controlled environments, reinforcing the interaction between gentrification and gated forms of residence examined in this study (Aalbers, 2016; Smith, 2002).

These types show that gentrification can operate through housing markets, retail landscapes, redevelopment policy, securitisation, and financial investment. That several of these pathways align closely with the rise of gated and enclave-style living. This typological framing supports your thesis by clarifying how gentrification and gated development can work as connected strategies: one revalorises space and reshapes who can access it, while the other stabilises separation through physical design and private governance, producing durable socio-spatial inequality in everyday urban life (Lees et al., 2008; Caldeira, 2000; Low, 2003).

**Table 2.1: Types of Gentrification**

<b>Type of gentrification</b>	<b>Core mechanism (what changes)</b>	<b>Main drivers</b>	<b>Typical outcomes</b>
<b>Classic residential gentrification</b>	Upgrading of existing housing accompanied by gradual replacement of lower-income residents	Housing reinvestment; rent-gap dynamics; rising land and property values	Displacement (direct and indirect); residential sorting; increased socio-economic polarisation
<b>New-build gentrification</b>	New high-end residential construction on redeveloped industrial or mixed-use land	Developer-led redevelopment; land revalorisation; prestige-oriented projects	Rapid social change; exclusion through price; creation of semi-private or securitised residential environments
<b>State-led / regeneration-led gentrification</b>	Gentrification produced or accelerated through planning policy and public intervention	Rezoning; infrastructure investment; public private partnerships redevelopment	Accelerated land-value increase; displacement pressure; normalisation of elite and enclave-style development
<b>Commercial gentrification</b>	Transformation of retail and service landscapes (cafés, boutique, leisure venues)	Consumption shifts; land-use policy; symbolic branding and upmarket services	Changes in everyday life; rising costs of daily consumption; symbolic and cultural exclusion
<b>Cultural displacement / symbolic exclusion</b>	Remaking of neighbourhood identity and social norms without necessarily forcing physical relocation	Rising costs; loss of familiar services; changing social composition	Displacement pressure; erosion of belonging; residents feeling “out of place” in their own neighbourhood

<b>Enclave / securitised / “fortified” gentrification</b>	Upgrading combined with security practices and controlled access	Fear, inequality, private security provision, lifestyle differentiation	Physical and symbolic boundaries; urban fragmentation;
<b>Financialised / investment-driven gentrification</b>	Housing treated primarily as an investment asset rather than a social good	Financialisation; speculative capital; credit systems; pursuit of returns	Accelerated and volatile neighbourhood change; intensified displacement pressures; protection of property value through enclosure strategies

### 2.1.12 Debates and Contemporary Perspectives

Scholars continues to debate whether gentrification can occur without exclusion. Some scholars argue that regulated, gradual neighborhood change, especially under strong tenant protections and inclusive planning frameworks, may reduce displacement and enable social mixing. By contrast, other researches contend that because gentrification is structurally tied to rising land value and the logic of profitability, exclusion is extremely difficult to avoid, particularly under market-oriented governance (Smith, 1979; Smith, 2002; Lees et al., 2008). This debate reveals reveals that gentrification is not only a descriptive concept but a political issue: it raises questions about what kind of city is being produced, for whom, and under what rules.

Recent work has also drawn attention to issues of speed, scale, and governance. Rapid market-driven redevelopment can intensify displacement and polarization, while slower incremental change may allow some continuity. Yet even slow change can still shift power relations if affordability steadily declines or if cultural boundaries harden (Lees et al., 2008). This is why gentrification is now widely described as a political process that reflects decisions about land use, investment priorities, and the social function of urban space (Smith, 2002; Harvey, 2008).

Taken together, gentrification is best understood as an uneven and contested urban process driven by the interaction of economic investment, cultural change, and policy decisions. While it often brings upgrading and new capital, it also generates exclusionary dynamics that reshape social relations, belonging, and access to space. This conceptual foundation is essential for this thesis because it clarifies how gentrification can interact with self-segregation and with the growth of gated residential environments, especially in a city like Tehran where class distinction is strongly spatialized.

## 2.2 Gated Communities: Global and Local Perspectives

Gated communities are among one of the most visible and contested forms of contemporary residential development. They are commonly understood as physically enclosed residential environments in which access is restricted through walls, fences, gates, guards, or security systems, and where internal space is governed through private rules rather than ordinary forms of public management (Blakely & Snyder, 1997; Low, 2003). While the architectural forms vary ranging from luxury towers to villa compounds or planned suburban enclaves the underlying logic is consistent: enclosure enables controlled access, and controlled access produces social filtering. Seen this way, gated communities are not simply a housing style; they function as a spatial arrangement that makes inequality visible and operational in everyday life (Caldeira, 2000; Low, 2003). An important clarification in the literature is that gated communities should not be seen only as “walled housing”, but as part of a wider family of privately governed neighbourhoods. In this view, gating is not simply an architectural feature; it is a governance arrangement in which access, behaviour, maintenance, and sometimes even internal infrastructures are regulated through private rules and private organisations. Le Goix stresses that the term “gated communities” is often used to describe a wide range of cases, from fully enclosed suburban compounds to partially secured developments with restricted entrances, and that what links them is the combination of territorial control and private management rather than one single urban form (Le Goix, 2008). This perspective supports analysing “gatedness” as a continuum (from soft to hard barriers), which is important in relevant in Tehran, where some elite residential spaces may function like gated communities even if they are not always formally labelled as such (Le Goix, 2008).

The edited volume by Atkinson and Blandy further how gated communities operate across different urban regions and political economies, yet they share a common logic: residential space is recognized through boundary-making, and they shift everyday urban responsibilities into a private domain. The comparative cases in their collection highlight how gating can emerge through different routes, crime anxieties, status competition, property-market strategies, and planning systems yet repeatedly produces similar concerns about exclusion, separation, and reduced public responsibility for collective urban life (Atkinson & Blandy, 2006).

### 2.2.1 The Global Rise of Gated Residential Enclaves

Since the late twentieth century, the expansion of gated communities has reflected broader changes in urban governance and in the spatial organization of fear, privilege, and status are organized spatially. Across different urban contexts, gating is linked to rising socio-economic inequality and declining trust in public institutions. Residents opting for gated living often seek alternatives to municipal services, relying instead on private provision of security, maintenance, and sometimes even internal infrastructure (Blakely & Snyder, 1997; Glasze, 2005). Through this form of private governance, transforms what might otherwise be shared urban responsibilities into purchasable benefits, available mainly to those who can afford them.

Existing research indicates that gating has expanded across both the Global North and the Global South, but with different meanings. In North America, early gated developments were often connected to suburbanization and fears of crime or social disorder. Over time, gating also became common in inner-city luxury developments and regenerated waterfronts, where the goal was not only safety, but exclusivity and investment protection (Low, 2003; Le Goix, 2005). In these cases, gating is tied to the production of elite urban lifestyles, where access control becomes part of what is being sold as a residential product.

In the Global South and the Middle East, gated communities have expanded rapidly alongside market-oriented reforms and the growing influence of private developers in housing provision. Several studies suggest that in many places these developments are promoted as symbols of modernity and global integration. Marketing images often emphasize order, cleanliness, green space, and a controlled environment, contrasting the gated enclave with the perceived chaos of the surrounding city (Caldeira, 2000; Low, 2003). This symbolic contrast is important, as it frames the city outside the gates as something to be avoided rather than improved, which can legitimise withdrawal from shared urban life.

### 2.2.2 Drivers: Security, Lifestyle, and Class Reproduction

Security frequently cited motivations for gating, particularly in contexts marked by inequality or social tension. Yet existing research suggests that security is not only about actual crime rates. It is also about perception, anxiety, and the desire for predictability. Gated environments offer visible signs of control: guards, cameras, and controlled entrances that produce a symbolic sense of safety, even when they cannot eliminate risk completely (Low, 2001; Caldeira, 2000). This symbolic safety can be attractive because it offers emotional comfort and reduces uncertainty in daily life.

Security alone, however, does not fully explain the popularity of gated living among affluent groups. Lifestyle and status are equally central. Gated communities offer

regulated environments, aesthetic order, and exclusive amenities. These features appeal to residents who value privacy, homogeneity, and a particular image of “good living” (Blakely & Snyder, 1997; Low, 2003). Viewed sociologically, gated communities, function as mechanisms of class reproduction: they allow affluent households to maintain separation from social difference and to stabilize their social position spatially (Vesselinov, 2008). They also protect property values by ensuring the surrounding social environment remains controlled.

At this point, the concept of self-segregation becomes crucial. Gated communities are typically produced through voluntary choice, not legal enforcement. Residents often describe their decision as rational based on safety, comfort, and investment value. Yet research warns that voluntary choice does not make the outcome socially neutral. Self-segregation is enabled by unequal resources. It allows privileged groups to withdraw from shared urban conditions while still benefiting from the city’s labour, services, and economic life (Atkinson, 2006; Marcuse, 1997). In this sense, gating can normalise inequality by framing separation as personal preference rather than collective injustice.

### 2.2.3 Gated Communities as Urban Governance and Privatization

A key contribution of the literature is the idea that gated communities are also alternative governance systems. Inside gates, responsibilities often associated with municipalities security, maintenance, and the regulation of behavior are shifted to private entities. This reflects broader patterns of neoliberal urban governance, where market solutions replace public provision (Harvey, 2008; Graham & Marvin, 2001). Le Goix argues that an important reason gated communities matter for urban studies is that they blur the line between private housing and urban governance. When internal streets, green areas, and everyday rules are privately managed, the neighbourhood becomes a micro-territory with its own semi-autonomous regime of control. This does not necessarily remove the development from the city, but it changes how urban order is produced: instead of being negotiated through open public institutions, it is enforced through private management and access control (Le Goix, 2008). In practical, this can affect who can enter, who is visible, and how the boundary between “insiders” and “outsiders” is maintained, a dynamic closely linked to self-segregation and socio-spatial distance (Le Goix, 2008).

Atkinson and Blandy’s international perspective illustrates that private governance is not a side detail; it is central to how gating functions socially. The internal rules (formal or informal) help stabilise a shared identity and a controlled environment, which can feel attractive for residents, but also strengthens separation from surrounding neighbourhood life. In this sense, the gate is both a physical boundary and a governance tool that supports a particular lifestyle and a particular social composition (Atkinson & Blandy, 2006).

As this practice becomes more widespread, the city is no longer governed only through public systems. Instead, it becomes a patchwork of different rule regimes, where some spaces are highly managed and resourced, while others remain dependent on weaker public infrastructures.

The spatial consequences of this shift are substantial. Streets, gardens, and plazas that might otherwise be public become semi-private or private, reducing the city's shared spaces. Scholars argue that this weakens public space as a site of encounter, diversity, and civic life (Sennett, 1992). It also intensifies fragmentation: instead of a connected urban fabric, the city increasingly resembles an archipelago of enclaves, each with different accessibility, safety, and symbolic value (Graham & Marvin, 2001).

#### 2.2.4 Socio-Spatial Impacts and Urban Fragmentation

The impacts of gated communities extend beyond their boundaries. Physical barriers disrupt connectivity, reduce permeability, and limit everyday interactions between social groups. Over time, this generates social distance, not only as a metaphor but as a daily lived reality who meets whom, who shares space, who is visible, and who is absent (Caldeira, 2000; Low, 2003). These patterns can reinforce inequality because access to resources and influence becomes concentrated inside enclaves.

Vesselinov's work contributes by framing gated communities not just as a residential form, but as a mechanism within urban inequality. Instead of viewing gating as a neutral lifestyle trend, she conceptualises it as part of a wider system in which social advantage is spatially organised and protected. In her argument, gated communities operate as a nexus between social relations (class differentiation, status, exclusion) and spatial relations (boundaries, controlled access, neighbourhood sorting). This framing links the built form of enclosure directly to the reproduction of inequality in everyday urban space (Vesselinov, 2007).

This perspective is especially useful for interpreting of "voluntary" separation. Residents may describe gating as a rational choice, but when these choices are repeated across the housing market, they contribute to city-wide patterns of uneven access to security, amenities, and symbolic prestige. Over time, this process can normalise unequal forms of urban citizenship: some groups inhabit well-managed and controlled environments, while others remain dependent on less resourced public systems and less protected spaces (Vesselinov, 2007). This helps clarify how gating can both reflect and intensify socio-spatial stratification, even when it is not legally enforced (Vesselinov, 2007).

Through the provision of self-contained amenities, gated communities can reduce reliance on public services and limit engagement with shared urban spaces. This inward orientation may weaken social cohesion at the city scale, replacing shared

urban identity with enclave belonging (Caldeira, 2000; Marcuse, 1997). In this way, gating does not only reflect inequality; it can help reproduce it by changing how urban citizenship is imagined.

### 2.2.5 Gated Communities in Middle Eastern and Iranian Contexts

In Middle Eastern contexts, gating is shaped by specific political economies, governance arrangements, and cultural meanings of status. Rapid urban change, uneven development, and regulatory gaps can support private enclave development. In Iran, gated communities have expanded particularly in higher-income areas and are often associated with class distinction and prestige (Rahimi & Dadashpoor, 2024). Research also suggests that, in practice, these enclaves can operate with limited public oversight, allowing private interests to shape urban space with minimal concern for broader socio-spatial effects (Rahimi & Dadashpoor, 2024).

#### Relevance to This Thesis

For this thesis, gated living in Tehran must be understood not only as a reaction to insecurity but as a strategy of distinction and self-segregation. Gated environments reflect and reinforce class inequalities by controlling space, visibility, and access. They are also deeply relevant to the thesis's main question because they can interact with gentrification-gating may consolidate elite control in upgraded areas, and it can intensify land value pressures around it. Taken together, these contributions sharpen the conceptual base for reading gated development not as an isolated phenomenon, but as part of a wider process of socio-spatial restructuring.

Taken together, these contributions sharpen the analytical foundation of this section. The international and comparative literature suggests that gated communities are best understood as an urban strategy that combines boundary-making, private governance, and social filtering, producing effects that reach beyond the walls themselves (Atkinson & Blandy, 2006; Le Goix, 2008). In parallel, the inequality-focused approach clarifies that gating is not simply an architectural response to fear, but a spatial practice that can consolidate advantage and stabilise class distance through everyday rules of access and separation (Vesselinov, 2007). This framing is closely aligned with the thesis question, because it allows gated living in Tehran to be analysed as a form of self-segregation that interacts with urban upgrading and gentrification-like change, rather than as an isolated housing preference (Atkinson, 2006; Vesselinov, 2007)

## 2.3 Theoretical Approaches: Urban Segregation and Social Stratification

Urban segregation and social stratification provide a crucial theoretical bridge between gentrification and gated development. Segregation is commonly defined as the uneven distribution of social groups across urban space, producing unequal access to services, opportunities, and urban advantages. Even when segregation appears to result from “choice,” it is still shaped by structural inequalities, including income, cultural capital, and access to desirable housing markets, (Massey & Denton, 1993). The key point in this literature is that segregation is not simply spatial separation; it is a mechanism through which inequality becomes durable, over time.

At a theoretical level, gentrification and gated communities are increasingly understood as interconnected mechanisms of socio-spatial stratification. Gentrification reorders class relations through neighborhood upgrading and market revaluation, while gated communities tend to stabilize class boundaries through enclosure and private governance. Together, they contribute to a city made of differentiated zones—some open and shared, others controlled and selective (Marcuse, 1997; Graham & Marvin, 2001).

### 2.3.1 Residential Segregation, Class, and Urban Inequality

Foundational work shows that segregation concentrates advantage and disadvantage geographically. It shapes educational access, employment networks, environmental quality, crucially and everyday mobility. Even when two households have similar incomes, neighborhood conditions can generate long-term inequality through different schools, social ties, and local infrastructures (Massey & Denton, 1993). When gentrification occurs, it can reorganise these geographies by shifting where higher-income groups live and where lower-income groups can remain.

Within this framework, gentrification introduces a dynamic element to segregation. Rather than maintaining existing divisions, it actively reorders them. The arrival of wealthier groups into previously lower-income areas changes housing markets, local services, and, over time and cultural norms. Long-term residents may be displaced or marginalized, and even when displacement is not immediate, the neighborhood can become less livable for them because everyday costs rise and symbolic boundaries harden (Atkinson, 2000; Davidson & Lees, 2005). In that sense, gentrification can be understood as a process that “moves” segregation by shifting the geography of who can afford centrality, quality services, or symbolic prestige.

Gated communities, by contrast, represent an explicit and formalized form of segregation. Walls and gates turn inequality into physical boundaries. This matters theoretically because it makes social distance spatially visible and enforceable. It also changes how urban space is experienced: there is a clear division between

inside and outside-between legitimate and illegitimate presence, between those who belong and those who are suspected (Caldeira, 2000; Low, 2003).

### 2.3.2 Self-segregation and the “voluntary” dimension of separation

A key theoretical insight is self-segregation. Unlike legal segregation, self-segregation operates through market capacity and social preference. Affluent groups can choose separation because they have the resources to do so, and because urban development offers them products designed for that purpose (Atkinson, 2006; Vesselinov, 2008). Self-segregation is powerful precisely because it can be justified as normal: families claim they are simply protecting children, securing investment, or, more broadly, improving quality of life. Yet from a structural perspective, such choices accumulate into collective outcomes that deepen fragmentation and reduce shared urban life (Marcuse, 1997).

This perspective is essential when linking gentrification and gating. In some cases, gentrification produces cultural boundaries and cost barriers that function similarly to gates; in other cases, gated environments intensify gentrification by raising surrounding land values and signaling elite desirability. In both cases, self-segregation becomes the social logic connecting these processes.

### 2.3.3 Political economy and the production of segregated space

Political economy approaches argue that urban space is actively produced through capital flows, state decisions, and market logics. Gentrification is interpreted as a strategy of urban revalorisation and capital accumulation, in which land is reorganised towards profitable use (Smith, 1979; Smith, 2002). Gated communities can also be read through this lens: they represent privatized bundles of security and services, where access to urban benefits becomes conditional upon payment (Harvey, 2008; Graham & Marvin, 2001). This is not simply a cultural trend; it is linked to the restructuring of urban governance and the commodification of infrastructure and safety.

### 2.3.4 Space, power, and social reproduction

Critical spatial theory adds another layer by emphasizing that space is socially produced. The city does not merely contain inequality; it helps create and reproduce it (Lefebvre, 1991). Segregated residential patterns shape daily encounters, political visibility, and access to opportunity, reinforcing social hierarchies over time. In this sense, gentrification and gating do not only change where people live. They shape

who is seen as belonging, who has legitimacy in certain spaces, and whose presence is treated as “out of place” (Lefebvre, 1991; Soja, 2010).

## Relevance to this thesis

These theoretical approaches provide the conceptual tools needed to interpret Tehran’s transformations as more than isolated projects or lifestyle trends. They support analysing gentrification and gated development as interconnected strategies through which class advantage is spatially secured. They also align with the thesis methodology, because they help interpret how residents and planners talk about boundaries, safety, prestige, investment, and belonging in everyday terms.

## 2.4 Planetary Gentrification and Global South Urbanism

Recent urban scholarship increasingly frames gentrification as a global process that extends beyond its early focus on North American and Western European cities. The concept of planetary gentrification captures the diffusion of gentrification-like transformations across cities in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East (Lees et al., 2016). This does not mean every city experiences the same type of gentrification. Rather, it means similar logics-revalorization of land, prioritization of investment, displacement pressure, and symbolic upgrading-can appear in different forms depending on local institutions and histories (Lees, 2012; Lees et al., 2016).

This framework matters, in part, because it challenges Eurocentric assumptions about how urban change happens. Earlier debates questioned whether gentrification could occur in cities with informal housing, different tenure systems, or strong state involvement. More recent scholarship shows that gentrification in the Global South often takes distinct forms, frequently driven by redevelopment projects, infrastructure investments, or state-supported regeneration rather than being driven only by middle-class “return to the city” narratives (Lees et al., 2016; Roy, 2009). It may also involve commercial gentrification, where retail and services upgrade and reshape everyday life even before residential displacement is visible (Forouhar et al., 2022).

Another key contribution of this perspective is that it refuses a simple “policy transfer” idea, where cities copy the West. Instead, it argues that cities reinterpret global pressures through local governance, cultural meaning, and political economy (Watson, 2009; Roy, 2009). Tehran is precisely the kind of city where this matters. Its urban development is shaped by a distinctive combination of state structures, land commodification, economic pressures, and social regulation. The result is that gentrification-like outcomes may emerge through locally specific pathways rather than through a standard global script (Forouhar et al., 2022; Lees et al., 2016).

Planetary gentrification scholarship also connects strongly to enclosure. Across many contexts, upgrading increasingly overlaps with restricted-access spaces, securitized commercial zones, and privatized amenities (Graham & Marvin, 2001; Caldeira, 2000). This overlap is crucial for this thesis because it supports analysing gentrification and gated development as part of the same broader restructuring of urban space. Put differently, gentrification produces the economic and symbolic revaluation of place, while gating formalises the boundary-making that protects and stabilises that revaluation.

Finally, this framework helps justify why the thesis can speak to global debates while remaining grounded in Tehran. It allows Tehran to be analysed as part of wider patterns of inequality-driven urban restructuring, while still respecting its institutional and cultural specificity (Watson, 2009; Roy, 2009; Lees et al., 2016). This is especially important for a qualitative thesis, as it allows local voices and experiences to be interpreted within broader debates without forcing them into an inappropriate template.

## 2.5 Planning Theory and Spatial Justice

Urban planning plays a central role in shaping the spatial outcomes of both gentrification and gated development. Planning decisions are not neutral or purely technical; instead, they help structure who benefits from urban change and who carries its costs (Fainstein, 2010; Harvey, 2008). Spatial justice theory provides a strong normative framework for evaluating these outcomes because it insists that inequality is not only social or economic; it is embedded in urban space through land-use decisions, infrastructure investment, and, crucially, uneven access to urban resources (Soja, 2010; Lefebvre, 1991).

Spatial justice highlights that counts as “improvement” is not automatically fair. A neighborhood can become cleaner, greener, and more attractive while becoming less accessible to long-term residents. This is why spatial justice shifts attention from aesthetic outcomes to distributive outcomes: who can remain, who can access public space, and who is ultimately able to enjoy the benefits of urban change (Soja, 2010; Fainstein, 2010). It is particularly relevant to gentrification because gentrification often redistributes urban advantage towards those already better positioned in the housing market (Lees et al., 2008; Smith, 2002).

Planning critiques also focus on the dominance of market-oriented and growth-led planning models. In many such models, urban policy prioritises investment, land value, and competitiveness. Even when these policies generate economic activity, they can intensify inequality if they lack strong housing protection, social provision, and democratic accountability (Harvey, 2008; Fainstein, 2010). Gentrification frequently emerges within this context, especially when public investment and

redevelopment permissions support land revalorisation but do not protect vulnerable residents (Atkinson, 2006; Smith, 2002).

Gated development raises a closely related planning problem, namely the privatisation of urban space and governance. When private residential projects control streets, green spaces, and internal regulations, they remove parts of the city from shared access and public decision-making (Caldeira, 2000; Low, 2003). This can contribute to “splintering urbanism”, where infrastructure and services become unevenly distributed and the city becomes fragmented into privileged and neglected zones (Graham & Marvin, 2001). In such conditions, spatial justice becomes not only about housing but about citizenship: who is entitled to safety, quality infrastructure, and dignified public space.

The right to the city provides a powerful counterpoint to market-led planning. It argues that urban inhabitants, not only property owners and investors, should have meaningful claims to urban space and participation in shaping urban futures (Lefebvre, 1991; Harvey, 2008). Planning debates using this concept emphasise that displacement, enclosure, and exclusion are not simply unfortunate side effects; they represent a redistribution of rights and power in the city (Marcuse, 2009; Purcell, 2014). For this thesis, the value of these frameworks is that they connect the empirical study of gentrification and gating to the question of justice: what kind of Tehran is being produced, and whose everyday life is being prioritized in practice?

## **2.6 Linking Gentrification and Gated Communities**

While gentrification and gated communities have often been treated as separate topics, an increasing body of work argues they should be analysed as interconnected and mutually reinforcing processes of socio-spatial restructuring (Marcuse, 1997; Lees et al., 2008). Both are strategies through which privileged groups secure advantage and reduce exposure to social difference, even though they operate through different spatial forms (Caldeira, 2000; Smith, 2002).

At a structural level, they share common drivers. Rising inequality and the commodification of housing encourage residential strategies focused on exclusivity, investment protection, and lifestyle differentiation (Aalbers, 2016; Harvey, 2008). Gentrification does this by transforming neighbourhoods into higher-value spaces through reinvestment and cultural rebranding. Gated development does it by offering an explicitly controlled environment, where the benefits of safety and amenities are bundled into a private product.

Empirically, the relationship is often two-way. In some contexts, gentrification can lead to gating: upgrading and redevelopment can be followed by access control, private security, and exclusionary design. In other contexts, gated developments can trigger surrounding land value increases and promote elite clustering, which can

contribute to gentrification-like pressures nearby (Caldeira, 2000; Lees et al., 2008). This matters because it shows that gentrification and gating are not competing explanations. They can be understood as different expressions of a similar class logic, where urban space is reorganised to prioritise security, prestige, and investment for a limited group.

The concept of self-segregation is again central here. Both gentrification and gated communities can be framed by participants as personal choices. Yet the literature shows these “choices” are patterned by structural inequality and by the housing market’s ability to offer spatial separation as a commodity (Atkinson, 2006; Vesselinov, 2008). Over time, these choices can reduce social mixing, intensify symbolic boundaries, and reshape the city into a set of differentiated zones where interaction across class lines becomes less common and less comfortable (Marcuse, 1997; Sennett, 1992).

For this thesis, linking gentrification and gated communities is not simply a theoretical exercise. It is necessary to answer the main research question, because it allows the analysis to focus on interaction. The key concern is not whether Tehran has gentrification or gated communities, but how upgrading and enclosure combine to reshape inequality, belonging, and everyday urban life.

## 2.7 Theoretical Implications for Tehran

Applying the combined literature on gentrification, gated communities, segregation, and spatial justice to Tehran highlights both global parallels and local specificities. Tehran displays strong socio-spatial differentiation, often visible in contrasts between affluent districts and more socially mixed or disadvantaged areas. These divisions provide conditions where gentrification and self-segregation can intensify one another, shaping housing choices, investment patterns, and everyday experiences of the city (Farahani, 2013).

Research suggests that gentrification in Tehran may not follow classic Western models in a simple way. Neighbourhood change may occur through commercial upgrading, selective redevelopment, informal practices, and planning-mediated land-use change (Forouhar et al., 2022). Yet many outcomes resemble those discussed in broader gentrification scholarship: rising costs, shifts in neighbourhood identity, and increasing social distance between long-term residents and newcomers. Even when displacement is not immediate or officially recorded, residents may experience symbolic exclusion through changing norms, services, and the feeling that the neighbourhood is being reoriented towards a different class (Atkinson, 2000; Davidson & Lees, 2005).

The literature on gated communities in Iranian cities points to social distance and class differentiation as key dynamics. Research argues that gated enclaves are

linked to income, education, and occupational status, and that they intensify segregation by concentrating services, security, and influence behind controlled boundaries (Rahimi & Dadashpoor, 2024). In Tehran, gated development therefore should not be read only as a safety response. It is also a spatial strategy of distinction, where privacy and exclusivity become part of social identity and class reproduction.

Most importantly, gentrification and gated development in Tehran should not be treated as unrelated. Affluent households may choose between renovated prestigious neighbourhoods and gated complexes, but both choices contribute to the partitioning of urban space along class lines. Upgraded areas can create economic and cultural barriers that function like invisible gates. Gated enclaves create physical gates that stabilise separation. Together, they produce a city where inequality is not only about income but about spatial entitlement: who feels comfortable, who feels watched, who has access, and who is excluded in everyday life (Caldeira, 2000; Lefebvre, 1991; Soja, 2010).

From a spatial justice perspective, these dynamics raise normative questions about equity, access, and participation. If urban change proceeds through market priorities with weak protections for vulnerable groups, the likely outcome is not shared improvement but increased fragmentation (Fainstein, 2010; Harvey, 2008; Soja, 2010). This theoretical framing supports the thesis's empirical chapters by offering a lens to interpret interview narratives and case-study observations as evidence of how inequality is lived, justified, and contested within Tehran's changing urban landscape.

## Chapter 3 – Methodology

### 3.1 Research Design and Approach

This thesis adopts a qualitative research design. I chose this approach because it is particularly appropriate for examine complex social and spatial processes in depth. Rather than The aiming to produce statistical results or generalize the finding to across cities, this research seeks to understand how urban life in Tehran is perceived, experienced, and negotiated by different groups within the specific context of urban transformation.

Gentrification and the rise of gated communities are not shaped solely by economic forces or physical redevelopment. They are also closely linked to social processes that shape everyday life, influence social relations, and affect feelings of belonging. These processes influence how people experience their neighborhoods, how they interact with others, and how they interpret issues such as safety, dignity, and inclusion. A qualitative approach makes it possible to examine these lived experiences closely and to access meanings that cannot be fully captured through numerical data alone.

To address the research questions, this study draws on a combination of semi-structured interviews, field observation, and document analysis. The interviews allowed participants to describe their experiences in their own words, while still engaging with key themes relevant to the research. Field observations link these personal accounts to the physical and spatial characteristics of neighborhoods including housing form, accessibility, and everyday use of space. Document analysis provides in addition to context by examining planning documents, policy texts, and related reports, helping to situate individual experiences within broader institutional and governance framework.

This research is grounded in an interpretive approach. This method considers the basis and foundation of knowledge on the interaction between the researcher and the participants. Meanings and definitions are not the same for everyone, as individuals interpret urban change in different ways. These interpretations are shaped by social background, place of residence, and personal experience. In this view, individuals can understand and explain urban change in different ways.

This methods approach is aligns with theories of communicative and participatory planning that emphasize dialogue, reflection, and the co-production of knowledge. Within this framework, participants are not treated as passive sources of information. Instead, they are understood as active interpreters of their urban environments, whose perspectives are essential to understanding how gentrification and development are experienced and discussed within everyday life.

### 3.2 Case Study Selection and Comparative Logic

The research is structured around a comparative of two different contrasting urban setting in Tehran. The analysis focuses on Ekbatan town, a large modern residential settlement in western Tehran, and district 1 (Residential Park), a gated residential located in the northern part of the city. The two sites were identified to capture sharply different trajectories of urban transformation, yet both have been shaped by broader economic and planning conditions.

Ekbatan is an example of gradual commercial and socio-spatial change in an established urban context. The settlement was initially developed as a modern housing project for middle-income households and has long been associated with social diversity, shared public spaces and relatively affordable housing. Daily life in Ekbatan has traditionally relied on free circulation, communal courtyards and strong connections to public transport. However, in recent years, the area has seen rising property values, increased commercial activity and changes in everyday consumption patterns. New cafes, service and retail spaces have changed the way the neighborhood is used and perceived. These recent changes position Ekbatan as a valuable setting for observing forms of gradual urban change within an open residential environment.

On the other hand, District 1 illustrates a more advanced and overt form of socio-spatial exclusivity. It is a highly defined area with gated communities, controlled entrances, and private amenities. These spaces are designed to provide security, privacy, and social homogeneity. Access is typically largely reserved for high-income or wealthy people groups, and daily interaction with the surrounding city is carefully managed. The urban environment itself—through walls, gates, and private governance arrangements—actively reinforces separation from public space and from lower-income neighborhoods. District 1 thus provides a prime example of self-segregation through gated development.

The comparative logic of this research doesn't consider Ekbatan and District 1 as two opposing poles, separated and simple. Instead, they are understood as interconnected consequences of a single urban system. Both are shaped by different important issues in urban management, such as market dynamics, planning decision, and changing class relations, but they express these forces in different spatial forms. By comparing how urban transformation is experienced and interpreted by residents, planners, and other actors in these two contexts, this study shows how urban redesign and enclosed development work together in Tehran.

This comparative approach allows the research to move beyond the description of individual cases. It shows how different forms of segregation can coexist within a single metropolitan area and how they contribute to the creation of a fragmented

urban landscape. Through this comparison, this study builds a deeper understanding of how socio-spatial; inequality is produced and normalized in contemporary Tehran.

### 3.3 Data Collection Methods

This study primarily on semi-structured interviews, supported by field observation and document review. This combination was selected allow participants to speak freely about everyday experiences while still addressing themes relevant to the research. This format guided the conservations around key themes while allowing participants to describe their experiences, opinions, and concerns in their own words. This approach was particularly important for capturing personal perspectives on sensitive issues such as housing, social transformation, and belonging.

A total 40 interviews were conducted between May and July 2024. Participants were organized into four groups, each groups represents a different position in city of Tehran in urban developments:

Ten residents of Ekbatan Town, mainly from middle-income households, who are experiencing changes related to commercialization and increasing property values.

Ten residents of District1 (Residential Park), who represent higher-income households living in gated communities.

Ten real estate professionals active in both districts, who provide perspectives on housing markets, investment trends, and property valuations.

Ten urban stakeholders, including planners, policymakers, and academics, who provide insights into planning processes, regulatory frameworks, and governance challenges.

The structure was designed to create a balanced analytical perspective. Residents shared their everyday experiences, both I terms of neighborhood change and social interaction. Real estate professionals explained how economic variables, demand, and investment strategies in fluence urban form. Unban stakeholders helped to situate these experiences withing broader planning policies and institutional contexts. Together, these perspectives allowed the study to connect lived experience with market behavior and governance decision.

Each interview lasted between 20 and 45 minutes. Most interviews were conducted in Persian, as interviewees preferred to speak in Persian and express their opinions to be free. All interviews were later translated into English to ensure consistency throughout the analysis. Most interviews were conducted in Persian, as participants felt more comfortable expressing their views in their native language. To ensure consistency across language support ( ChatGPT) was used exclusively for translation

purposes. All interviews were conducted by the author, and the selection, interpretation, and analysis of interview material are entirely based on the author's original fieldwork and analytical judgment. The interviews followed a conversational style rather than a rigid questionnaire. Guiding questions focused on topics such as housing conditions, neighborhood identity, safety, accessibility, social relations, and perceptions of urban management. This format encouraged reflection and openness, while keeping the discussion aligned with research objectives

### **3.4 Field Observation**

Field observation was used as a complementary method to support the interview material. While interviews captured participants' accounts and interpretations, observation allowed a more direct look at how urban space was arranged and used in everyday situation. This helped to connect participants' statements with what was actually seen and experienced in practice.

Observations focused on both physical and social features of the built environment. This included types and street layouts, as well as the presence of boundaries between public and private space, patterns of commercial activities, signage, and daily routines. Attention was also given to through the space, common gathering points, and how they used different areas at different times of the day.

In Ekbatan, field observations highlighted the importance of open and shared spaces. Courtyards, pedestrian walkways and semi-public areas were widely used by residents and others. At the same time, new cafes, shops and retail services become more visible. These commercial activities gradually altered patterns of interaction within an otherwise open social environment, even as commercialization introduced new forms of differentiation and selective use.

In Area 1, observations pointed to a distinct spatial and social environment. Physical barriers, including walls, gates and controlled entrances played a significant role in the pattern of daily life. Boundaries between residents and surrounding city were clearly marked through access points, security systems, and private facilities. Public space was limited, daily activities were more regulated. As a result, spontaneous social encounters were less common and interaction took place more in private or semi-private.

During field visits, visual material was collected and included in the appendices. These images support the qualitative analysis by placing the interview narrative within a visible spatial context. They help to fully characterize how social behaviors, access, and interaction in each area are shaped by specific features of urban form

### 3.5 Data Analysis Procedure

All interviews were transcribed verbatim and examined through thematic analysis. This approach was selected because it makes it possible to identify shared patterns in qualitative material while remaining flexible and sensitive to context. The purpose of this analysis was not to simply summarize participants' statements, but to explore how they understand and interpreted urban transformation in their own language.

The analytical process was iterative and developed across several stages. Rather than fixing interpretations at an early stage. Working in this way allowed themes to be refined through continuous engagement with both the data and emerging analytical insights

The process began with an initial phase of open coding. I read each interview transcript several times to become familiar with the data. In this stage, close attention was paid to all the words used by the interviewees, phrases, feelings, and recurring ideas. Codes were generated inductively, allowing themes to emerge directly from the participants' language rather than being imposed in advance. This helped ensure that the analysis remained closely grounded in lived experience.

In the next stage, individual codes were organized into broader analytical categories. These included themes related to perceptions of security, affordable housing, social exclusion, sense of belonging, everyday spatial practices, and views on urban governance. These categories were then compared across different interview groups, making it possible to identify both shared concerns and contrasting perspectives among residents, real estate professionals, and urban stakeholders.

The final phase involved thematic synthesis. At this point, themes were examined across all interview groups in order to identify areas of convergence as well as points of tension or disagreement. Observational notes from the fieldwork were incorporated at this stage to inform the interpretation and to assess whether interview accounts aligned with the observed spatial conditions and everyday practices.

Although the analysis followed an inductive logic, it was informed by the theoretical framework outlined in Chapter 2. Concepts such as gentrification, self-segregation, gated communities, and spatial justice helped guide interpretation without limiting the emergence of new or unexpected insights. This approach allowed the analysis to remain both theoretically informed and closely connected to the empirical material.

### **3.6 Ethical Considerations**

Ethical issues were taken account throughout the research. All individuals who took part in the study did so on a voluntary basis and received clear information about the purpose and scope of the research before participating. Consent was obtained, and participants were informed that their identities would be protected.

As the study addressed sensitive topics such as housing conditions, social inequality, and urban governance, care was taken to establish a respectful and comfortable interview setting. Interviewers were informed that they were free to skip any question or withdraw from the study at any stage without any negative consequences. Interviews took place in locations selected by participants themselves, most often in familiar environments such as cafes or residential courtyards.

Pseudonyms were used in all written materials, and identifying details were removed from transcripts. While full interview transcripts are included in the appendices for transparency, all data were anonymized to protect participants' privacy.

### **3.7 Research Limitations and Positionality**

As a qualitative study, the findings are context-specific and not intended to be statistically generalized. The purpose of the research is to interpret meanings and patterns rather than measure prevalence or frequency. Access to certain institutional actors was limited; however, triangulation across diverse participant groups helped mitigate this constraint.

The researcher's background in urban planning influenced both the formulation of research questions and the interpretation of spatial issues. Rather than viewing this positionality solely as a limitation, the study acknowledges it as both a challenge and a resource. Continuous reflexivity, engagement with multiple data sources, and careful comparison across perspectives were used to minimize bias.

Overall, this methodological approach enables a nuanced and humanized understanding of urban transformation in Tehran one that captures lived experience, professional reasoning, and institutional dynamics within a single analytical framework.

## Chapter 4 – Urban and Case Study Context

### 4.1 Tehran Urban Context and Planning Overview

Over the last several decades, Tehran has been shaped by continuous urban growth, strong social diversity, and pronounced spatial inequalities. The city has been expanding both in terms of physical extent and population, transforming from a relatively compact urban form into a complex metropolitan region. With a population over eight million, Tehran functions as Iran's primary economic, political, and cultural center, attracting migration, capital investment, and large-scale development from across the country.

Rather than following a single or coherent planning vision, urban development in Tehran has emerged through a combination of state-led planning initiatives, private-sector investment, and informal or semi-formal development practices. Different political and economic periods have produced distinct urban forms, often without long-term coordination or sustainable planning strategies. As a result, development has been unevenly distributed, with some areas benefiting from continuous investment and infrastructural upgrading, while others have remained underserved and neglected. From the perspective of this thesis, this uneven pattern of urban development is central to understanding contemporary urban change in Tehran,

A defining structural feature of Tehran's urban geography is the divide between the north and south. The northern districts are generally wealthier and benefits from higher-quality housing, better access to services, greater availability of green spaces, and better environmental conditions, including cleaner air and cooler climate. These areas are commonly associated with prestige, high security, and higher property values. In contrast, the southern districts are more affordable and host a higher share of middle and low-income residents. However, they often face persistent challenges related to inadequate infrastructure, resulting in marked differences in everyday life conditions across the city.

Such spatial inequalities are closely connected to planning practices and institutional arrangements. Land-use policies, planning regulations, and different housing programs have frequently higher-income groups and large-scale private development. In many cases, policy interventions intended to address housing needs have failed to adequately respond to the realities of low-and middle-income residents. At the same time, urban planning institutions have struggled to keep pace with rapid population growth. This has led to increased pressure on public services, traffic congestion, housing shortages, and unbalanced access to amenities such as public transport, parks and social infrastructures.



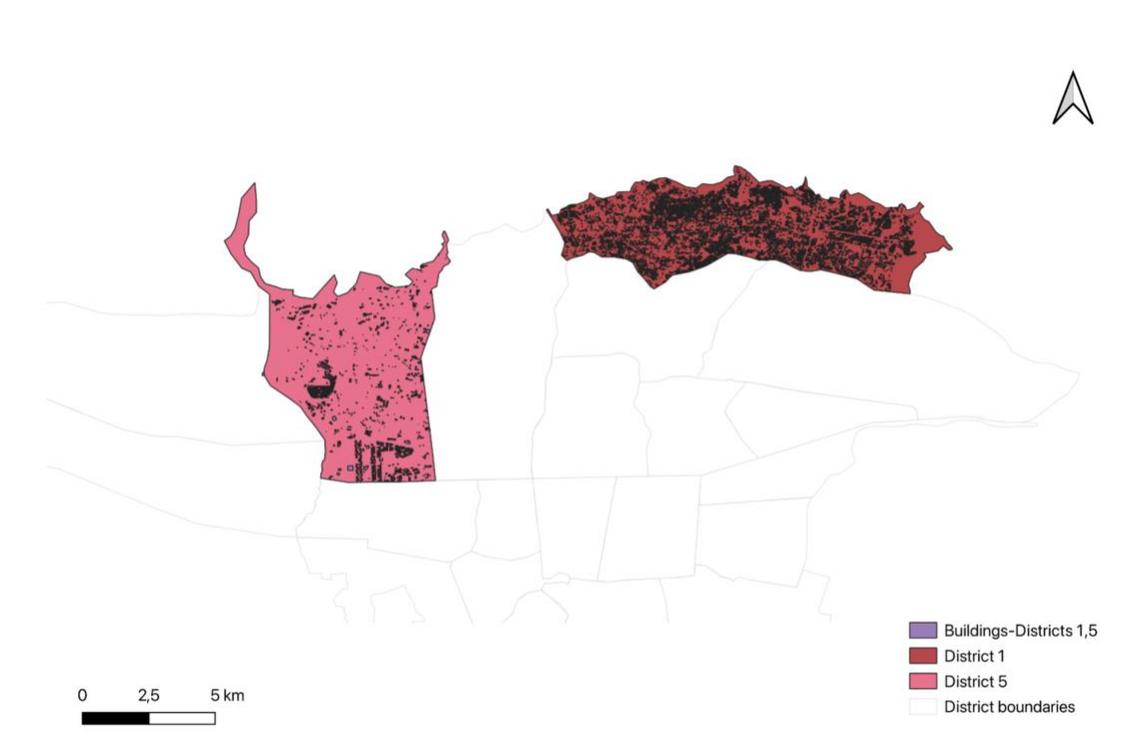
**Figure 1:** A citywide skyline view illustrating Tehran’s north–south socio-spatial gradient.  
Note: Source: Google Images, author unknown.



**Figure 2:** A citywide skyline view illustrating Tehran’s north–south socio-spatial gradient.  
Note: Source: Google Images, author unknown.

Over the past two decades, urban redesign projects and private-sector interventions have transformed different parts of Tehran, especially in the northern part of the city. Many of these changes are characterized by new construction, the influx of wealthy residents, and shifts in the social character or neighborhoods. While such developments can bring new services, improved infrastructure, and physical renewal, they can also lead to rising housing prices, displacement of long-term residents, and increased social injustice.

Tehran's urban fabric therefore raises broader questions about justice, access, and identity. Who can live in specific parts of the city, and who is excluded? Which groups have access to safe and well-maintained public spaces, and which do not? How are planning decisions made, and whose voices are included or excluded in these processes? These questions are important not only for understanding Tehran's physical form, but also for understanding its social dynamics. These are particularly significant in the context of gentrification and the increasing presence of gated communities, which together are changing everyday urban life and patterns of inclusion and exclusion



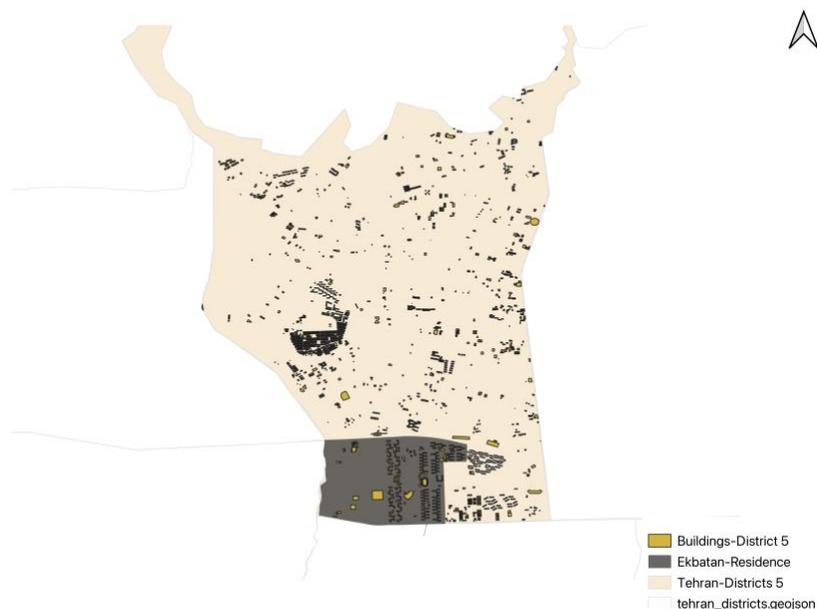
**Figure 3:** Spatial distribution of buildings in Districts 1 and 5 of Tehran  
Note: Author's elaboration. Using OpenStreetMap as the base map.

## 4.2 General Description of Ekbatan and District 1

Across Tehran, the urban fabric is made up of neighborhoods with their own histories, composed of different physical forms and different social conditions, as the capital city of Iran. Some areas have been planned through large scale development, while in some districts growth has been driven mainly by private-sector investment and market forces. Within this diverse urban landscape, Ekbatan and District 1 are two examples that show how contrasting urban planning can be in terms of how different parts of the city have evolved over time. Although both are located within Tehran's administrative boundaries, they reflect different planning ideas, housing models, and everyday urban realities. These contrasting characteristics provide the basis for comparing Ekbatan and District 1 in this thesis.

### 4.2.1 Ekbatan: A Planned Community with a Collective Spirit :

Located in western Tehran, Ekbatan is a large residential complex developed in the 1970s as a modern housing project. It was designed to provide comfortable and affordable housing for middle-class families. The project followed principles of modern urban transformation, emphasizing functionality, order, and communal living, its physical form is characterized by large residential blocks, repetitive modular architecture, and well-defined open spaces.



**Figure 4:** Spatial distribution of buildings in Districts 5 of Tehran  
Note: Author's elaboration. Using OpenStreetMap as the base map.



**Figure 5:** Aerial view of Ekbatān residential blocks illustrating the modular modernist layout. Note: Author's Saeed Ghazi (Maap Arcitecture studio)

The Ekbatan settlement was designed to support everyday urban and social interaction. Residential buildings are arranged around shared courtyards and green spaces, which act as semi-public spaces for walking, relaxation, and informal encounters. Pedestrian paths are designed to be separate and away from car traffic areas, creating a safer and quieter environment. Local shops, schools, health services and basic facilities allow residents to meet many of their daily needs within the neighborhood. For this reason, Ekbatan is often described as a relatively autonomous urban unit.



**Figure 6:** Ekbatān residential environment showing repetitive block typology and shared open spaces supporting everyday social life. Note: Author's elaboration

Over recent years, some parts of Ekbatan have experienced modest changes, including the emergence of cafés, renovated apartments, and small-scale commercial spaces. These developments may indicate the beginning of gentrification. However, the area still preserves its mixed population and collective atmosphere. This continuity is significant for understanding everyday life in Ekbatan. Public spaces remain open, and people from different social backgrounds continue to live and interact there. Another important feature of Ekbatan is its strong public transport connection. The metro system directly serves the area, making it easy for residents and visitors from other parts of Tehran to reach it. This accessibility helps maintain a more open and connected urban environment.

Accessibility also plays an important role in sustaining this openness. The neighborhood benefits from good transportation systems, such as the metro system and the city bus and taxi system, which effectively connect it to other parts of Tehran. This level of connectivity supports public mobility within the urban network, encourages open space, and helps to reduce social isolation. It also allows Ekbatan to be physically and socially connected to the wider city.



A

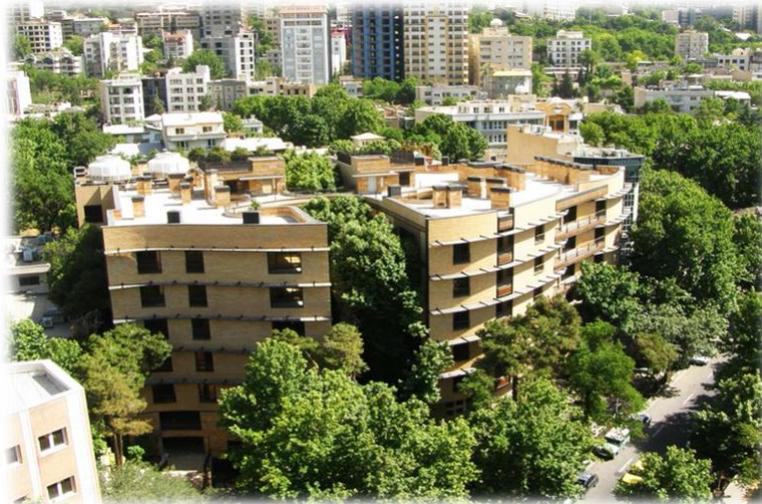


B

**Figure 7:** Key activity nodes within Ekbatan Town, Tehran. (A) Ekbatan Megamall. (B) Ekbatan Metro Station  
Note: TripAdvisor, user-contributed photographs (author unknown).

#### 4.2.2 District 1: Prestige, Privilege, and Isolation

District 1 is located in the north of Tehran, nestled in the foothills of the Alborz Mountains. This area has historically been associated with higher income groups, environmental benefits, and prestigious residential development. Compared to Ekbatan, District 1 exhibits a very different pattern of urban development, shaped largely by private investment and market-oriented planning



A



B



C



D

**Figure 8:** Golestan-e Shomali residential complex, Tehran. (A–C) Residential buildings, (D) Gated entrance.



**Figure 9:** Spatial distribution of buildings in Districts 1 of Tehran  
 Note: Author's elaboration. Using OpenStreetMap as the base map.



**Figure 10:** Park Residential Complex in Tehran's District 1, illustrating contemporary high-rise residential architecture and terraced green balconies. Note: Author's elaboration.

The urban development in District 1 is different from the western and southern parts of Tehran and is characterized by sparsely populated villas and luxury apartment complex, many of are gated. These developments are often designed with controlled entrances, security systems, and high levels of private amenities. Streets are generally quitter and les mixed, and access to residential spaces is clearly regulated. Green spaces and different facilities are often designed privately for the residents of the complexes, not for the public.

In the last two decades, District 1 has experienced a clear wave of gentrification. Older houses have been replaced by tall luxury towers. Trendy restaurants and designer shops have appeared, targeting a younger and wealthier population. This process has not only changed the physical appearance of the district but also its social atmosphere.



A



B

**Figure 11 :** Park Residential Complex, Tehran (District 1).  
(A) Gated entrance, (B) Internal courtyard. Note: Author's elaboration.

One important result of this transformation is a growing sense of isolation. Many people living in District 1 choose to live in secured buildings or gated communities. They are surrounded by people from similar social backgrounds, and daily life often takes place in exclusive spaces from private gyms to cafés that are unaffordable for many. As a result, the district feels more disconnected from the rest of the city, both physically and socially.

Although District 1 is served by metro lines, taxis, and good road connections, its high cost of living limits access for many people. From the price of housing to everyday items like food, cafés, and services, this area is among the most expensive in Tehran. As a result, only a certain class of people can afford to live or spend time here. This contributes to a sense of social and economic isolation, reinforced by gated buildings, private developments, and exclusive environments that are not welcoming to outsiders. The result is a district that feels physically connected to the city, but socially separated from it.

When viewed together, Ekbatan and District 1 present two very different faces of Tehran's urban development. Ekbatan was designed with a vision of collective living, shared spaces, and social interaction, and it continues to reflect many of these values today. District 1, in contrast, has increasingly become a symbol of luxury, exclusivity, and controlled urban space, these contrasting trajectories help illustrate how gentrification does not produce the same outcomes every day. Instead, it interacts with local planning decisions, different types of homes, and social structures to create different forms of transformation and division.

One of the best examples of this shift is North Golestan Town in Sahebgharanieh. This zone shows the transition from middle-class housing toward exclusive gated communities. Through gentrification, older and more modest residential buildings have been replaced by luxury apartments and enclosed villas. This physical transformation reflects a deeper process of social polarization within Tehran. Controlled boundaries, private green spaces, and restricted access redefine neighborhood identity and shape new forms of social belonging. In this emerging urban landscape, security and exclusivity become central values, while openness and social mixing play much smaller roles.

### 4.3 Synthesis: Relationship between Gentrification and Gated Communities in Tehran

In recent years, urban change in Tehran has made the relationship between gentrification and the emergence of gated communities more visible, particularly in Ekbatan and District 1. These two processes are not identical, nor do not always appear together. However, in some contexts, they interact and reinforce one another, shaping patterns of access, exclusion, and everyday urban life. What matters here is how local planning decisions and everyday practices influence these outcomes.

In many cities, gentrification of declining urban areas usually involves the physical, economic, and symbolic upgrading of neighborhoods. Typically, wealthier groups are attracted to contexts where building renovations and the new services have taken place. In some cases, this process can lead to rising housing costs, and greater control over space. Gated development tends to emerge when the private investment focuses on various sectors, with the largest investment in the security and welfare aspects of communities and attracts wealthy people to these areas.

District 1 illustrates this relationship most clearly. Here, gentrification followed the construction of luxury apartments, private developments, and gated residential complex. These spaces are often protected by walls, security personnel, and surveillance systems. While such measures provide for the safety and comfort of those living in these buildings, they also restrict access and social interaction within the city of Tehran. As a result, the district 1 became more socially and economically insulated from its surrounding. Although it remains physically well connected to the wider of city, everyday urban life in this district 1 is quite gentrified and isolated from the rest of the urban areas in Tehran.

Ekbatan, however, reflects a different relationship between gentrification and gated features. In Ekbatan, some elements associated with controlled access existed before the recent renewal process. Each residential block in the tower section had control access, private parking, and basic security. These features were not designed to create exclusion, but rather to organize residential life and ensure security. At the same time, the overall structure of Ekbatan was designed so that shared courtyards, public paths, and communal spaces was designed to support social relations.

As limited forms of gentrification have emerged, Ekbatan has not become more closed or socially isolated. While, become more socially dynamic and more connected to people. This outcome was influenced by specific urban and planning decisions.

different developments played a significant role in shaping this process:

The construction of metro station that improved accessibility and connected Ekbatan to the rest of Tehran.

The opening of modern shop malls and arcades, which combine cinema, clothing and supermarkets often referred to as “Megamalls”

The increase of local cafes and restaurants, which enhanced public life and encouraged social community.

In Ekbatan, these shifts did not reinforce isolation and segregation. Instead, they helped to open up the town. Here, gentrification created a more vibrant and lively urban environment, where different social groups could meet and spend more time together in public spaces. In this case, the process did not lead to stronger self-segregation. Rather, it supported new shared spaces and everyday experience that encouraged openness and interaction.

Overall, this comparison suggests that gentrification does not automatically lead to gated development. Outcomes depend on how urban policies are shaped, how public space is managed, and how access is maintained. In District 1, gentrification occurred through separation and exclusive. In Ekbatan, it contributed to greater accessibility and more integrated form of urban life. At the heart of this comparison lies a broader question about urban transformation: as cities change, do they become more closed and divided, or more open and interconnected? Tehran, like many cities, is shaped by planners, policymakers, and developers who influence not only the physical form but also its social future and how people experience belonging, difference, and everyday urban life. In this thesis, this comparison is used to show how urban change can produce either openness or enclosure, depending on how access and public space are governed.

## Chapter 5 – Findings and Discussion

### 5.1 Narratives from Residents (Ekbatan and Park Residential Complex)

This section is based on qualitative material collected through interviews with residents of Tehran's Ekbatan Housing Complex and a gated residential complex in the park area of District 1. These accounts are supported by the researcher's field observations. The residents' narratives are organized thematically, focusing on social mix, exclusion and identity, everyday lifestyles and spatial practices, as well as processes of gentrification and neighborhood change. These themes are interpreted in relation to existing debates on gated communities, segregation, and spatial justice. Interview excerpts and field notes, drawn from Persian-language diaries, help illustrate how residents understand and experience the social and spatial dynamics of their neighborhoods. From the perspective of this study, these narratives reveal how everyday life is shaped by broader urban structures.

#### 5.1.1 Social Mix and Community Relations

Residents in Ekbatan and the Park complex describe very different senses of community. Ekbatan, Tehran's large mixed-income residential complex, is remembered by many long-term residents as originally housing working- and middle-class families together. One long-term resident explained that people of different ages and backgrounds such as older residents, shopkeepers, and students still interact in shared courtyards and plazas. He noted with pride that "we have everyone here in one place, and we grew up knowing our neighbors." In contrast, interviewees from the Park complex emphasized a more socially homogeneous environment. Most households were described as shared similar class backgrounds and lifestyles. One Park resident remarked that "everyone here looks pretty much like me same income, same habits which makes life predictable."

These accounts are consistent with studies showing that gated communities are often constructed to ensure comfort and homogeneity, using physical walls and private governance to limit access. In the Park complex, strict entry protocols and private amenities reinforce this identity. By contrast, Ekbatan's original multi-phase design which was intended for different income levels to accommodate different income levels, continues to support a diverse social landscape. Several Ekbatan interviewees highlighted everyday cross-class interactions, with residents from various backgrounds coexisting and engaging in shared spaces. One Ekbatan mother noted that, unlike the Park, it is common for children from different households to play together, fostering a sense of shared identity.

At the same time, both areas show signs of internal social differentiation. In Ekbatan, residents observed that Phase III, generally considered the wealthiest

section, is more self-contained, while Phases I and II maintain more social cohesion. Similarly, in the Park complex, residents observed a trend toward even greater social similarity, as newer residents increasingly belong to the professional and economic elite. These findings confirm that social mix is not just about who lives in an area, but how people interact with one another in shared space.

### 5.1.2 Exclusion and Identity Politics

Interviewees described subtle but meaningful forms of exclusion in both neighborhoods, especially in relation to gender and sexuality. In Ekbatan, several LGBTQ+ residents reported feeling both tolerated and invisible. One gay resident explained that he socializes with like-minded people in semi-private areas, while avoiding open displays of identity due to fear of judgment. Another mentioned that while Ekbatan felt “safer” than other neighborhoods, it still carried the risk of exposure and gossip.

In the Park complex, exclusion was described as more structural. Interviewees referred to a strong sense of social surveillance, with neighbors informally enforcing moral standards. LGBTQ+ residents felt compelled to self-censor, and visitors who did not appear “fit in” were more visible and sometimes questioned by building staff. These experiences reflect a broader issue of spatial injustice, in which urban environments fail to accommodate diverse identities and reinforce dominant norms of respectability and conformity.

Together, these patterns show how urban form walls, gates and shared courtyards intersects with social power to produce invisible boundaries. Even in neighborhoods promoted as “safe” or “community-focused,” residents who deviate from the perceived norms experience varying degrees of exclusion, marginalization, and erasure.

### 5.1.3 Lifestyle and Spatial Practices

Residents’ daily routines further reveal contrasting neighborhood cultures. In Ekbatan, semi-public spaces such as courtyards, walkways, and arcades are frequently used as extensions of the home. These areas act as extensions of the home, enabling casual encounters and spontaneous gatherings. A young woman explained that she often meets former classmates while shopping or walking her dog in the plaza. Parents described how children play with neighbors’ kids under minimal supervision, supported by the neighborhood’s familiarity.

By contrast, the Park complex fosters more private and regulated lifestyles. Shared facilities, such as swimming pools or gyms, are typically used according to schedules, and informal interaction with neighbors is limited. One father explained that children mostly socialize indoors or through organized activities. Another

resident noted that the only “public” events are those arranged by the management board, such as seasonal gatherings or cultural nights. Several interviewees said they appreciated the peace and quiet, but also admitted to feeling isolated.

Field observations confirm these contrasts. In Ekbatan, outdoor spaces remain active late into the evening, with visible social activity, conversation, and play. In the Park complex, shared areas are often quiet, with little sign of spontaneous use. These differences highlighted how urban design shapes everyday practices: one environment encourages interaction, while the other prioritizes privacy and control.

#### 5.1.4 Gentrification and Neighborhood Change

Both neighborhoods are currently undergoing socio-spatial change, though in different forms. In Ekbatan, residents reported rising rents, the renovation of older apartments into luxury units, and an influx of wealthier newcomers. Longtime residents expressed concern about losing their sense of community. One retired teacher lamented that her neighbors of 30 years had moved out due to rising costs, replaced by “younger people with no connection to the area.”

In the Park complex, gentrification was described less as population turnover and more about consolidation of wealth. Residents noted a shift toward more high-end services, foreign-educated neighbors, and exclusive shops nearby. Several interviewees described feeling “sealed off” from the rest of the city, not only physically, but culturally. As one resident remarked, “When I go to other neighborhoods, I feel like I’m visiting a different Tehran.”

These narratives reflect two sides of the gentrification process. In Ekbatan, it leads to economic displacement and cultural change. In Park, it reinforces isolation and the reproduction of privilege. In both cases, residents acknowledge the impact of market forces and weak regulatory frameworks on the city’s social fabric.

## 5.2 Insights from Real Estate Professionals and Developers

This section focuses on interviews with real estate agents, property consultants, and developers working in Tehran, particularly in Ekbatan and northern districts such as District 1. Their accounts illustrate how market actors interpret neighborhood change, respond to demand for gated lifestyles, and participate directly or indirectly in processes of gentrification, spatial stratification, and self-segregation. These perspectives complement the resident-focused narratives of Section 5.1, by highlighting the economic and institutional forces shaping local housing markets. From the perspective of this research, these accounts make clear how housing

choices are increasingly framed through market-based reasoning rather than through ideas of everyday urban integration.

### 5.2.1 Market Demand, Lifestyle Branding, and the Appeal of Gated Living

Real estate professionals consistently referred to a growing demand for residential environments described as “predictable,” “secure,” and “clean” particularly among middle- and upper-income buyers. Several consultants described gated development District 1 not simply as housing, but as lifestyle products. One developer explained that clients “want privacy, controlled access, and a community of people like themselves,” adding that marketing strategies deliberately highlight homogeneity, prestige, and exclusivity.

Agents noted that families with children, dual-income professional households, and returning expatriates are among the main target groups for gated private compounds. These buyers are generally less concerned with urban integration and more focused on reducing everyday friction such as traffic, noise, mixed land uses, and perceived social disorder. One consultant remarked that “people want to avoid uncertainty; the walls give them peace of mind.”

Ekbatan, by contrast, is often described in more ambivalent terms. While some agents continue to highlight its urban design, green spaces, and strong services, many pointed out that the complex now attracts a mix of long-term residents, investors seeking rental income, and younger newcomers priced out of northern districts. According to the several interviewees, this diversity makes Ekbatan “harder to brand”, yet still highly profitable because of its location, scale, and reputation for safety relative to other middle-income areas.

### 5.2.2 Gentrification as an Investment Strategy

Real estate professionals openly acknowledged that renovation-driven gentrification is not accidental but actively pursued as an investment strategy. Many described Ekbatan as an “opportunity zone” where aging apartments can be upgraded into luxury apartments. One agent stated that “if you renovate well, you can double the rent.” Developers typically purchase older units, install high-end finishes, and market them to wealthier tenants. Interviews recognized that this process gradually excludes long-term residents from the rental market, but has become “standard practice” because of high returns.

In District 1, gentrification takes a different form: rather than upgrading old units, developers build hyper-exclusive compounds targeting the upper-middle and upper classes. These projects rarely integrate into the urban fabric and instead function as islands of privilege. One developer admitted that such projects “do not solve any housing shortages but cater to profitable niches.”

Professionals across the sector highlighted that weak urban regulation and fragmented governance allow the market to drive these transformations with minimal oversight. Developers repeatedly emphasized that municipal guidelines do not restrict exclusivity, density, or pricing strategies, enabling rapid capital accumulation in premium districts.

### 5.2.3 Risk Perception, Segregation, and the Construction of ‘Desirable’ Space

The Interviews show that professionals play an active role in shaping classed and moralized narratives of Tehran’s neighborhoods. Agents often describe District 1 as “safe,” “cultured,” and “trustworthy,” while framing middle-income areas as risky, noisy, or socially unpredictable. These narratives reinforce demand for gated communities and normalize socio-spatial segregation.

Many agents admitted that they “filter” clients based on perceived fit with the community, even if unofficially. For instance, one consultant said he would “never show an Ekbatan unit to someone who clearly wants privacy and homogeneity,” while another mentioned discouraging middle-income clients from visiting District 1 complexes because “they won’t feel comfortable there.” These practices show how market actors contribute to self-segregation by guiding clients toward socially homogeneous territories.

Professionals also reported that LGBTQ+ individuals or unconventional households rarely approach them explicitly, but they acknowledged that such groups might prefer areas like Ekbatan where anonymity is easier and social surveillance weaker. This aligns with resident narratives about visibility and safety.

### 5.2.4 Affordability, Displacement Pressures, and Market Polarization

Agents consistently highlighted rising housing prices as a structural feature of Tehran’s market. However, they often framed displacement as “natural” or “inevitable.” One consultant noted, “This is how cities evolve people move to where they can afford.” Another said that “every renovation increases value, and that’s good for everyone,” an interpretation that contrasts sharply with concerns expressed by long-term residents in Ekbatan.

Professionals confirmed that younger middle-income households increasingly cannot afford northern districts, pushing them toward more peripheral or aging complexes. Meanwhile, District 1 developments are priced with the intention of attracting investors, expatriates, and elite families, not local middle-class buyers.

This dynamic contributes to a polarized housing market:

Northern gated enclaves continue to accumulate wealth and exclusivity.

Middle-income areas like Ekbatan face rent pressure, fragmentation, and selective gentrification.

Lower-income groups become increasingly peripheralized.

Several professionals expressed concern that this pattern is unsustainable but noted that without stronger regulation, market incentives overwhelmingly favor exclusive, high-profit enclaves.

### 5.2.5 Developers' Perspective: Future Trajectories of Tehran's Residential Market

Developers emphasized that the future of Tehran's housing market will likely involve more gated communities and high-rise compounds. They cited reasons such as:

continued population growth

demand for privatized amenities (pools, gyms, private roads)

lack of trust in public services

desire for social similarity and controlled environments

profit margins that exceed those of conventional housing

One developer stated: "Cities are becoming more chaotic. People want control. Gated communities are the answer for the upper classes." This mindset reflects global literature showing how privatized residential enclaves emerge as responses to insecurity, inequality, and weakening public institutions.

Developers also noted that many buyers prefer "turnkey" properties with minimal interaction with municipal authorities, reinforcing the privatization of urban governance. They acknowledged that this trend can intensify segregation but argued that "the market responds to preferences."

## 5.3 Urban Stakeholders: Perspectives on Planning and Segregation

This section presents insights from urban planners, municipal staff, and policy-oriented professionals working across different districts of Tehran. Their perspectives highlight how issues of segregation, uneven development, and the growth of exclusive residential enclaves are understood not only as the result of market forces but also as reflections of institutional limitations, planning cultures, and political priorities. While residents and market actors describe lived or economic experiences, urban stakeholders offer a broader, systemic view of how spatial inequalities are produced and reproduced in the city.

### 5.3.1 Planning Constraints, Fragmented Governance, and Uneven Priorities

Many planners acknowledged that Tehran's governance framework is fragmented, with overlapping authorities that hinder coherent long-term planning. One planner described the city as "a puzzle where each piece has its own agenda." District municipalities tend to focus on short-term, revenue-generating interventions, facade improvements, selective park projects, and infrastructure beautification, rather than on citywide social equity. Urban planners repeatedly emphasized that gated communities, luxury towers, and high-end compounds tend to move forward more easily, largely because they generate fees and political visibility, while socially mixed or affordable housing receives little institutional support.

Professionals working in mid-income districts reported that proposals for inclusive upgrades often remain caught in bureaucratic loops. One planner noted that her team had developed a project to improve pedestrian access and public spaces in a dense, aging neighborhood; however, "didn't attract investment, so it was dropped." These reflections illustrate how institutional incentives can indirectly reinforce socio-spatial segregation: projects serving wealthier areas advance faster, while neighborhoods most in need of reinvestment remain under-served.

### 5.3.2 Perceptions of Gentrification: Normal Cycle or Structural Problem?

Urban stakeholders showed clear differences in how they interpret gentrification is understood. Some senior planners described it as a "normal stage of urban evolution," suggesting that rising property values reflect improvement and modernization. Others, especially younger planners or those working more directly with communities, framed it as a structural issue tied to displacement, loss of social diversity, and widening inequality.

A planner in District 10 remarked that "each time a renovation happens, someone gets pushed further away." This concern was echoed by urban designer, who explained that gentrification should not be read only as visual or aesthetic change, but as "a quiet reshaping of who has the right to stay in the city."

Stakeholders based in District 1 offered yet different perspective. While they acknowledged the exclusivity of gated developments, they argued that planning authorities have little influence over market-driven enclaves. As one planner noted, “We can regulate the façade, but not the social boundaries.” This observation captures a broader tension: professionals often recognize patterns of segregation yet feel constrained within existing institutional cultures.

### 5.3.3 Security, Social Order, and the Normalization of Gated Lifestyles

Several stakeholders described the rise of gated communities as a reaction to wider urban anxieties in Tehran. These concerns include issues of safety, overstretched public services, and a declining level of trust in municipal management. One planner explained that “people don’t believe the city can protect their quality of life, so they buy protection privately.” Another stakeholder added that gated complexes provide a sense of predictability, something the public realm cannot always guarantee.

At the same time, planners also recognized the long-term risks of this model. Several interviewees warned that reliance on private enclaves fragments the city, weakens shared public life, and accelerates socio-spatial divides. A transport engineer pointed out that gated communities disrupt street connectivity and reduce permeability, creating “dead edges” in the urban fabric. A landscape architect highlighted the emotional dimension: “When the city feels stitched together by walls, it affects how people relate to each other.”

These reflections reveal how planners simultaneously understand the reasons behind gated living and remain concerned about its consequences.

### 5.3.4 The Silent Reproduction of Inequality Through Everyday Decisions

Across the interviews, planners emphasized that segregation in Tehran is rarely created through explicit policy. Instead, it develops through a series of everyday decisions: zoning exemptions, flexible density allowances, selective infrastructure investments, and a general tolerance toward exclusive developments. One municipal staff member admitted that “we don’t plan segregation, but our decisions allow it to happen.” For example, exclusive compounds often receive faster approvals or better services, not because of formal regulations, but because they align with political and financial priorities. Meanwhile, districts with aging housing stock or dense working-class populations tend to face slower responses and limited resources. Several planners described this pattern as “institutional drift”: a gradual process in which certain areas accumulate advantages without any official justification.

These reflections suggest that segregation should not be understood only as a social outcome. It is also embedded in everyday planning practice, shaped more by implicit priorities and routine decisions than by openly stated policies.

### 5.3.5 Hopes for Change: The Role of Participatory Planning and Social Justice

Even with institutional constraints, several planners expressed optimism about emerging approaches. Younger professionals highlighted the growing discourse on participatory planning, social justice, and inclusive urban design, especially within universities and training programs. Some cited small-scale interventions in central districts pedestrian improvements, cultural initiatives, community micro-parks as promising steps.

Yet they emphasized that without structural support, these efforts remain symbolic. One planner put it simply: “We can design inclusive projects, but unless the system values inclusion, they won’t become reality.”

Urban stakeholders consistently argued that Tehran needs a stronger commitment to equitable development: transparent land policies, investment mechanisms for aging districts, and planning tools that prioritize mixed-income communities. Their reflections highlight a desire for a shift from reactive, revenue-driven interventions toward policies that ensure that all residents not just affluent groups in gated enclaves have access to secure, livable urban environments.

## 5.4 Intersections of Gentrification, Social Class, and Exclusion

This section synthesizes findings from residents, real estate professionals, and urban stakeholders to reveal how gentrification, class dynamics, and spatial exclusion interact in Tehran’s contemporary urban landscape. The comparison between Ekbatan and District 1 provides a powerful lens for understanding how different socio-spatial processes unfold simultaneously across the city. Personal observations from fieldwork walking through Ekbatan’s active courtyards and District 1’s quiet, polished gated environments help illustrate how these processes are not only structural but also deeply embodied in the everyday atmosphere of each neighborhood.

### 5.4.1 Two Models of Socio-Spatial Change: Reinforced Privilege vs. Pressured Diversity

Gentrification manifests differently in the two areas. In Ekbatan, it is largely incremental and renovation-driven, often resulting in affordability pressures for long-term residents. Interviewees spoke about rising rents, investor interest, and the gradual disappearance of familiar neighbors. Real estate professionals confirmed that upgrading older units has become a profitable strategy, accelerating turnover.

By contrast, District 1’s transformation is not renovation-based but exclusivity-based. Its gated complexes are designed from the outset as enclaves for the city’s

upper classes. Developers openly promote homogeneity, security, and prestige. Stakeholders described this as “the market naturally selecting its audience,” but residents from other districts often perceive it as intentional self-segregation.

My own observations reflected these dynamics: while Ekbatan’s public spaces were lively and mixed, District 1 felt curated, visually uniform, and socially filtered. The contrast between the two environments makes class-based spatial ordering tangible at the street level.

#### 5.4.2 Spatial Exclusion Through Design, Governance, and Everyday Practice

Across interviews, residents and planners described a pattern of exclusion that is not always formalized but becomes entrenched through design choices and social practices. In District 1, walls, checkpoints, and private governance structures create physical barriers. More subtly, residents reported social expectations around appearance and behavior that shape who “belongs.”

Urban stakeholders acknowledged this indirectly, noting that Tehran’s planning system lacks tools to regulate exclusivity or ensure mixed-income development. As one planner said, “We don’t design exclusion, but we allow it to grow.

In Ekbatan, exclusion operates differently. LGBTQ+ residents described feeling both safer and more invisible protected by density and anonymity but still cautious about visibility. This form of “soft exclusion” contrasts with District 1’s overt social filtering, where deviation from dominant norms stands out more visibly. The difference between “blending in” and “being watched” surfaced repeatedly in interviews and matched what I observed while moving through each area.

#### 5.4.3 Market Logics and Institutional Biases Working in Parallel

A key intersection revealed in the findings is how real estate markets and institutional incentives reinforce each other. Developers prioritize luxury compounds because they generate higher returns; municipal authorities approve them quickly because they generate revenue; planners struggle to propose alternatives because they lack regulatory support.

This cycle privileges districts already attractive to elites and neglects those with strong social fabric but lower economic returns. Ekbatan residents frequently complained about slow municipal responses, while District 1 residents benefit from curated amenities and faster service delivery.

Stakeholders described this not as intentional discrimination but as the outcome of “institutional drift,” in which richer districts accumulate advantages over time. Personal observation supported this pattern: District 1’s clean sidewalks and manicured greenery contrasted with Ekbatan’s resident-made adaptations benches, ramps, informal seating, improvised shading evidence of a community compensating for uneven investment.

#### 5.4.5 Identity, Morality, and Class: The Hidden Layer of Segregation

Interviews revealed that segregation is not only economic but also moral and cultural. Real estate agents often described District 1 as “cultured,” “trustworthy,” or “well-behaved,” subtly reproducing classed hierarchies. Residents of gated complexes echoed these sentiments by emphasizing similarity and predictability.

In Ekbatan, by contrast, diversity shapes identity in a more organic way parents, students, elderly residents, migrants, LGBTQ+ individuals, and mixed-income households all share semi-public space. The social complexity creates frictions but also a more open sense of belonging.

My field notes captured this directly: in Ekbatan, I saw teenagers playing, elderly men talking, and families using outdoor plazas well into the evening. In District 1, the atmosphere was calmer but more guarded; children played mostly indoors or in private courtyards, and spontaneous street life was almost absent.

These contrasting ambiances reflect different moral geographies one built around interaction, one built around containment.

#### 5.4.6 Reproduction of Inequality Through Everyday Spatial Experience

Perhaps the strongest intersection emerging from the data is how inequality becomes felt and internalized through daily spatial routines. In Ekbatan, residents depend on shared spaces and informal social networks that mitigate some pressures but cannot prevent rising costs. In District 1, residents experience comfort and stability within a curated environment that shields them from the city’s broader challenges.

These contrasting experiences reinforce different urban imaginaries:

Ekbatan residents often speak about “losing what we had” as gentrification advances.

District 1 residents speak about “protecting what we have” through exclusivity.

Both perspectives reflect defensive reactions to broader urban uncertainty, but they lead to divergent spatial outcomes one toward displacement, the other toward deeper enclosure.

#### 5.4.7 A City Moving Toward Greater Separation Unless Redirected

Interviews with planners reveal a shared concern: if current market and institutional trends continue, Tehran risks becoming increasingly fragmented along class lines. The coexistence of pressured diversity (Ekbatan) and fortified privilege (District 1) represents two faces of the same urban trajectory.

Yet several stakeholders expressed hope that alternative models mixed-income housing, community-centered planning, and reinvestment in aging districts could bend this trajectory. However, they also agreed that meaningful change requires political will and regulatory reform, not just design intentions

## Chapter 6 – Analysis of the Empirical Material

### 6.1 Comparative Analysis of the Two Case Studies

The comparison between Ekbatan and the Park Residential building in District 1 show how two residential environments in the city of Tehran can generate fundamentally different experiences of belonging, visibility, and urban change. Based on field observations and interviews with residents, real estate professionals, and planners, Ekbatan and District 1 emerge not simply as neighborhoods but as two contrasting urban models shaped by class, design, and governance.

#### 6.1.1 Ekbatan: Diversity, Transit Connectivity, and an Evolving Social Landscape

Ekbatan stands out as one of the few large-scale residential areas in Tehran where social diversity remains clearly visible. Families, students, young professionals, migrants, and LGBTQ+ residents live side by side. This diversity is not abstract; it is part of everyday life. It can be seen in ordinary daily life: older residents spending time in shared communal spaces, teenagers gathering near local shops and using different facilities like playing football and basketball, workers and employees moving in courtyards, and young people using public spaces throughout the day. For LGBTQ+ residents in particular, the size and density of the complex provide a form of anonymity that allows them to participate in neighborhood life without attracting attention.

Several LGBTQ+ residents say Ekbatan offers a special kind of comfort. The size, density, and layout of the complex allow these groups to remain relatively unknown while still being part of a community. Many interviewees describe Ekbatan as a place where they can blend in without attracting attention. This sense of anonymity does not eliminate social constraints, but it creates a subtle sense of security that is harder to find in more controlled and socially homogeneous neighborhoods in Tehran.

One key factor supporting this social mix is Ekbatan's strong connection to public transportation. The presence of a metro station, along with taxi ranks and bus routes, links the area directly to the wider city. This level of accessibility allows people from different income levels and social backgrounds to live in Ekbatan while commuting across Tehran. Students travel to universities, office workers move daily between districts, and service workers use public transport on different days. These constant movements help keep the neighborhood active and socially mixed.

At the same time, Ekbatan is undergoing noticeable change. New cafes, renovated apartments, and changing lifestyle types indicate the early stages of gentrification. These developments bring improved services and attract new residents with different backgrounds, but they also raise concerns about affordability and identity. Residents

express mixed feelings: some welcome better amenities and renewed focus on the neighborhood, while others worried that Ekbatan's original social character is slowly changing.

Overall, Ekbatan represents a neighborhood in transition. Although the neighborhood is shaped by new social and economic forces, it continues to resist complete socio-spatial segregation. It has diversity, public transport connectivity, and where different forms of urban life. For the reson, Ekbatan offers an important case for understanding how gentrification can occur without immediately leading to rejection or strong self-segregation.

### 6.1.2 District 1: Established Exclusivity and Social Filtering

The Park Residential Complex in District 1 presents a very different scenario. Here, exclusivity is not emerging; it is already firmly established. Gated entrances, private amenities, manicured landscapes, and strict security measures an environment that residents described as orderly, predictable, and safe. These characteristics are especially valued by wealthy families and returning expatriates, who make up the majority of the population.

However, this sense of comfort is closely linked to social filtering. During interviews, some residents indirectly acknowledged the homogeneity of the community, while real estate agents openly stated that buyers seek "similar people" and "a predictable social environment." These coded preferences contribute to a form of self-segregation, in which difference whether based on class, culture, or related to identity is less tolerated. LGBTQ+ individuals, for instance, explained that while District 1 may feel physically secure, it offers less emotional safety due to heigh social visibility and strong expectations of conformity.

Urban planners were particularly critical of this pattern. They argued that gated developments tend to reinforce inequality by attracting disproportionate attention and resources from municipal authorities. Field observations supported these concerns: although the public realm in District 1 appears polished and well maintained it feels socially restrained, with limited signs of spontaneous public interaction. Architecture and governance systems work together to create a refined but inward-facing urban atmosphere.

#### **Two Divergent Urban Trajectories**

Seen together, Ekbatan and District 1 represent contrasting urban paths in Tehran:

Ekbatan remains socially mixed and porous, shaped by its transit accessibility, inclusive spatial design, and the presence of diverse social groups including LGBTQ+

residents who find a degree of comfort and anonymity there. Gentrification is present but moderated by the neighborhood's scale and structure.

District 1 represents a mature form of exclusivity where gated living, homogeneity, and social filtering are embedded into the environment. Here, gentrification has already consolidated into a stable pattern of elite segregation.

Both neighborhoods are influenced by broader market and political forces, but they respond differently due to their design, governance, and social histories. Ekbatan illustrates a fragile coexistence between diversity and transformation; District 1 demonstrates how exclusivity becomes self-reinforcing once embedded in physical and social systems.

Ultimately, the comparison reveals that the future of Tehran's urban landscape will depend on whether neighborhoods evolve toward the openness of Ekbatan or the enclosure of District 1 and what that means for belonging, identity, and social justice in the city.

## 6.2 Conceptual Interpretation with Literature Integration (Humanized & Updated)

Interpreting the findings from Ekbatan and District 1 through the theoretical lenses introduced in Chapter 2 shows how Tehran's recent urban transformations both reflect broader global patterns and express distinctly local dynamics. Concepts such as gentrification, self-segregation, spatial justice, and communicative planning provide a useful framework for understanding the lived experiences described by residents, planners, and real estate professionals. In the context, the presence of LGBTQ+ residents in Ekbatan, together with the role of public transportation, emerged as particularly important in understanding why these processes take different forms across the city.

### 6.2.1 Gentrification as a Layered, Social, and Spatial Process

These changes can be observed in Ekbatan and correspond to what Lees, slowly according to (Lees, Slater and Wiedley, 2008) explanation as symbolic gentrification. From this perspective, gentrification is not just about physical renovation or rising property values. It also affects how places are shown, used, and socially interpreted. In Ekbatan, this shift appears through the emergence of new cafes, renovated apartments, lifestyle businesses, and changing consumption types. Together, these elements introduce new cultural meaning and signs of changes, while large-scale has not happened yet.

What makes Ekbatan spatially important is that because gentrification has not led to elimination of social diversity. The early modern design of the complex, with its large residential blocks, open courtyards, and shared pedestrian spaces, continues to support communal living. These features reduce the isolation of urban space and increase interaction between people. They create a sense of comfort for different groups who they are living in Ekbatan. For LGBTQ+ groups in Ekbatan, this place provides a form of protection across anonymity and density. As some residents explain, Ekbatan allows them to exist without being constantly observed or judge. This experience reflects the idea of (Sent,1970) that dense and complex urban environments can offer a model of freedom by allowing differences to exist without constant security.

### 6.2.2 Gated Communities and the Privatized City

District 1 exemplifies the global rise of gated living driven by fear, aspiration, and privatized governance patterns detailed by Blakely & Snyder (1997) and Setha Low (2003). Interviews confirmed that residents value predictability, homogeneity, and controlled access. Real estate agents frequently described the area as “secure” and “cultured,” revealing the moral and class codes embedded in spatial choice.

This resonates strongly with Marcuse’s (1997) theory of the partitioned city, where physical boundaries mirror deeper social divisions. District 1’s high security, manicured landscapes, and carefully curated public spaces demonstrate how urban form can reinforce socio-economic separation. LGBTQ+ residents described these environments as emotionally restrictive, illustrating how spatial filtering affects not only class groups but also identities that do not conform to dominant expectations.

### 6.2.3 Urban Planning: Technocratic Priorities and the Absence of Equity

The findings highlight the tension between technocratic and communicative planning models discussed in the literature review. Fainstein’s “Just City” framework helps interpret how municipal priorities often privilege economic gain over social equality. Planners interviewed in Tehran acknowledged that high-income developments receive disproportionate attention due to their political visibility and financial returns.

District 1 therefore benefits from a flow of investment, approvals, and infrastructural attention, while Ekbatan despite its vibrant social life experiences slower improvements. This uneven prioritization aligns with Soja’s (2010) analysis of **spatial injustice**, where systemic inequities accumulate through countless small decisions rather than explicit discriminatory policies.

#### 6.2.4 Class, Identity, and Everyday Spatial Boundaries

The relationship between class and space was visible in both case studies. In District 1, residents and professionals described social similarity as desirable, reflecting Bourdieu's idea of habitus, where class identity becomes spatially expressed through lifestyle preferences. These expectations narrow who can comfortably belong in such spaces.

Ekbatan, however, reflects a messier but more inclusive social landscape. Its complexity supports a wide range of identities, including LGBTQ+ individuals who find greater freedom of movement there. This "everyday diversity" aligns with Amin's (2002) theory of micropublics small, informal spaces where difference is negotiated through routine interaction rather than formal policy.

#### 6.2.5 A Distinctively Tehran Trajectory

When we link these findings to theoretical framework, Tehran shows as a city is shaping by global and local forces. Gentrification, privatization, and segregation follow familiar global types, but are filter across city of Tehran specific circumstances, these include the legacy of large modern of housing projects such as Ekbatan, fragmented governance structures, strong public transition base mobility in some areas, cultural norms around class and reputation, and the particular risks faced by marginalized groups, included LGBTQ+ groups.

Taken together, these elements help explain why Ekbatan is become a space for moderated gentrification and ongoing social mix, while District1 represents entrenched exclusivism and self-segregation. This contrast suggests that urban outcomes are not unavoidable. They are shaped by planning choices. This interpretation directly sets the stage for addressing the main research question of the thesis in the next section

### 6.3 Response to the Main Research Question

#### **Main Research Question:**

**How does gentrification influence self-segregation and the rise of gated communities in Tehran? What socio-economic and cultural factors drive these residential choices?**

The information obtained from comparing Ekbatan and The Park residential complex in two district areas, one in northern Tehran and the other in western Tehran, provides a clear answer. These two case studies show that the gentrification in Tehran has not

been carried out in a sustainable and uniform manner and we fully feel the difference. Instead, these differences can be understood through the history of the design of the neighborhoods, their connections, social relations and the insecurities of the residents.

### 6.3.1 Gentrification in Tehran produces different forms of urban change depending on neighborhood structure

In Ekbatan, gentrification appears as a slow and layered process. Renovated apartments, new cafés, and shifting consumption patterns have undoubtedly changed parts of the complex. Yet, these changes have not replaced social diversity. Ekbatan's design large blocks, open courtyards, active pedestrian spaces still enables everyday interaction across age groups, professions, and lifestyles. Interviewees described the neighborhood as evolving, yet still familiar, still collective. LGBTQ+ residents also emphasized that Ekbatan's anonymity and diversity make it a comfortable place to navigate daily life.

In contrast, District 1 represents a context where gentrification has long since matured. Its transformation is not incomplete or ongoing it is stabilized, embedded into gated compounds, pricing structures, and social expectations. Exclusivity is a starting point rather than a result. Residents choose District 1 for its privacy, order, prestige, and sense of predictability. Here, gentrification reinforces an existing pattern of class-based separation instead of creating new social combinations.

This comparison shows that the relationship between gentrification and segregation varies sharply depending on the physical and social DNA of the neighborhood.

### 6.3.2 Self-segregation is both a cause and a consequence of Tehran's residential patterns

The findings show that self-segregation operates through different mechanisms in the two areas:

#### **In District 1:**

Self-segregation is intentional. Wealthy people choose these areas because they can be in an environment where people of the same social and even financial class are closely managed. Interviews with real state professionals and real state agents who seek them out have neighbors who share similar lifestyle, values, and economic

profiles. This is not expressed as exclusion from others, but rather as convenience, stability, and social predictability.

### **In Ekbatan:**

Self-segregation is much less common. Residents do not choose this area because they want to segregate themselves, but because the affordable housing, access to public transportation, access to amenities, and greater social space allow more social classes to gather in this area. In this zone, assimilation occurs more easily. LGBTQ+ groups, young professionals, families, and older residents live together with relative ease, not because the place is intentionally inclusive, but because its creation and diversity naturally support different ways of life.

Thus, self-segregation in Tehran is highly contextual, strong, and intentional in District 1, and weak and solvable in Ekbatan.

### **6.3.3 Socio-economic and cultural factors deeply shape residential choice**

In both case studies, housing choices are a combination of economic conditions, cultural values, and everyday social experiences. These factors do not operate in isolation; rather, they can be assessed together, and they thus determine which neighborhoods people can live in and what urban spaces they can experience.

Two factors play a key role in this process: economic status and affordability. The rise in real estate prices is important for understanding the impact of urban renewal in Tehran. As neighborhoods become more developed, housing in these areas becomes more expensive and more difficult to access. For middle-income residents and younger households, Ekbatan provides a good mix of affordability and quality of life. Housing in this neighborhood is still somewhat affordable, while services, transportation, and everyday amenities are easily accessible. In contrast, Zone 1 is almost exclusively accessible to high-income groups and, in some cases, to returnees with high financial means. This clear distinction reinforces socio-economic stratification, as economic barriers clearly define who can live in these areas or even use them regularly.

Mobility and access to public transport also strongly influence residential choices. The metro station, taxi ranks and bus routes in Ekbatan play an important role in maintaining the social diversity of the neighborhood. Strong transport connections keep Ekbatan open to people of different social classes and provide strong links to the rest of the city. Daily commuting in this space contributes to social diversity and reduces social isolation and social exclusion. Zone 1, in contrast, follows a completely different pattern. The car-dependent structure limits chance encounters and everyday interactions with people outside the neighborhood. This heavy reliance

on private mobility fosters social isolation and reinforces feelings of isolation, even in an environment with adequate urban services.

Issues of identity, visibility, and comfort in everyday life are equally important. LGBTQ+ residents did not describe District 1 as directly or physically unsafe; they did, however, describe it as a more formal, orderly, and socially restricted space. Daily life in this area is governed by more specific norms of behavior and appearance. In contrast, Ecbatana was described as a lively, bustling, and diverse space. The constant activity in this neighborhood allows people to go about their daily lives without drawing too much attention. This difference suggests that the sense of comfort stems more from the space itself and how it is organized. Comfort depends on how the space allows people to be, to be present in society, and to be themselves in their daily lives.

Cultural preferences and social ideals also play an important role in residential decisions. District 1 in Tehran's urban imagination serves as a symbol of prestige and social status. Choosing to live in this area is not just a practical decision, but also a cultural one. It reflects certain values that are tied to a lifestyle based on status, order, and distinction. In contrast, Ekbatan represents a different set of meanings. The neighborhood is known for its sense of familiarity, sociability, and everyday mobility. For many residents, Ekbatan provides a sense of continuity and efficiency in daily life rather than symbolic distinction.

Finally, the emotional and practical perceptions of security in these two areas differ significantly. In Zone 1, security is provided through physical measures such as gates, guards, and controlled access, and protection is institutionalized in the design of the space. In contrast, in Ekbatan, security is social in nature. Density, constant activity, and the constant presence of people create a sense of visibility and mutual support. Here, people feel safe not because the space is closed, but because it is shared and alive.

People feel safe because the space is shared and active, not because it is closed and confined.

Together, these different experiences create a kind of emotional geography that strongly influences where residents feel comfortable and where they feel they belong. As a result, housing choices in Tehran are not simply about income or location; they are also about identity, daily lifestyle, and the types of social environments that people seek or prefer to avoid.

## Institutional factors reinforce these dynamics

The planning system in Tehran fragmented, profit-driven, and uneven unintentionally strengthens socio-spatial divisions. Luxury developments receive rapid approvals and better municipal attention, reinforcing the exclusive character of District 1. Ekbatan, despite its strong social fabric, receives slower upgrades and less strategic planning support. This institutional imbalance amplifies the different trajectories of the two neighborhoods.

## Final Answer: Gentrification in Tehran is intertwined with class, mobility, identity, and governance

Taken together, the findings show that:

In Ekbatan, gentrification introduces change but does not erase diversity. Public transportation, mixed housing stock, and active social life help sustain inclusivity.

In District1,gentrification reinforces existing exclusivity. Gated design, high prices, and cultural aspirations create a stable pattern of self-segregation.

So, gentrification in Tehran is not specifically an economic process, it is shaped by urban form, system of mobilities, cultural norms, and identity-based experiences. Residential choice comes from the intersection of what people can afford, how they want to live, and how the city's planning structures prioritize different areas.

Ultimately, without stronger regulatory and planning interventions, the city risks moving toward deeper socio-spatial divisions. Yet the case of Ekbatan also shows that alternative pathways are possible, where urban transformation and social diversity can coexist under the right conditions.

## Chapter 7 – Conclusion

### 7.1 Summary of Core Findings

This thesis aims to understand how urban space Tehran is shaped by processes of gentrification and self-segregation. By Focusing on two different case studies, The Ekbatan and a gated residential complex in District 1, the research is examining that how urban change is experienced and perceived by different social groups within the city.

The data show that urban change in Tehran does not follow a single, unified or defined path. In Ekbatan, transformation has taken place slowly and unbalanced. Residents did not describe sudden displacement or rapid physical transformation, and these changes have occurred over a long period of time. Instead, they spoke of changes in daily life, such as the growth of cafes and commercial activates, the increase in housing coats in nearby areas, and changes in the way public and semi-public spaces are used. Although these changes have affected the neighborhood's atmosphere, they have not completely eliminated its social diversity. Ekbatan still functions as relatively open and accessible area, where shared spaces, daily encounters, and public transportation continue to support a sense of urban communal life. In this context, renewal appears to a slow process that introduces pressures and adjustment without completely transforming the neighborhood's social composition.

In District 1, the situation is quite different. Here, segregation is not the outcome of gradual neighborhood change, but rather a potential and inherent feature of the residential environment. Gated communities are designed to offer privacy, control, dependent on financial and cultural circumstances linked to lifestyle preferences, concerns about safety, and expectations about social order. Rather than being excluded, residents of District 1 actively choose environments that limit exposure to difference and regulate interaction. In this case, segregation is largely produced through self-segregation rather overt exclusion

Across case studies, self-segregation emerges as a key factor shaping Tehran's urban landscape. Whether through market-driven transformation in mixed neighborhoods or through purposeful gated developments, spatial segregation has increased. This process is driven not only by economic factors, but also by ideas such as security, status, and belonging. As the findings suggest, segregation operates not only at the structural level, but also through everyday practices, such as housing choices, daily routines, and social interactions.

The research also highlights the role of urban form in shaping social relations. Ekbatan modern design characterized open courtyards, walkable spaces, and strong

public transport connections, while also providing private spaces for residents, both creates opportunities for interaction and limits physical separation, while also providing a sense of security for residents. In contrast, gated communities, with walls, controlled access, and private facilities, reduce contact with the wider city and limits voluntary social encounters.

Finally, the findings indicate that experiences of inclusion and exclusion vary across social groups and locations. Urban space is experienced differently depending on where people live and their social position. While gated communities allow for greater visibility and interaction among different residents, gated environments tend to prioritize privacy and separation, often at the expense of broader social engagement. These differences reveal how planning decisions, market forces, and everyday spatial practices combine to determine who feels comfortable, visible, or confined in the city.

Taken together, the findings suggest that gentrification and gated development in Tehran are closely related but not identical processes. Ekbatan shows that urban transformation can occur while maintaining elements of social diversity, whereas District 1 represents a more entrenched and institutionalized form of socio-spatial segregation. Understanding these dynamics is essential for reflecting on the role of urban planning and for considering how future change might move toward more inclusive outcomes.

## **7.2 Urban Policy and Design Recommendations**

The findings indicate that urban change in Tehran cannot be addressed through fixed or uniform planning solutions. Most changes in neighborhoods is shaped by combination of market forces, institutional decisions, and residents' everyday choices. From a planning perspective, the goal should not be to stop these processes, but rather to guide them in ways that can mitigate negative social impacts and support broader outcomes.

The regulation of gated residential developments is an important issue, as gated communities in District 1 do not only function as private residential spaces, but also affect movement, social interaction, and the division of urban space. When these developments are treated as purely private, their more significant impacts often go unexplored. Planning agencies can play a more active and nuanced role by planning and setting rules about how gated communities connect to their surroundings. Simple measures such as improving pedestrian access around gated areas, limiting excessive walls or creating shared spaces at the edges of these developments can help reduce spatial segregation while respecting residents' desire for safety.

In neighborhood like Ekbatan, where change occurs slowly, planning should be focus on managing transformation before it escalates. This research shows that Ekbatan's open plan, strong public transport connections, and shared public spaces continue to support social mixing. Planning policies can help maintain an over-concentration of luxury services by carefully controlling commercial development and promoting affordable housing options, as well as benefiting from these features. In this way improvements and investments can be made without displacing existing residents or undermining social diversity.

Some space, such as public and semi-public spaces, also play a very important role in everyday urban life. The comparison between Ekbatan and District 1 illustrates how design choices and decision-making interventions affect social interaction. Open courtyards, pedestrian way, and accessible gathering areas increase the likelihood of public contact, while closed and highly regulated spaces tend to limit it and cause social isolation. From a design perspective, investing in inclusive public spaces should not only be seen as a physical upgrade, but also as a way to support social connection and visibility among different groups

The information gathered points to the importance of participation and transparency in planning processes. Many residents described urban changes as something that happens around them, rather than something they participate in. Although meaningful participation in the current political and institutional conditions in Tehran can be difficult and is almost unreal, even small steps and small contributions can make a difference. Providing opportunities for residents to share concerns, local knowledge, and expectations can help reduce feelings of exclusion and build trust, even if conflicts cannot be avoided entirely.

In Tehran, we must also be able to recognize the broader constraints that urban planning faces. Economic hardship, housing market volatility, and regulatory constraints limit what planners can realistically achieve. Addressing these emerging constraints does not mean giving up on social justice. Instead, it requires incremental, context-sensitive strategies that work within existing conditions. Small changes in design laws, land-use regulations, and neighborhood-level management can slowly affect urban outcomes over time.

Overall, the policy and design recommendations emerging from this study highlights planning as a mediating practice. By responding to market realities and lived experiences, planners can help guide urban change in ways that remain practical while also supporting inclusion and spatial justice.

### 7.3 Methodological Reflections and Challenges

Reflecting on the methodological process of this research provides an opportunity to critically examine not only how the study was conducted, but also how knowledge about urban transformation in Tehran was produced. Methodology, is not simply a technical framework; It shapes what is observed, whose voices are included, and how complex social realities are interpreted. A look at the research process highlights both the strengths of the chosen approach and the challenges that problem emerged along the way.

A qualitative approach was chosen because gentrification, self-segregation, and enclosure cannot be fully captured or understood through quantitative indicators alone. They are revealed through everyday practices, personal experiences, and social interactions that are often subtle, gradual, and emotionally charged. In the first stages of the research, it become clear that residents' feeling about their neighborhoods, whether expressed in terms of comfort, anxiety, pride, or loss, were fundamental to understanding urban change. A qualitative approach allowed for deep engagement with these experiences and allowed participants to articulate meanings that were difficult to capture through surveys or statistical data.

Semi structured interviews played a central role in this process. They provided enough structure to ensure comparisons between interviews, while reminding flexible enough to allow participants to lead the conversation toward what they considered most important. In practice, this flexibility was crucial. Some interviews followed a planned thematic structure, while others took unexpected turns and revealed issues that were not initially foreseeable. Rather than being seen as methodological weaknesses, these differences were seen as valuable moments that reflected the lived difficulty of urban change. In many cases, participants raised concerns or observations that challenged the researcher's initial assumptions and prompted further reflection and adjustment.

A key methodological strength of this study is the inclusion of different groups of actors. By including residents, real estate professionals, and urban stakeholders, the research avoided relying on a single story of urban transformation. Instead, it was possible to observe how the same processes were shaped and understood differently depending on social position and professional role. During the interviews, these differences were often distinguishable. Residents often spoke in concrete and personal terms, describing changes in their daily routines, social interactions, or sense of belonging. Real estate professionals, on the other hand, tended to emphasize market dynamics, investment logic and demand patterns. Urban stakeholders often adopted a more abstract language, referring to planning frameworks, governance constraints or long term development goals.

These contrasting perspectives were not always aligned, and in some cases directly contradicted each other. However, this incoherence was itself an important finding. This showed how urban knowledge can be fragmented and how different actors operate with distinct priorities and frames of reference. Methodologically, bringing these voices together allowed the analysis to reflect this fragmentation, rather than smooth it over. The aim of this research was not to merge these perspectives into a single explanation, but rather to place them in interchange and highlight tensions, overlaps, and gaps.

Field observation complemented the interview data by grounding narratives in visible spatial realities. Walking around Ekbatan and District 1 allowed the researcher to observe how urban form, access, and design shaped everyday life. In Ekbatan, the presence of open courtyards, pedestrian paths and common spaces, as well as the gradual emergence of new commercial activities, was directly visible. In District 1, the physical appearance of walls, gates, and controlled access points reinforced residents' descriptions of privacy and separation. These observations helped to support the interview narratives and, in some cases, revealed differences between how space was described and how it was used.

With all these strengths, the research also faced several challenges. One of the most frequent challenges was access to institutional actors and decision-making processes. While planners, academics, and practitioners were interviewed, direct insight into formal planning decisions and governance mechanisms remained limited. This limitation reflects a deeper challenge in conducting urban research in Tehran, where planning processes are often dirty and not readily accessible to external researchers. Rather than attempting to compensate for this limitation between supposition, the research focused on what was observable and reliably connected: lived experience, professional explanation, and observable spatial consequences.

Another challenge was related to language and translation. Most interviews were conducted in Persian and later translated into English for analysis and writing. This process was not simple. Translation involved constant decisions about how to convey meaning, tone, and emotional shade. Some phrases did not have direct equivalents in English, while others had cultural connotations that were difficult to reproduce. In these cases, preserving meaning often required adaptation rather than literal translation. As a result, translation became an interpretive act closely linked to analytical process. Interview transcripts were reviewed several times to ensure that the participants' voices were not flat or distorted in the final text.

The researcher's position also played a significant role throughout the research process. Having different perspectives and opinions on urban planning influenced how we looked at the city and how we asked questions. Adequate understanding of planning concepts and issues made it easier to connect individual narratives to

broader structural issues. At the same time, this knowledge ran the risk of interpreting experiences through predefined programming perspectives. To address this issue, great effort was made to pay attention to moments when participants' narratives challenged planning assumptions or revealed contradictions and differences. These moments were seen as opportunities for learning, not anomalies to be corrected.

Thus, reflexivity was a methodological practice undertaken on an ongoing basis, rather than a final step. Throughout the research, the researcher, continually reflection was applied to how interpretation were shaped by personal assumptions, academic training, and professional interests. While this reflexive approach did not eliminate bias, but it helped to make it visible and manageable. By creating these solutions, such as interviews, observations, and different perspectives from actors, the analysis sought to be respectful to alternative reading and avoid overly definitive conclusions.

This study also has limitation. The study focuses on only two cases, so the findings cannot be generalized to the entire city of Tehran. This was a conscious and reasoned decision. The aim was not to provide a comprehensive overview of all urban areas, but to develop an in-depth understanding of specific places. By examining Ekbatan and District 1 closely, this study was able to show how renewal and self-segregation operate in specific environments, influenced by urban design, social groups, and planning history. Although these two areas do not reflect all urban experiences in Tehran, they can help explain processes that have occurred in the rest of the city.

It is important to note that qualitative analysis always involves interpretation. Themes do not emerge automatically from the data; they are developed through careful reading, comparison, and reflection. During the analysis, effort was made to stay close to and listen to everything the participants actually said so as not to lose their voices. At the same time, these experience were connected to the theoretical ideas discussions presented earlier in the thesis. Maintaining this balance was challenging, but it was essential to provide a sound and accurate analysis that could both draw on real experiences and make sense at a conceptual level.

Finally, the methodological choices in this thesis are based on the idea that urban transformation must be understood through everyday experiences. Rather than viewing urban renewal or gated development as a abstract concepts, this research focuses on how these processes affect how people live, move, and feel in the city. Although the study faced some practical and institutional limitation, the use of interviews, field observation, and reflective analysis helped to develop a solid and context based understanding of urban change in Tehran.

Overall, this methodological approach allowed for an examination of how planning decisions, market forces, and everyday life combine to shape the city. By focusing on

lived experience and reflecting on the research process, this study provides a more human perspective on urban transformation, while reminding relevant to the realities of planning practice and the limitations of research.

## 7.4 Future Research Directions

This thesis focused on two specific case studies in Tehran, but the findings suggest several avenues for future research. Rather than providing definitive answers, this study raises new questions that can be further explored, especially as urban change in Tehran is ongoing and constantly evolving.

One clear avenue for future research concerns scale. This study looked at neighborhood experiences in Ekbatan and District 1 in detail, allowing for a deeper understanding of local dynamics. Future research could examine other neighborhoods in Tehran, including southern and peripheral areas that experience very difficult social and economic conditions. Comparing this area could help to show whether the patterns observed in this study are unique to specific urban contexts or part of broader trends across the city.

Another area for future research concerns methodology. While interviews and field observations provide valuable insights into everyday experiences, future studies could combine these qualitative methods with quantitative data. For instance, housing prices, demographic changes, or spatial data could be used to track how gentrification and segregation develop over time. Using both qualitative and quantitative approaches can help connect personal stories to broader urban design and provide a more complete picture of urban transformation.

Longitudinal research is crucial. The different processes discussed in this thesis are not fixed or abrupt; they develop slowly and unbalanced. Studying the same neighborhoods or even the same households over a longer period can help to show how attitudes, behaviors, and spatial conditions change over time. For example, in Ekbatan, long-term research could help clarify whether current trends will lead to exclusion whether elements of social composition will continue to exist and community composition can be seen.

Future research could also focus more closely on specific social groups. While this study identified diversity in neighborhoods, specific groups such as youth, older residents, or social marginalized groups deserve more attention. Examining how these groups experience safety, belonging, and visibility in both open and enclosed environments could add depth on the debate about inclusion and exclusion in the city.

Finally, research that compares Tehran with other cities in the Global South would be very useful. Many cities face challenges similar to Tehran, including rising inequality,

private housing development, and limited transparency in planning processes. Comparing Tehran with other urban contexts can help identify processes that are shaped by local conditions and those that reflect broader global trends. These comparisons can also support more informed and context-sensitive planning strategies.

Overall, this thesis can be considered a starting point rather than a final conclusion. By focusing on lived experience and everyday urban life, it encourages future research to continue to examine how cities are shaped by gentrification and gated development. Further studies in these areas can help support approaches to urban planning and research in Tehran and beyond

# Full Interview Transcripts

## **Interview 1– Faraz Dargahi (33, GAY, Ekbatan Resident)**

1-How long have you been living in Ekbatan and why did you choose this neighborhood?

I've been living in this neighborhood for about 33 years. I chose it for several reasons. First, I have an emotional attachment to it. Second, as a gay person, I feel safe here and know others like me, and I socialize with them.

2-What is your general experience of living in this area?

When you live in a smaller, more local area, being LGBT is more noticeable. My overall experience in this neighborhood has been both good and bad. The good part is the easy access it's like a small city, with everything: schools, hospitals, parks, restaurants, and more. As for the downside: the location is far from other areas. And as someone who is gay, I've faced both positive and negative reactions, which I think are partially influenced by the nature of this neighborhood.

3-Do you feel this neighborhood provides something specific or unique for you socially or emotionally?

Emotionally, I'm deeply attached to this place. I've lived here since childhood, and I have many memories and friends. Socially, the area has changed a lot of people from various social backgrounds have moved in. One reason, I think, is the public transportation system, which makes it easier to travel to other parts of the city even though Ekbatan is far from some areas.

4-How would you describe the level of social interaction and sense of belonging here?

Social interaction is interesting here because everything you need exists inside the town from public offices to simple supermarkets and laundromats. When you interact with these people, they usually know you, and it creates close relationships.

5-Have you noticed any changes in the neighborhood in recent years (new buildings, wealthier residents, rising prices)?

In recent years, some wealthy investors who owned properties elsewhere have entered this neighborhood. Through joint ventures, they've come and purchased various units. Construction and unregulated renovations are increasing, which has led to dissatisfaction among some residents.

6-Would you like to add anything else about how this place affects your sense of identity, belonging, or daily routines?

In my view, this neighborhood can create a friendly environment because it's like a small town. But on the downside, people can easily learn about your private life, and that takes away your sense of security.

### **Interview 2 – Amir, 24, Gay, Graphic Designer, Resident of Phase 2, Ekbatan**

1- How long have you been living in Ekbatan and why did you choose this neighborhood?

I moved to Ekbatan about a year ago. Before that, I lived with my family in central Tehran. When I started working as a graphic designer and gained some financial independence, I decided to move out. A friend of mine who is also part of the LGBT community suggested I check out Ekbatan. The structure of the area, the order, the semi-private feel it all made me feel like I could live with a bit more peace here. It seemed safer for someone like me.

2-What is your general experience of living in this area?

Compared to other areas I've lived in, it's much more comfortable. I've always been anxious about how people react to me my clothes, my body language. But here, I haven't faced any direct hostility. People might look, but I don't feel threatened. That's a big deal for me.

3-Do you feel this neighborhood provides something specific or unique for you socially or emotionally?

Emotionally, it gives me a kind of peace. I don't have to pretend. There's a sort of quiet understanding here especially in Phases 2 and 3 that makes me feel like I belong, even if I don't personally know everyone. It's subtle, but powerful.

4-How would you describe the level of social interaction and sense of belonging here?

The streets and sidewalks are alive here. People are always out, especially at night. I often go for walks or sit in the nearby park after work. Eventually, shopkeepers and even neighbors start saying hi. These small things matter. You feel part of something.

5-Have you noticed any changes in the neighborhood in recent years (new buildings, wealthier residents, rising prices)?

Yes. Even in just one year, I've seen old apartments being bought up and turned into luxury units. Rents have gone up noticeably. If I tried to rent my place now, it would cost nearly double. It worries me.

6-Would you like to add anything else about how this place affects your sense of identity, belonging, or daily routines?

Definitely. Ekbatan feels like an urban refuge. Not perfect, but safer and freer than most places in Tehran. People don't bother you. That's all I want to walk around, wear what I like, and hang out with friends without constantly looking over my shoulder.

### **Interview 3 – Nazanin, 27, Trans Woman, Freelancer, Born and Raised in Ekbatan**

1-How long have you been living in Ekbatan and why did you choose this neighborhood?

I was born and raised here. My family still lives in Phase 1. Ekbatan isn't just where I live it's part of who I am. As a trans woman, I value the predictability and familiarity of this place. It's not 100% safe, but at least I know my surroundings.

2-What is your general experience of living in this area?

It hasn't always been easy, especially growing up and figuring out my identity. But over time, people either got used to me or learned to leave me alone. In recent years, attitudes have improved. I still hear judgment or get odd looks now and then, but compared to other areas, this is a more neutral zone.

3-Do you feel this neighborhood provides something specific or unique for you socially or emotionally?

It's home. My childhood memories, school, work all here. Walking around gives me a strange peace. Socially, I've always kept some distance from the broader community, maybe out of fear or habit. But even small, judgment-free greetings from neighbors feel meaningful.

4-How would you describe the social interactions and sense belonging here?

Ekbatan is vibrant. People are always out in the parks, cafés, walking around. I love that I can be myself, wear what I want, and blend into the crowd. You don't stand out, and that's a kind of safety for someone like me

5-Have you noticed any changes in the neighborhood in recent years (new buildings, wealthier residents, rising prices)?

A lot. Old apartments have been renovated, and younger, more educated people are moving in. That's a good thing in terms of diversity, but it also pushes prices up and squeezes out long-time residents. I'm worried the space that feels safe to me might slowly disappear.

6- would you like to add anything else about how this place affects your sense of identity belonging, or daily routines?

Yes, in its own way. It's not fully open, but it's one of the few areas in Tehran where I can live without fear. Many LGBT friends either live here or spend time here for that reason. It's not perfect, but it gives us some breathing room.

#### **Interview 4 – Kaveh, 22, Gay, Art Student, Lives with Friends in Phase 3**

1-How long have you been living in Ekbatan and why did you choose this neighborhood?

I moved here with two friends around nine months ago. We were in a tiny, overpriced apartment near Enghelab before. We needed a safer, more affordable place. A friend from Phase 3 recommended Ekbatan, and once we saw it the open spaces, the layout, the on-site shops we decided right away.

2-What is your general experience of living in this area?

Honestly, I like it. It's not perfect, but the mental pressure I used to feel elsewhere is much lower here. When I walk with my friends or wear clothes I like, no one really reacts. That's huge for me.

3-Do you feel this neighborhood provides something specific or unique for you socially or emotionally?

It's a kind of in-between space not fully public, not fully private. It gives me a sense of calm. I'm still new here, but I can imagine this place feeling like home. The general indifference of others actually works in my favor.

4-How would you describe the social interactions and sense belonging here?

It depends on you. If you want to socialize, the chance is there. There are hangout spots behind our building, but I'm more focused on studies. Still, even small daily encounters the baker, the guard, the grocery guy feel respectful and normal.

5-Have you noticed any changes in the neighborhood in recent years (new buildings, wealthier residents, rising prices)?

Yes. More young renters are coming in. Some old buildings have been renovated. I feel like Ekbatan is becoming "trendy" for people with alternative lifestyles. But the rising rent is a concern I don't know if we'll be able to stay long-term.

6-would you like to add anything else about how this place effects your sense of identity belonging, or daily routines?

Yes. Ekbatan is one of the few places in Tehran where people like me can breathe. It's not ideal, but it offers relative freedom. I've even met other LGBT people here who feel the same. This space means a lot to us.

### **Interview 5 – Raha, 29, Lesbian, Freelance Photographer, Lives in Phase 5**

1-How long have you been living in Ekbatan and why did you choose this neighborhood?

I've lived here for about three years. Before that, I was in Sa'adat Abad with my family. When I decided to live independently, I wanted a place that felt safe but was still affordable. A friend active in the LGBT community recommended Ekbatan. I visited and immediately felt like it offered the semi-private environment I needed.

2-What is your general experience of living in this area?

Mostly positive. As a woman and especially a woman who doesn't fit the typical mold life in Tehran can be tough. But here, I often feel invisible and that's a good thing. I've never faced serious harassment here. People keep to themselves, and that gives me peace. A few neighbors have even become friends, without being nosy.

3-Do you feel this neighborhood provides something specific or unique for you socially or emotionally?

It gives me balance. I'm not isolated, but I'm not overwhelmed either. I've also made connections with people like me, who understand my situation. That sense of community and emotional safety is rare in Tehran.

4-How would you describe the social interactions and sense belonging here?

One of the first things I noticed was how many women were visible and active in public space in parks, cafés, walking around freely. That was a big deal for me. The social interactions are usually short, polite, and low-pressure. Not too close, not too distant just enough.

5-Have you noticed any changes in the neighborhood in recent years (new buildings, wealthier residents, rising prices)?

Yes. Some old blocks are being rebuilt or rented out to wealthier people. Rents have nearly doubled in three years. I worry that if this continues, people like me won't be able to stay. Also, with wealthier newcomers, I fear that today's indifference might turn into tomorrow's judgment.

6-would you like to add anything else about how this place affects your sense of identity or daily routines?

Yes. Ekbatan is one of the few urban spaces in Tehran where we can live without constant fear. That "respectful indifference" is valuable. I can sit in a park, walk with a friend, laugh without always watching my back. I hope it stays that way, because this is one of the only places where people like us can still breathe.

**Interview 6 – Mahsa, 35 years old, married, one child, resident of Ekbatan for 10 years**

1-How long have you been living in Ekbatan and why did you choose this neighborhood?

My husband and I moved to Ekbatan about ten years ago, right after getting married. We used to rent a small apartment near Vali-Asr Square, but when we decided to have a child, we started looking for a quieter, more family-oriented neighborhood with more green space. We had heard a lot about Ekbatan it was said to be clean,

family-friendly, and well-equipped. Prices were more reasonable back then, and we really liked that everything schools, shops, clinics was nearby.

2-What is your general experience of living in this area?

Honestly, it's been great. We raised our daughter here, and I've always felt that it's a healthy environment for children. There's a real sense of community. People say hello; the faces are familiar. I know many of our neighbors by name. Sure, sometimes there's noise or traffic during rush hours, but compared to other parts of Tehran, it's much better.

3-Do you feel this neighborhood provides something specific or unique for you socially or emotionally?

To me, Ekbatan has become my true home. When I walk through the blocks or take my daughter to the park, I feel a special sense of calm and familiarity. I'm active in the school's parents' association and have made good friends through it. I feel like I've truly put down roots here something I never felt in our previous neighborhood.

4-How would you describe the social interactions and sense belonging here?

Very active especially in the afternoons and evenings. Elderly people sit outside, kids play, and parents stroll with strollers. What I love most is that the public spaces are both open and safe. I can let my daughter ride her bike without worry. Interactions are usually warm but not nosy. When the shopkeeper asks about my family while I'm buying groceries, I really value that closeness.

5-Have you noticed any changes in the neighborhood in recent years (new buildings, wealthier residents, rising prices)?

Yes, many. Rent has gone up a lot. We were lucky to buy an apartment, but several families we knew had to leave because they couldn't afford to stay. More single young people have moved in students or freelancers and the vibe of the neighborhood has shifted a bit. New cafés have opened, and some buildings have been luxuriously renovated. I think the neighborhood is gradually transforming into a different kind of urban space.

6-would you like to add anything else about how this place effects your sense of identity belonging, or daily routines?

Definitely. There's a rare balance here it's close to the city, yet feels suburban. I worry much less about safety. There's a mutual understanding among parents; people look out for one another. The architectural design of Ekbatan with its courtyards and open

spaces between blocks has brought people closer together. This isn't just a place to live it's where we've built real human connections.

### **Interview 7 – Hamed, 48 years old, taxi driver, born and raised in Ekbatan**

1-How long have you been living in Ekbatan and why did you choose this neighborhood?

I've lived here since I was a kid since the 1980s. My family was among the first to move in when Ekbatan was newly built. Back then, people thought it was too far out, but my father believed in its future. Now, years later, I realize how right he was. I never wanted to move elsewhere I'm used to it and I feel like this place belongs to me.

2-What is your general experience of living in this area?

For me, Ekbatan has always been a good and peaceful place. In terms of security, order, and amenities, it's really better than many other parts of Tehran. Even in my job as a taxi driver, I often hear passengers complaining about their neighborhoods, but I'm genuinely satisfied here. Everything is nearby from bakeries to clinics. The only problem lately is the traffic around the area, and it's gotten a bit overcrowded.

3-Do you feel this neighborhood provides something specific or unique for you socially or emotionally?

To me, Ekbatan is like family. Everywhere I walk, I run into someone I know. Many of my friends are still here kids I grew up with. This isn't just a place to live it's full of memories, it's my roots. It gives me a kind of psychological comfort. When I come home tired from work, these streets are where I feel calm again.

4-How would you describe the social interactions and sense belonging here?

Compared to other places in Tehran, the social life here is much more vibrant. People still say hello to each other, and everyone's familiar in the stores and bakeries. If I don't go to the bakery one day, people actually ask what happened! Of course, the younger people who've moved in recently have different behaviors they're less social but overall, the environment is still friendly and respectful.

5-Have you noticed any changes in the neighborhood in recent years (new buildings, wealthier residents, rising prices)?

A lot. Both in construction and in the people. Previously, it was mostly middle-class families, but now young people with different lifestyles have moved in. Some homes have been renovated in luxury styles. Prices have really gone up. I'm worried my kids

won't be able to afford to stay here. With this trend, Ekbatan is slowly slipping out of reach for ordinary people.

6-would you like to add anything else about how this place effects your sense of identity belonging, or daily routines?

Yes, it still does. For people like me who want a peaceful, familiar, and safe environment, Ekbatan is still the best choice. We grew up here, we were shaped here. Despite all the changes, I can still walk down the street and see people who say hello and ask how your kids are doing. That sense of belonging is rare in Tehran nowadays.

### **Interview 8 – Reza, 40 years old, civil engineer, new apartment owner in Ekbatan**

1-How long have you been living in Ekbatan and why did you choose this neighborhood?

We moved to Ekbatan about two years ago. Before that, we lived in Apadana, but I was looking for a place with better accessibility and more complete facilities and a place where I could buy a structurally sound apartment. Ekbatan always appealed to me for its organized urban layout and green spaces between buildings. When an opportunity came to buy an apartment in Phase 1, I took it without hesitation.

2-What is your general experience of living in this area?

Very positive. As someone who works in construction, I really appreciate the urban design here. The streets, parks, and walkways are thoughtfully laid out. Everyday life is easier because everything is close by. My family likes it too especially my daughter, who quickly made friends at school.

3-Do you feel this neighborhood provides something specific or unique for you socially or emotionally?

Emotionally, it's not super deep yet since we're new, but we quickly felt like this could be our real home. Social relations are polite and friendly not too nosy, not too cold. That's something I really value. Our neighbors are decent, cooperative people.

4-How would you describe the social interactions and sense belonging here?

This is one of Ekbatan's strongest points. Public space is active and diverse, suitable for all ages. Parks are always full of kids, parents, elderly people, and joggers. I feel

safe even at night. The semi-private nature of the common areas really keeps the neighborhood alive.

5- Have you noticed any changes in the neighborhood in recent years (new buildings, wealthier residents, rising prices)?

Even though I'm new here, based on what neighbors say and from what I know about real estate, there have been big changes. Property prices have increased dramatically. Renovations have become common. And new buyers are coming in with different lifestyles. These changes add diversity, but if not managed, they might gradually erode the neighborhood's identity.

6- Would you like to add anything else about how this place affects your sense of identity, be longing, or daily routines?

Yes, absolutely. Ekbatan is a good place for families, both physically and socially. Kids have open areas to play, schools are nearby, daily shopping is easy. And a sense of community is slowly forming, which is important for raising children and living a peaceful life. By choosing this place, we've invested in our family's future.

### **Interview 9 – Shahla, 39 years old, clothing shop owner, Phase 2 of Ekbatan**

1- How long have you been living in Ekbatan and why did you choose this neighborhood?

I've been living in Ekbatan for about twelve years. Before that, I used to come here daily for work since I had my shop here. But when I saw that the neighborhood was peaceful and comfortable for women, I decided to move in completely. It's close to my work, and it's a good place for a single woman to live.

2- What is your general experience of living in this area?

Ekbatani life has always felt balanced to me. Not too crowded and luxurious, not too limited or conservative. Most people both my shop's customers and my neighbors are respectful. The fact that I can work and live without fear of judgment or gossip means a lot to me. Of course, there are some issues, but overall I feel safe here.

3- Do you feel this neighborhood provides something specific or unique for you socially or emotionally?

It feels like a motherly neighborhood to me. I've been able to balance work and life here. The interactions I have with customers at my shop give me energy. Many are

regulars, and I've even formed friendships with some. That sense of being part of a small, trustworthy community really matters to me.

4-How would you describe the social interactions and sense belonging here?

Interactions are balanced here. No one bothers you, but if something happens, neighbors help. The spaces between the blocks are always full of kids, women, athletes, and young people. I take walks every afternoon, and I usually exchange greetings with a few people. It feels both public and private a good mix for a single woman.

5-Have you noticed any changes in the neighborhood in recent years (new buildings, wealthier residents, rising prices)?

Definitely. The types of customers and residents have changed. It used to be mostly traditional families, but now you see more independent youth, students, and even some migrants. That's good it adds life but it's also raised rents. I worry that these long-term changes might disturb the neighborhood's balance.

6-would you like to add anything else about how this place affects your sense of identity belonging, or daily routines?

Yes, absolutely. For a working woman like me, being able to do everything without needing a car is very important. The relative safety, organized layout, and cultural respect for privacy make me feel comfortable. I can even walk home at night after closing my shop without fear. Ekbatan is one of the few places in Tehran that still offers that.

**Interview 10 – Farhad, 44 years old, government employee, conservative, Phase 4 of Ekbatan**

1-How long have you been living in Ekbatan and why did you choose this neighborhood?

We moved to Ekbatan about 8 years ago. Before that, we lived in Narmak. My main reason for choosing Ekbatan was its orderliness and higher security. My wife liked the green spaces and the proximity to schools. In my view, Ekbatan is still one of the cleanest and most organized places in Tehran, ideal for family life.

2-What is your general experience of living in this area?

My experience has been good, especially as a father of two. I feel like my kids are growing up in a healthier environment. The neighborhood isn't chaotic, there's not much harassment, and people usually respect each other. Though I don't like some of the new cultural shifts like the behavior or clothing of some young newcomers I still feel good about living here.

3-Do you feel this neighborhood provides something specific or unique for you socially or emotionally?

It's a place where I was able to buy a home for my family after years of hard work. Socially, I have decent relations with neighbors, although I'm not very social. I prefer to interact with those who share similar cultural and moral values.

4-How would you describe the social interactions and sense belonging here?

In general, Ekbatan's public space is healthy, but we must be careful to keep it that way. Things like excessive dog walking or groups of youth hanging around in cafés could disturb the neighborhood's peace in the long term. That said, people are still respectful, and neighbors help each other out even if they don't fully agree.

5-Have you noticed any changes in the neighborhood in recent years (new buildings, wealthier residents, rising prices)?

Yes, especially in the type of residents. It used to be mostly traditional families, but now there's a lot more diversity. Some changes are good, like improved services and facilities, but prices have gone up, and older families are being pushed out. I worry that the cultural values may also start fading.

6-would you like to add anything else about how this place effects your sense of identity belonging, or daily routines?

To a large extent, yes. The organized structure, urban discipline, and nearby facilities make it comfortable for families. I still consider Ekbatan a safe, calm place for family life. But I believe both city management and residents must work harder to preserve its cultural atmosphere and traditional values.

### **Interview 1 – Resident of Park Residential Complex (District 1)**

1-How long have you been living in Park Complex, and what made you choose this neighborhood?

I've been living here for about 12 years. Actually, it was a family decision we were looking for a place that felt safe, green, and private. The moment we saw these wide balconies full of plants, and the quiet environment compared to central Tehran, it just felt right. Plus, being in District 1 was important for access to good schools and calm living.

2- What is your general experience of living in this area?

Overall, it's been very positive. The area feels peaceful and a little bit isolated from the chaos of the city. There's a real sense of calm when you walk between the trees and see the greenery everywhere. I think living here helped us feel less stressed, even though Tehran itself can be overwhelming.

3- Why did you choose to live in this gated community?

The main reasons were safety and privacy. Here, you don't have to worry much about strangers access is controlled, and you can let your children play outside without major concerns. Also, the atmosphere feels more respectful; people greet each other, and there's a sense of belonging.

4- What features or values were most important in making that decision (e.g., safety, status, comfort)?

Definitely safety first, but also comfort. The large balconies, the views, the green spaces between the towers they all create a kind of urban garden that's very rare in Tehran. It's not about luxury in a flashy sense, it's about feeling relaxed, connected to nature, and still having all the city's services nearby.

5- How would you describe the lifestyle and social environment inside this complex?

It's quite calm and respectful. People generally mind their own business but are still friendly when you meet them. You see lots of dog walkers, families with kids, elderly couples sitting on benches. During special times like Nowruz, sometimes there are small gatherings where neighbors come together and celebrate, but otherwise, life is pretty low-key and relaxed.

6- Do you feel that living here separates you from the rest of the city socially or spatially?

Yes, in a way. Inside the complex, you feel you're in a small protected world, different from the busy, noisy streets outside. Socially, you mostly meet people from similar backgrounds here educated, middle- to upper-class families so sometimes you forget how different life can be just a few kilometers away.

7- In your opinion, are gated communities becoming more popular in Tehran? If yes, why do you think that is?

Definitely. People are increasingly worried about security, pollution, and the loss of green spaces. Gated communities offer a solution to all three. Plus, for many families, living in a managed, clean, and calm environment has become a priority, even if it costs more.

8- Have you noticed any changes in this area or nearby neighborhoods like new buildings, rising prices, or different people moving in? Who is moving in, what kinds of buildings are being developed, or changes in the general atmosphere?

Yes, absolutely. In the past few years, new high-rise luxury towers have been built around the complex. Prices have risen sharply. You see more younger, wealthier families moving in. Some traditional single-family homes in the area have been replaced by modern apartment complexes.

9- Some people believe gated communities promote urban segregation do you agree or disagree? Why?

I think it's partly true. While living here feels safe and comfortable, I realize that it does create social distance. People outside might see these walls and think we're closing ourselves off, and in a sense, that's correct. It protects us, but it also separates us from the reality of broader urban life.

10- Do you think wealthier residents have a responsibility to contribute to a more inclusive city?

Yes, absolutely. Those who have more resources should feel responsible to support broader urban improvements like funding public parks, supporting public education, and investing in greener infrastructure so that all parts of Tehran can benefit, not just small privileged pockets

## **Interview 2 – Resident of Park Residential Complex (District 1)**

1- How long have you been living in Park Complex, and what made you choose this neighborhood?

I have been living in Park Complex for about 8 years. When I got married, my husband and I were looking for somewhere quieter and greener than central Tehran. We both grew up in busy parts of the city and wanted a place where we could feel like we were stepping out of the chaos. Park Complex attracted us because of its spacious design, the large balconies filled with plants, and the secure environment. It felt like a small town inside the city.

2- What is your general experience of living in this area?

Honestly, it's been a very positive experience. Life here feels slower and more peaceful compared to most areas in Tehran. You wake up to the sound of birds instead of heavy traffic. The streets are clean, the neighbors are generally respectful, and there's a sense of community even if people value their privacy. I always say it feels like a hidden garden in the middle of a hectic city.

3- Why did you choose to live in this gated community?

Safety was a big factor, especially once we started thinking about having children. The idea that my kids could play outside without me constantly worrying was priceless. Also, there's a strong sense of order here everything from the entrance to the parking areas is controlled. Plus, we loved the fact that the complex is full of greenery; it doesn't feel like you're trapped in concrete like other parts of Tehran.

4- What features or values were most important in making that decision (e.g., safety, status, comfort)?

For us, it was mainly about safety and comfort. But status played a role too, if I'm honest. Living in District 1 comes with a certain reputation people assume you're educated and successful, which can be important professionally and socially in Tehran. But beyond that, we valued the space, the architecture that allows light and air into every apartment, and the access to nearby parks and shops.

5- How would you describe the lifestyle and social environment inside this complex?

Life here is quiet but sophisticated. People generally have good manners no unnecessary noise, no inappropriate behavior. It's common to see neighbors exercising, walking their dogs, or gardening on their balconies. On weekends, some families organize small gatherings in the communal garden. There's a nice balance between respecting personal space and being available for a friendly chat if you meet in the elevator or at the entrance.

6- Do you feel that living here separates you from the rest of the city socially or spatially?

Yes, absolutely. It's a double-edged sword. On the one hand, you feel protected and privileged; on the other, you can become disconnected from the everyday struggles most Tehranis face. Sometimes I realize I've gone days without stepping outside the complex except for work. It's like living in a bubble where problems like traffic, noise, and even some social issues seem far away.

7- In your opinion, are gated communities becoming more popular in Tehran? If yes, why do you think that is?

Definitely. People crave security and peace of mind more than ever. With the rise in theft, urban insecurity, and environmental stress, gated communities offer a promise of control and quality of life. Plus, as public spaces in Tehran have become more crowded and sometimes poorly maintained, private spaces like this have become very attractive to middle- and upper- class families.

8- Have you noticed any changes in this area or nearby neighborhoods — like new buildings, rising prices, or different people moving in? Who is moving in, what kinds of buildings are being developed, or changes in the general atmosphere?

The change is very noticeable. In the past five years, we've seen a lot of luxury towers popping up around Park Complex. Prices have skyrocketed, and many older residents have sold their apartments to younger, wealthier buyers. There's more investment coming in, but also a slight loss of the old, neighborly atmosphere. Some of the traditional shops have been replaced by high-end cafés and designer boutiques.

9- Some people believe gated communities promote urban segregation do you agree or disagree? Why?

I agree to some extent. It creates a visible line between "us" and "them," whether you intend it or not. If you're living inside, you feel protected and lucky, but it's undeniable that it also creates a division between social groups. And that can be unhealthy for a city in the long run. Urban life should bring people together, not push them apart into small, isolated islands.

10- Do you think wealthier residents have a responsibility to contribute to a more inclusive city?

Yes, without a doubt. Those who are privileged enough to enjoy the best parts of the city should also invest in making life better for others. Whether it's through supporting public projects, funding green spaces, or even small acts like sponsoring local schools, it's important to give back. A city is healthiest when all its citizens feel included and valued.

### **Interview 3 – Resident of Park Residential Complex (District 1)**

1- How long have you been living in Park Complex, and what made you choose this neighborhood?

I have been living in the Park Residential Complex for about eleven years. Actually, the decision to move here wasn't made overnight. We were living in another part of District 1, in an older villa that had become difficult to maintain. Over time, we realized that living in a private house in Tehran no longer made sense because of the rising maintenance costs and the growing concerns about safety. We started looking for somewhere that would offer both security and a good quality of life. We visited several places, but the moment we walked into Park Complex, it felt different. The architecture was welcoming, the wide balconies, the amount of green space between the buildings, and the level of maintenance were impressive. Plus, it was still close enough to main roads and services but far enough to feel secluded and peaceful. That combination was rare in Tehran.

2- What is your general experience of living in this area?

Honestly, it's been overwhelmingly positive. Life here is calmer, greener, and cleaner than most parts of Tehran. You can actually hear the birds in the mornings something you don't realize you miss until you live in a big noisy city. One thing that stands out to me is the respect people have for public spaces. You don't see garbage on the ground or vandalism. People seem to understand that living in a beautiful place comes with a responsibility to maintain it. Socially, it's also quite healthy. It's not a noisy or intrusive environment, but there's enough friendliness that you don't feel isolated. I've met a lot of people just by walking my dog around the park areas, or while waiting at the small cafés inside the complex. It feels like a small town a community within a city.

3- Why did you choose to live in this gated community?

Security was definitely the first priority. After a few negative experiences like petty thefts and car vandalism when we lived outside we realized how important it was to live somewhere that controls who comes and goes. But it wasn't just about feeling safe from crime. It was also about feeling psychologically relaxed. Knowing that your children can ride their bicycles around without you constantly worrying, that you can leave your windows open at night, or that you can go for an evening walk without fear these small things really add up to a different lifestyle. Another major factor was the community atmosphere. Even though it's not a place where everyone knows everyone, there's a shared sense of pride in living here.

4- What features or values were most important in making that decision (e.g., safety, status, comfort)?

For me personally, it was a mix of safety, comfort, and lifestyle quality. Safety came first physical security, controlled entrances, and reliable management of the complex. Comfort was second meaning wide, well-designed apartments with lots of natural light, big balconies, green views, and high construction quality.

And if I'm honest, status played a role too. Living in District 1, especially in a respected complex like this, subtly affects how people perceive you professionally and socially. It can open certain doors in business or networking, because people immediately assume certain things about your background when they hear where you live.

But most importantly, it was the balance of all these factors not just one thing that made Park Complex the right choice.

5- How would you describe the lifestyle and social environment inside this complex?

It's very calm and community-oriented without being intrusive. Most residents here value privacy, but that doesn't mean they're unfriendly. There's a general politeness people greet each other, hold doors open, exchange small talks during walks. There are some informal groups too for example, there's a morning walking group for older residents, a book club that meets monthly, and even occasional holiday events organized around Nowruz or Yalda night. One thing I love is that there's no aggressive showing-off. People here are relatively wealthy, but it's not a flashy, competitive environment. It's more understated people care more about a good life than showing off. Also, there's a strong culture of outdoor living: you always see people enjoying their balconies, gardening, taking their pets for walks, or jogging through the green areas.

6- Do you feel that living here separates you from the rest of the city socially or spatially?

Yes, it definitely creates a kind of bubble. When you live here, you are a bit shielded from the everyday chaos of Tehran. Outside, there's constant traffic, pollution, visual clutter inside here, it's orderly and serene. Socially, too, there's a division. Most people here belong to middle- to upper-class families, often with higher education levels, professional careers, and similar lifestyles. Sometimes, when I have to go downtown for work and experience the full urban pressure of Tehran crowds, noise, stress I realize how far removed my daily life has become. It's a double-edged sword. On one hand, it gives you a better quality of life; on the other, it can make you less connected to the broader realities of your city.

7- In your opinion, are gated communities becoming more popular in Tehran? If yes, why do you think that is?

Absolutely. They're becoming almost a necessity for anyone who can afford them. The reasons are clear: rising concerns about personal safety, traffic problems, poor urban management in many neighborhoods, and the general unpredictability of public spaces. In a gated community, people feel they regain some control over their surroundings they can trust that the environment will stay clean, that there's green

space for their children, that their investment in property will be protected by good maintenance policies. Another reason is lifestyle expectations. People are increasingly demanding better living standards not just bigger apartments, but healthier, greener, and safer environments.

8- Have you noticed any changes in this area or nearby neighborhoods like new buildings, rising prices, or different people moving in? Who is moving in, what kinds of

buildings are being developed, or changes in the general atmosphere?

Yes, many changes. Around Park Complex, several new luxury towers have been built in recent years. These buildings are even more modern, with amenities like rooftop pools, fitness centers, and concierge services. Prices have increased dramatically to the point where many longtime residents have been priced out if they wanted to upgrade or move within the district.

The demographic has also shifted. You see more younger families, young professionals, and some returning expatriates. The atmosphere has become slightly more "globalized" a little more English spoken in daily conversations, different lifestyle habits but so far, the general respectful and calm spirit of the neighborhood remains.

9- Some people believe gated communities promote urban segregation do you agree or disagree? Why?

I would say I agree, even though I live here myself. By their nature, gated communities create a barrier both physical and social. Even if the goal is to find safety and a better quality of life, the result is often increased separation between different social classes. There's an irony: while we try to escape the city's chaos, we also contribute to its division. I think the problem isn't the existence of gated communities, but the lack of effort to balance them with investments in public spaces and more inclusive urban planning.

10- Do you think wealthier residents have a responsibility to contribute to a more inclusive city?

Yes, absolutely. We can't just create beautiful private spaces for ourselves and ignore the rest of the city. Wealthier citizens should be involved in supporting public services, urban improvements, and social programs not just through taxes, but through voluntary investments, foundations, and civic initiatives. If we don't, the divisions will only grow deeper, and ultimately, even the privileged neighborhoods won't remain immune from the wider problems. A healthier, fairer city benefits everyone in the long run.

#### **Interview 4 – Resident of Park Residential Complex (District 1)**

1-How long have you been living in Park Complex, and what made you choose this neighborhood?

I have been living in Park Complex for about eight years. Originally, we chose this place after almost a year of searching all around District 1. At that time, my husband and I were expecting our second child, and our priority was finding a safe, green, and calm environment where our children could grow up. We visited several apartments in northern Tehran, but many of them, despite being luxurious, felt too isolated or cold. Park Complex immediately gave us a different feeling it felt alive, but still private. Another major factor was the reputation of the complex: people who lived here spoke highly about the management, the respectful atmosphere, and the well-maintained green spaces. It wasn't just about luxury it was about creating a real sense of home.

2- What is your general experience of living in this area?

Honestly, it's been incredibly positive. Every morning when I wake up and open the windows to see the gardens and the old tall trees, I feel thankful. The seasons are really alive here you can smell spring when it comes, you see the leaves turn gold in autumn. Also, daily life is very convenient. Even though it feels secluded, we're close to everything we need: schools, clinics, shopping centers like Palladium and Sam Center, and good restaurants. Another big thing for me is that walking around the complex or the nearby streets feels safe and pleasant. Unlike many other parts of Tehran, there's a lot less stress about traffic, noise, or unwanted attention.

3- Why did you choose to live in this gated community?

It was mainly for peace of mind. After some uncomfortable experiences in our previous neighborhood including minor thefts, and feeling uncomfortable letting my kids play outside we realized how much we needed a protected environment. Living in a gated community isn't just about having security guards. It's about having neighbors who care about the environment, management that handles issues professionally, and rules that protect the quality of life for everyone. The community feel and the security measures here really made the decision easy for us.

4- What features or values were most important in making that decision (e.g., safety, status, comfort)?

Safety was the number one factor for us physical security, yes, but also emotional security. Comfort was the second wide streets, thoughtful architecture, green spaces, and a real sense of space. And of course, education opportunities for the children mattered too. Many good schools are nearby, and even inside the complex,

there are private kindergartens that are very popular. Status wasn't our primary goal, but living in an area where people share similar values about respect, privacy, and community made a huge difference in our quality of life.

5- How would you describe the lifestyle and social environment inside this complex?

It's a very healthy, balanced lifestyle. People here enjoy their privacy but also create a friendly environment. It's normal to greet your neighbors warmly when passing by, or to have casual conversations in the gardens while kids are playing. There are occasional community activities like small fairs, Nowruz celebrations, or even yoga sessions organized by residents in the green spaces. But it's very respectful no one forces you to participate. There's also a strong "pet culture" many residents have dogs or cats, and there's even an unofficial group that organizes weekend morning walks for pet owners. Social interaction feels natural and not forced, which I really appreciate. It's more about belonging to a respectful, supportive environment rather than belonging to a club.

6- Do you feel that living here separates you from the rest of the city socially or spatially?

Honestly, yes. There's no denying that once you step inside the gates, you're living in a kind of parallel Tehran quieter, greener, cleaner, and safer. Sometimes when I go downtown or even to busier parts of District 1, I feel the huge difference. It's like living at a slower, healthier pace. Socially, too, there's separation. Most residents here are either professionals, entrepreneurs, academics, or artists. You don't often meet people from lower-income backgrounds inside the complex, simply because the cost of living here is very high. It's something I'm aware of and sometimes I worry about what it means for the overall fabric of Tehran.

7- In your opinion, are gated communities becoming more popular in Tehran? If yes, why do you think that is?

Yes, without a doubt. People are more concerned about safety, air quality, and finding a little peace amid the chaos. Also, social changes have made people seek spaces where they can control their environment more whether it's to protect their children, enjoy more freedom (for example regarding dress codes), or simply avoid the daily aggressions that public spaces sometimes bring. Living in a gated community now represents, for many, not just a luxury, but a basic strategy for survival and well-being.

8- Have you noticed any changes in this area or nearby neighborhoods like new buildings, rising prices, or different people moving in? Who is moving in, what kinds of buildings are being developed, or changes in the general atmosphere?

Yes, big changes. Prices have skyrocketed. When we bought our apartment eight years ago, it was expensive, but now it's almost doubled. There are a lot of new, very modern luxury towers being built nearby, many offering amenities like swimming pools, gyms, rooftop gardens, and smart home technologies. The new residents tend to be younger professionals, often with international experience people who have studied abroad and returned to Tehran. The general atmosphere has become a little more cosmopolitan, but thankfully Park Complex has managed to preserve its original spirit: respect, calmness, and green living.

9- Some people believe gated communities promote urban segregation do you agree or disagree? Why?

I partly agree. They certainly separate people based on income and social status. Not intentionally, but practically. However, it's also true that many people living here, like us, didn't move here to isolate ourselves socially we moved because we needed a safer, healthier environment for our family. Still, I recognize that if more and more of Tehran becomes divided this way, it can create deeper social tensions. It's a complex issue.

10- Do you think wealthier residents have a responsibility to contribute to a more inclusive city?

Yes, 100%. I believe those of us who have been lucky enough to afford a better life have a duty to invest in public causes supporting education, parks, healthcare, cultural programs, and so on. It's not about charity it's about recognizing that the strength of a city depends on how everyone lives, not just a privileged few. If we ignore this responsibility, we're building walls that will eventually harm us all.

### **Interview 5 – Resident of Park Residential Complex (District 1)**

1-How long have you been living in Park Complex, and what made you choose this neighborhood?

I've been living in Park Complex for almost twelve years now. Back then, I had just returned to Tehran after a few years working abroad. I was looking for a place that felt both modern and traditional somewhere I could have privacy but also a real sense of belonging. A friend recommended Park Complex. At first, I wasn't sure I thought maybe it would feel too isolated. But when I visited, I was impressed. The architecture, the wide green spaces between the buildings, the tall trees, the peaceful atmosphere it all felt very different from most parts of the city. Also, my parents live nearby, in Niavaran, so it was convenient to stay close to family.

2- What is your general experience of living in this area?

Overall, it's been excellent. This neighborhood has everything I value: it's quiet without being dead, it's green without feeling too suburban, and the people here generally respect each other's privacy. There's a sense of calm here that you don't find in most parts of Tehran. Even when the city is overwhelmed with noise, dust, and stress, life inside the Park Complex feels protected somehow. Another important point for me is how well the public spaces are maintained. The gardens are trimmed regularly, the common areas are clean, and security patrols are discreet but effective.

3- Why did you choose to live in this gated community?

Security was definitely a huge factor. After living in Europe for a few years, I had gotten used to walking around without constant anxiety, and I didn't want to give up that feeling after moving back to Tehran. I also wanted to live somewhere that my lifestyle walking my dog, dressing more casually, hosting friends without fear of complaints would be easier. Living in a gated community like Park Complex makes it possible. You feel a degree of personal freedom inside that you might not have elsewhere in the city.

4- What features or values were most important in making that decision (e.g., safety, status, comfort)?

For me, it was a combination of comfort, community spirit, and environmental quality. Of course, safety mattered knowing there are guards, cameras, and controlled entrances gives you peace of mind. But I also wanted somewhere that felt beautiful. Good design matters. Green spaces matter. Fresh air, quiet streets, respectful neighbors all of that makes a big difference in daily life. I didn't specifically choose it for status, but I'm aware that Park Complex has a good reputation socially, and I admit that's reassuring too it suggests a certain level of shared values among residents.

5- How would you describe the lifestyle and social environment inside this complex?

It's very healthy and moderate. People here are busy with their own lives, but they're polite, kind, and open to small interactions. You might not become best friends with your neighbors, but you'll share smiles, greetings, and occasional small conversations. There are social spaces where people naturally gather like small parks, jogging paths, and cafés and you'll often see people sitting outside reading, walking their pets, or chatting in small groups. Special events around holidays, like Nowruz, bring a bit more community spirit potlucks, concerts, children's activities. But everything remains balanced: you can join if you want, or keep your distance if you prefer.

6- Do you feel that living here separates you from the rest of the city socially or spatially?

Yes, definitely. It's impossible not to feel the difference. As soon as you leave the gates, the noise, traffic, and general pressure of the city come back full force. Spatially, we are separated by walls, but also by the atmosphere: inside, it's calm and ordered; outside, it's chaotic and unpredictable. Socially, too, there's a separation. Most people here are from similar socio-economic backgrounds. It's not about looking down on others it's simply that the environment and the cost of living create a natural filter. And while I enjoy the life here, I'm aware it can contribute to urban inequalities.

7- In your opinion, are gated communities becoming more popular in Tehran? If yes, why do you think that is?

Absolutely yes. I think a lot of people, especially young families and professionals, are tired of the lack of infrastructure, poor public management, and daily struggles that come with living in many parts of the city. Gated communities offer predictability. You know the elevators will work, the garbage will be collected, the gardens will be maintained. Plus, the world has become more uncertain economically, politically, even socially and people look for pockets of control and peace. Gated communities provide that, even if it comes at a higher financial cost.

8- Have you noticed any changes in this area or nearby neighborhoods like new buildings, rising prices, or different people moving in? Who is moving in, what kinds of buildings are being developed, or changes in the general atmosphere?

Yes, major changes. Prices have exploded not just in Park Complex, but all around District 1. Many older houses have been demolished to make way for luxury towers, some of which are extremely modern and expensive. The demographics have shifted too: more young tech entrepreneurs, artists, and people working in international companies are moving in.

The overall atmosphere is slightly more global now you hear more English, see more international schools opening, and feel more cosmopolitan vibes in local cafés and stores.

9- Some people believe gated communities promote urban segregation do you agree or disagree? Why?

I would say I partly agree. They do create clear boundaries between different social groups. They also reinforce inequalities, because access is mostly limited to people who can afford it. But at the same time, many residents, like myself, choose gated communities simply because public spaces elsewhere are so poorly maintained or

unsafe. The real problem, I believe, isn't the existence of gated communities it's the failure of urban authorities to provide high- quality public spaces for everyone.

10- Do you think wealthier residents have a responsibility to contribute to a more inclusive city?

Yes, without a doubt. Those who are privileged enough to live in peaceful environments should support initiatives that improve life for others whether through direct financial contributions, volunteering, investing in community projects, or simply advocating for better urban policies. Ignoring the city's problems doesn't protect anyone in the long term. A healthy city is good for everyone rich or poor and we all have a role to play in making it better.

### **Interview 6 – Resident of Park Residential Complex (District 1)**

1-How long have you been living in Park Complex, and what made you choose this neighborhood?

I've been living in Park Complex for almost six years now. At the time, my wife and I were looking for a place to start a family. Safety and environment were our top concerns. We explored a lot of different neighborhoods in District 1, but many areas were either too commercialized, too noisy, or simply didn't feel right. When we first visited Park Complex, the greenery, the quiet atmosphere, the feeling of order and care it immediately caught our attention. Also, several friends of ours were already living in gated communities, and after talking to them, we realized how much the sense of community and security mattered in daily life.

2- What is your general experience of living in this area?

Very positive. Life here is peaceful. I don't have to worry about things like loud traffic noise, strangers loitering around, or bad maintenance. The environment is really family-friendly. You see children playing freely in the green areas, seniors walking early in the mornings, and neighbors exchanging greetings politely. Another thing that stands out to me is the quality of air. Even though Tehran has serious pollution problems, here you feel a noticeable difference because of all the trees and green spaces.

3- Why did you choose to live in this gated community? Primarily for security and peace of mind.

Living in Tehran, you often hear about thefts, vandalism, or even harassment in public spaces. We didn't want to raise our kids constantly looking over our shoulders.

In Park Complex, with its controlled entrances, private security teams, and organized management, we feel much more at ease. Also, the controlled environment provides a much better quality of life: better maintenance, cleaner surroundings, and a more respectful social atmosphere.

4- What features or values were most important in making that decision (e.g., safety, status, comfort)?

Safety came first no question about that. After safety, we looked for comfort: well-designed apartments, access to green spaces, facilities like playgrounds and jogging paths. Social environment was another big consideration. We wanted to live among people who share similar values respect for privacy, peaceful living, attention to cleanliness and order. Status was not a major factor for us, but we knew that Park Complex had a good reputation, which certainly made it a more appealing investment too.

5- How would you describe the lifestyle and social environment inside this complex?

I would say it's friendly, but reserved. People respect each other's space. You don't have nosy neighbors or noisy parties disturbing your evenings. At the same time, if you want to be social, it's very easy to make connections there are small coffee shops, green areas, and community events like outdoor movie nights or Nowruz celebrations where you can meet others. There's a sense of safety even for kids they can ride bikes or play ball outside without constant supervision. Overall, it feels like a small village inside a huge metropolis.

6- Do you feel that living here separates you from the rest of the city socially or spatially?

Yes, very much so. Inside the gates, life feels almost like another world compared to the chaos outside. Spatially, we are definitely separated through walls, guards, and restricted entrances. Socially, too, there's a distinction. Most residents here belong to a similar economic and educational level. I sometimes feel a bit guilty about it we are privileged to enjoy this calm and safety, while so many others in Tehran don't have access to anything similar.

7- In your opinion, are gated communities becoming more popular in Tehran? If yes, why do you think that is?

Definitely. The reasons are very clear: worsening public safety, heavy traffic, poor maintenance of open spaces, and a general decline in public infrastructure quality. Gated communities offer predictability you know what to expect. And with the rise in economic inequality, people with higher incomes are increasingly looking for ways to secure better lifestyles for themselves, including better housing. Gated communities give them a safe, green, predictable environment, which public spaces in Tehran often fail to provide.

8- Have you noticed any changes in this area or nearby neighborhoods like new buildings, rising prices, or different people moving in? Who is moving in, what kinds of buildings are being developed, or changes in the general atmosphere?

Yes, absolutely. New luxury towers are popping up almost everywhere around District 1. Some are extremely high-end, offering rooftop pools, gyms, smart home systems amenities that were rare even five years ago. Prices have shot up dramatically, making it harder for middle-class families to move into these areas. Also, the population is changing. You see more younger, globally connected professionals people who studied abroad or work for multinational companies. The general atmosphere is becoming more modern, more international but sometimes, I worry that we are losing some of the old neighborhood spirit along the way.

9- Some people believe gated communities promote urban segregation do you agree or disagree? Why?

I agree to some extent. By creating exclusive spaces that only certain income groups can access, gated communities definitely contribute to social segregation. They also reinforce the idea that public spaces are unsafe or inferior, which isn't healthy for a city's social fabric. At the same time, I understand why people seek them it's a logical reaction to the failures of urban planning and public safety in Tehran. Still, if nothing changes, the long-term effect could be a very divided city, both physically and emotionally.

10- Do you think wealthier residents have a responsibility to contribute to a more inclusive city?

Yes, absolutely. Wealthier residents including myself should not only invest in their private comforts but also support public projects, education, health, and cultural activities that benefit everyone. Otherwise, we are simply building isolated islands of privilege in an ocean of urban suffering. Helping build a better, fairer city is not only a moral duty it's a practical necessity for maintaining stability and harmony.

### **Interview 7 – Resident of Park Residential Complex (District 1)**

1-How long have you been living in Park Complex, and what made you choose this neighborhood?

I have been living in Park Complex for about ten years now. When I was looking for a new place, I was searching for somewhere peaceful but still central enough to easily reach my office and my kids' schools. One of my closest friends was already living here and recommended it highly. After visiting a few times, I realized that Park Complex offered something rare in Tehran: a combination of green space, well-planned infrastructure, strong security, and a real neighborhood feeling. It was a big decision, financially and personally, but I'm grateful I made it.

2- What is your general experience of living in this area?

Honestly, it's been mostly wonderful. There's a strong sense of order here. Everything from the way buildings are maintained to how the green areas are kept shows real care and management. Living in this area has given me and my family a sense of safety, a cleaner environment, and the ability to enjoy public spaces without constant stress.

Also, socially, it's a good balance you have your privacy, but if you want interaction, the opportunity is there. It's a calm, mature atmosphere, without the chaos you often find in other parts of Tehran.

3- Why did you choose to live in this gated community?

The choice was mainly about providing security and stability for my family. In Tehran, you always have some level of worry about theft, vandalism, or general social unrest. Inside Park Complex, you have controlled access points, visible but discreet security, and clear rules that everyone respects. Beyond that, there's an intangible feeling of calmness here you don't feel the underlying tension that sometimes exists in open urban areas. It also allows my children to play outside, ride their bikes, and enjoy some freedom, which is priceless.

4- What features or values were most important in making that decision (e.g., safety, status, comfort)?

For me, safety, comfort, and community environment were the top priorities. Comfort wasn't just about having a nice apartment it was about air quality, green views, walking paths, and a general sense of ease in daily life. Status was a side benefit, not the main reason. Of course, knowing you live in a respected, high-demand area is reassuring, but what mattered more was the way of life it offered. I also deeply value a strong, respectful community, where people are considerate without being intrusive.

5- How would you describe the lifestyle and social environment inside this complex?

It's a calm, sophisticated lifestyle. People are polite but not intrusive. There are many professionals, doctors, university professors, and business owners living here. Social life is subtle it happens through casual conversations in the gardens, at small local events, or during community meetings. We celebrate Nowruz together with a small fair every year, and sometimes we organize charity drives or clean-up days for the complex. Pets are common especially dogs and there's a friendly culture around pet walking.

6- Do you feel that living here separates you from the rest of the city socially or spatially?

Yes, both socially and spatially. The physical walls and controlled entrances create an obvious separation, but the lifestyle differences are even more striking. While the outside city often feels rushed, crowded, and unpredictable, life inside the complex feels structured and serene. Socially, most residents here belong to the upper-middle or upper classes, so interactions with people from other economic backgrounds happen less often. It's not about rejecting others it's simply the reality of the environment we live in.

7- In your opinion, are gated communities becoming more popular in Tehran? If yes, why do you think that is?

Absolutely. I think it's a natural response to the conditions in Tehran: growing insecurity, poor urban management, traffic congestion, and social tensions. Gated communities offer predictability and safety, two things that are very hard to find in the city nowadays. People are willing to pay more if it means protecting their families, accessing better-maintained spaces, and avoiding daily urban frustrations. Also, as wealth disparities grow, people with means are looking for ways to shield themselves from the broader urban problems and gated communities offer that possibility.

8- Have you noticed any changes in this area or nearby neighborhoods like new buildings, rising prices, or different people moving in? Who is moving in, what kinds of buildings are being developed, or changes in the general atmosphere?

Definitely. Prices have increased dramatically both in Park Complex and all around District 1. In terms of construction, we're seeing more luxury high-rises, with modern designs and international standards of amenities: gyms, pools, smart home features. The new residents tend to be younger, often with experiences abroad, and have a more globalized lifestyle. At the same time, the atmosphere remains respectful and relatively calm, although I sometimes worry about the city becoming too exclusive and losing its diversity.

9- Some people believe gated communities promote urban segregation do you agree or disagree? Why?

I agree, but with nuances. Yes, gated communities do contribute to segregation. They create protected spaces for certain groups, usually wealthier ones, and separate them from the wider city. But I think it's important to understand why people choose them often out of necessity, not arrogance. If Tehran's public spaces were safer, cleaner, and better managed, maybe fewer people would feel the need to retreat into gated communities.

10- Do you think wealthier residents have a responsibility to contribute to a more inclusive city?

Absolutely. When you have more resources, you have more power and with power comes responsibility. We can support better public services, donate to community projects, invest in public green spaces, sponsor cultural activities, or simply advocate for better urban planning. Ultimately, the health of a city affects everyone, and creating an inclusive, livable city is in everyone's best interest.

### **Interview 8 – Resident of Park Residential Complex (District 1)**

1-How long have you been living in Park Complex, and what made you choose this neighborhood?

I have been living in Park Complex for about eight years now. At the time, I was newly married, and we were looking for a peaceful place to settle and eventually start a family. I grew up in the north of Tehran, but most neighborhoods felt either too commercialized or too isolated. When I visited Park Complex, I immediately loved the balance it offered: close to the city center but still quiet, modern but not flashy, secure but still connected to the city life. The decision was easy after seeing the green spaces, the architecture, and meeting a few residents.

2- What is your general experience of living in this area?

Overall, it has been extremely positive. The most important feeling I get here is peace of mind. Whether it's about letting the kids play outside, going for an evening walk, or simply knowing that maintenance issues will be taken care of quickly, the experience has been excellent. The neighbors are polite and educated, and although everyone minds their own business, there is a sense of shared responsibility in keeping the community well-functioning.

3- Why did you choose to live in this gated community?

The main reason was security. When you live in a big city like Tehran, especially as crime rates sometimes fluctuate, security becomes a top priority. Park Complex offered something rare controlled access, dedicated guards, and a clear separation from the chaos outside. Additionally, the organized management of services like waste collection, gardening, and cleaning helped create a stress-free living environment, which was very attractive to us.

4- What features or values were most important in making that decision (e.g., safety, status, comfort)?

Safety was number one, but comfort and community were also crucial. We were looking for a place where children could grow up with some freedom ride bikes, make friends, and have green spaces to play. We also valued the architectural style having spacious balconies, lots of natural light, and good layouts. The social composition mattered too: knowing that the majority of residents value peace, respect, and cleanliness made it a reassuring place to invest in.

5- How would you describe the lifestyle and social environment inside this complex?

It's structured but relaxed. You don't feel monitored, but there's a natural sense of discipline and mutual respect. Most residents are busy professionals doctors, engineers, lawyers and value their privacy. At the same time, community events are organized occasionally like Nowruz celebrations, or charity bazaars which keep the social environment warm without being overwhelming. It's a good mix of independence and belonging.

6- Do you feel that living here separates you from the rest of the city socially or spatially?

Yes, both. There is a clear spatial separation because of the physical barriers fences, gates, guards. But socially, the separation is even stronger. Living here creates a bubble where you rarely interact with lower-income groups or different social realities. While life inside is easier, safer, and cleaner, it can sometimes make you forget the daily struggles happening just a few kilometers away.

7- In your opinion, are gated communities becoming more popular in Tehran? If yes, why do you think that is?

Definitely. Urban pressure is increasing more traffic, more noise, more insecurity. Families want a clean, secure place for their children. Professionals want peace and predictability. Gated communities respond to these needs, and as Tehran's challenges grow, more people are willing to pay for this lifestyle.

8- Have you noticed any changes in this area or nearby neighborhoods like new buildings, rising prices, or different people moving in? Who is moving in, what kinds of buildings are being developed, or changes in the general atmosphere?

Yes, the changes are very visible. Prices have skyrocketed, and new high-end towers are being built all around. You see more international schools, luxury car dealerships, and gourmet cafés. The people moving in tend to be wealthier, younger, and often more globally connected working for multinational companies or owning startups.

9- Some people believe gated communities promote urban segregation do you agree or disagree? Why?

I do agree. Even if unintentionally, gated communities contribute to social isolation and economic segregation. They separate those who can afford a higher quality of life from those who cannot. But in my view, the real cause is not the communities themselves it's the failure of public urban planning. If public spaces were safer, cleaner, and more attractive, fewer people would feel the need to retreat behind gates.

10- Do you think wealthier residents have a responsibility to contribute to a more inclusive city?

Absolutely. Through community engagement, investments in public spaces, educational initiatives, and by supporting policies that reduce inequality, we can all play a part. If we isolate ourselves completely, we are only creating bigger problems for the city's future problems that eventually come back to affect everyone, rich or poor.

### **Interview 9 – Resident of Park Residential Complex (District 1)**

1-How long have you been living in Park Complex, and what made you choose this neighborhood?

I moved here about seven years ago, after retiring early from my job in banking. I was looking for a quieter life, somewhere I could enjoy peaceful days without the constant stress of downtown Tehran. Park Complex seemed perfect green, secure, and populated with people who value a balanced lifestyle. The spacious apartments and private balconies also made a big difference in my decision.

2- What is your general experience of living in this area?

It has been overwhelmingly positive. There is a strong sense of community here without any pressure to socialize too much. I appreciate the silence, the fresh air, the ability to walk safely at any hour, and the way the green spaces are preserved. Even

simple things like knowing the neighbors' names or seeing familiar faces every morning while walking the dog add to the sense of belonging.

3- Why did you choose to live in this gated community?

Primarily for peace and safety. Tehran is a wonderful city, but it's not always easy to live in the traffic, the pollution, the occasional feeling of insecurity. In Park Complex, life feels more manageable. You have reliable services, fewer worries about crime, and you can live at a slower, healthier pace.

4- What features or values were most important in making that decision (e.g., safety, status, comfort)?

Safety was number one, closely followed by comfort and environmental quality. I also liked the sense of community standards here rules about noise, about cleanliness, about maintenance. You can tell that the people who live here care about keeping the environment pleasant for everyone, not just themselves individually.

5- How would you describe the lifestyle and social environment inside this complex?

Very calm, and slightly traditional. People greet each other warmly but respect each other's space. There are gatherings for holidays, occasional meetings to discuss issues about the complex, and charity events now and then. It's a very civilized atmosphere polite, welcoming, but never intrusive.

6- Do you feel that living here separates you from the rest of the city socially or spatially?

Yes, both ways. Physically, it's obvious fences, security gates, controlled access. Socially, it's even more noticeable most people living here share a similar background: middle-to-upper class, highly educated, relatively affluent. This creates a comfortable living environment, but it also means that your interactions with the broader population are reduced.

7- In your opinion, are gated communities becoming more popular in Tehran? If yes, why do you think that is?

Yes, clearly. More and more people are looking for environments where they can have predictability and safety. As urban problems increase crime, pollution, congestion people are desperate for small islands of calmness where they can raise their families or retire peacefully.

8- Have you noticed any changes in this area or nearby neighborhoods like new buildings, rising prices, or different people moving in? Who is moving in, what kinds of buildings are being developed, or changes in the general atmosphere?

Definitely. Prices have gone through the roof. Developers are building luxury towers, and a younger generation of professionals, many of whom studied abroad, are moving in. The area feels more dynamic and youthful now, though it also feels a bit more commercialized than it used to.

9- Some people believe gated communities promote urban segregation do you agree or disagree? Why?

I partly agree. These communities do create exclusivity whether intentional or not. But they exist because public services have failed to offer decent alternatives. People aren't trying to isolate themselves out of arrogance they're trying to create spaces where basic expectations of safety and comfort are met.

10- Do you think wealthier residents have a responsibility to contribute to a more inclusive city?

Yes, absolutely. If you have the resources, you have the ability and therefore the responsibility to support improvements that benefit the entire city. Whether it's sponsoring local parks, funding public schools, or supporting social initiatives, every contribution matters. A better city benefits us all.

### **INTERVIEW 10 . Soha , English teacher**

1- How long have you been living in Park Complex, and what made you choose this neighborhood?

I've been living in the park complex for more than over 15 years, and actually, I haven't chosen living in this complex or living in this area due to my age, because when we moved here, I was like um, 14 or 13 years old, and I just moved here with my parents. We had been living there, and we had been living and the same district before, and we had always been living in the first district in Tehran, but this complex is famous for its spacious balconies and the safety

2- What is your general experience of living in this area?

Generally, I really enjoyed living in this district because it's safer than other places. We can say that it is not as crowded as other places in Tehran, and it is also greener. We have long trees, and you can spend some time walking in the streets, and it's so beautiful. And the people that you see in this kind of neighborhood are people in the same level of society, and there are nice

### 3- Why did you choose to live in this gated community?

About living in a gated community. When you are living in a gated community, you feel like you are living in your own town, away from the city, about from the hustle and bustle of the city, and you can enjoy it. There is something that I really like, is that for buying an apartment in this place that I'm leaving, you need to be interviewed, and in this interview, they choose the people who are on the same level, and actually they are even the questions are even related to your religious, beliefs, after this interview they make sure that all the people who are living in this gated community are really have a lot of income.

### 4- What features or values were most important in making that decision (e.g., safety, status, comfort)?

also this gated community actually this I can say these buildings or these complexes are located in the place which is not very comfortable it means that we don't have access to the grocery stores, shops or other facilities, it is really safe it is so beautiful, you can enjoy quiet days and nice, people are really nice, also these days due to that actually you set off the subways and actually improvement in the transportation especially the public transportation, all types of people can be seen in all of the places in area as districts in Tehran still this district can be more safer and it is feel like people with the same level of the society, about the 4 question actually if I want to give some more information, I can say that is very important that were there is answers you live, not be answers even your great grandparents and because all of us have been living in same places, because the schools that I used to go to very in the same district my family all lived there because of visiting them going to school and not spending a lot of time and the traffic jam

### 5- How would you describe the lifestyle and social environment inside this complex?

we have a lot of different lifestyles in Tehran and this area you can see a calm space and minimal lifestyle sometimes or actually there are also some people who are into luxury lifestyles but new generation are more into the minimal life, you can see some houses that have been designed in the minimal way but in this complex I can see that, I think that people are trying to live their lives to the fullest. Every morning they wake up, you can see a lot of pets, especially dogs. Actually, people are walking their dogs and the complex. And after that, they set off to work, and most of them come back at four o'clock in the evenings, they sit in the big balconies and have a cup of tea. Unfortunately, there is no gym in this complex, and there are not such facilities, such as pools and this kind of things. But the complexes usually have them, but this complex didn't have it due to some I don't know regulations that. I don't know what they are, but yes, people have some chill life, I can say. And especially in the green space of the complex, you can see that people are walking. They are trying to have a good time. And you can see the retired people sitting in the yard spending some time

together. And even sometimes, when there is a special occasion, such as actually some parties before the new year. Some parties are held in the complex which all of the neighbors can attend, and they can dance together, drink together, spend some good time together. And this is one of the advantages of living in gated community, because although it is not allowed to have big parties in this city, you can be in a gated community and enjoy your time with your friends and neighbors, dancing and having fun with your family. That is perfect. That is really one of the advantages.

6- Do you feel that living here separates you from the rest of the city socially or spatially?

I'm not sure, but I think that in our city, the gated community is getting more and more popular because according to the sanctions and the financial issues that we have the safety is decreasing and in the gated community you can be sure that "You can make sure that you are enjoying a safe area for living because there are some security which are protecting your house and it's not easy for other people to enter your building or enter the complex they need to have Actually permission for entering their and I think this is one of the reasons why people are more and more intending to live in such places. another reason is i think that safe green area that you can have in such place because if you want to go for a walk if you want to walk to your dog, you can have a safe and comfortable place For leaving and

7- In your opinion, are gated communities becoming more popular in Tehran? If yes, why do you think that is?

On the other, because of the increase and the price of land sometimes it's not very logical to spend a lot of money on the green spaces for the complexes so this is why then complex actually considers this kind of area and this kind of space and if you'll be really popular and precious but disadvantages that you have to pay a lot of money for that which I think it is really worth because you know you can have a better level of life and from the hustle and

bustle of the city and yeah, there are more popular these days And another thing is that because Of the hijab for example rules in this kind of areas you are sure that nobody is going to pick at you or tell you what you work , You can be free and enjoy your life.

8- Have you noticed any changes in this area or nearby neighborhoods like new buildings, rising prices, or different people moving in? Who is moving in, what kinds of buildings are being developed, or changes in the general atmosphere?

There used to be some gated communities and some areas like small towns with villas and houses, but nowadays, this kind of gated communities have changed to

complexes And there are like high towers like for example, they can be a big area with tree towers or something like that because it's not really Logical or sensible to build a house in the very big land in this complexes, yes as as I've mentioned before the prices are increasing every day and another thing is that different social that people will be different. Social this, but I think this is financial problem I meant because again kind of issues financial issues, the section some people are getting richer and richer every day and some people are getting more and more poor and the rich people Actually be the people who are not old money because for example, there are sometimes some middle men there are who are making a lot of money and now they can enter this kind of communities I can say that nowadays, the most important factor is how wealthy you are and if you can't afford. "But I still can't say that one advantage of living in such a complex is that although there high towers and being built every day because you have a great space around you with actually all the trees and beautiful spaces The changes in the city are not changing your lifestyle so much and you still have a good view because you are already living in a green space especially about the balcony is because in our apartment in our complex at each apartment has like about 60 to 90 m of balcony with flower boxes with a lot of plants and you can enjoy life actually in the green space \_ and you can both benefit from the advantages and the facilities of living in the complex and having a space with the yard I mean, sometimes I feel like there is a yard. There's a backyard in my house where I can sit and chill .

9- Some people believe gated communities promote urban segregation do you agree or disagree? Why?

I would say that I agree that some people living in some gated communities can actually lead into a separation between the different levels of actually Social levels in the city and I think I'm mostly the people who are not included in this gated community would fill this difference because that there is a space in city which are not allowed to enter which I think may fill them uncomfortable And they think that's OK. Why are some people isolating themselves or they may have such questions on the other hand the people who are living in the gates of community are really tired maybe maybe they're really tired of the hustle and bustle of living in the city specially in Tehran, which is the capital city it's so crowded as I have mentioned before it's really unsafe people need to create location where can feel safer they can spend some time silence . They can make sure that some strangers are not entering there and they can aware whatever they want and they can communicate with people who they have a lot of common weight and yes, after sometime they may feel isolated or like they are different from other people in the city because those people are not allowed to enter their actually leaving space Which I think is not a very bad thing As a person who is living in such a place, I love

this fact, but as you ask this question, and now I am actually considering it again I think it's may give a bad vibe to a person who is not included in this gated community.

This person may stand actually outside the gate and I wonder what is the difference between us and why Why am I able to enter or why I'm excluded and I don't know maybe this leads to something negative it's maybe

10- Do you think wealthier residents have a responsibility to contribute to a more inclusive city?

I believe that all the citizens have such responsibilities to actually build a better city to make sure that is not harmed or destroyed, and to make sure that they are developing and improving their cities but as you have mentioned and talked about the wealthy people of course they have more responsibility than other people because when you are wealthy, you can have a better and you are looking for a better lifestyle and for reaching that lifestyle you need to live in a good city now you cannot always wait for others to for you and you have the money you can invest in different parts of the city to make sure that it is improving now for example I can give some examples like you can make some I don't know recreational spaces. maybe you can build some places for people to to relax, or you can actually import some stuff which are not there in your city and invest and make sure that people can buy them that good with a good price This responsibility is very important. Sometimes it's not just about investing sometimes is about how you can help Other people grow themselves mentally or to improve the culture. Sometimes wealthy people can help others become more cultural. they can help them yo change lifestyles to be more healthy because if I think a city has healthy people, especially mentally that it is going to improve and the wealthy people can't really do it and I think it's very important not to consider just the benefits or the money you're going to make out of this investment, it's very important to see yourself as a part of the city like all the people who are actually living together in a ship if this ship is thinking Everyone actually is going to die so now in seen king city it is very important for to help everyone to survive to improve and make sure that everyone can live in them greener space I think I'm very important thing is are the trees nowadays because some wealthy people they want to build buildings and actually they destroys green spaces and cut off the trees and this is a very important thing that wealthy - peopleshould attention to to build green spaces for for surviving and for leaving and this is not something that they do for others. They are doing it for themselves and yes, this is their responsibility because at list in my city my city when other people are from other social levels are just fighting to stay alive or just fighting to live . living and find space to live to find to be able to buy some food and they are very busy with their actually the basic needs. So maybe they don't care about the improvement of their city at all and the realty people are the people who have some free time they are open-minded and they need to actually Feel the responsibility

Interview 1 – Mr. Shafiei, 50-year-old consultant, senior real estate officer in Region 1 (Owner of Qaraniyeh)

Have you noticed a rise in demand for gated communities in recent years? If yes, what do you think is driving this trend?

Yes, absolutely. In the past 10 years and especially after the COVID-19 pandemic I've seen a consistent rise in demand for gated communities, particularly among upper-middle-class families and returning expats. People are more sensitive about safety, not just physical security but also psychological comfort. Living in a gated community offers them predictability, controlled surroundings, and a higher sense of trust among neighbors. Add to that the uncertainty of Tehran's urban environment air pollution, traffic, dense neighborhoods and it's no surprise many families are looking for small islands of order and calm. A gated community promises exactly that: structure, peace, and security.

How has the real estate market changed in the last decade in terms of luxury housing?

The concept of luxury itself has evolved. Ten years ago, luxury often meant just size big apartments with shiny finishes. But today's buyers are smarter. They ask about smart systems, acoustic insulation, energy consumption, air quality, and community features like gym, concierge, or lobby design. They are more lifestyle-oriented. People used to look for show-off properties. Now they're looking for comfort, elegance, and quality. In areas like District 1, buildings with fewer units, calm surroundings, and premium management services are the ones that sell fastest even with higher price tags.

How do you market gated communities what messages are most appealing to potential buyers?

It really depends on the target audience, but overall, the key themes are privacy, security, and prestige. When I present a unit in a gated community, I always highlight things like 24/7 security, private access, low resident count, proximity to elite schools, and quiet streets. More emotional messaging also works well phrases like raising your family in peace, or living among people like you. Many clients ask me, What kind of people live here? That shows how much they care about the social environment. I often say: buying in a gated community isn't just buying a home it's buying a lifestyle and a social filter.

What are the main values, principles, or characteristics that your recent urban development or planning projects aim to promote?

In recent years, the focus has shifted toward human-scale, low-density, and smart-living principles. Projects we support or work with now prioritize fewer units per building, more light, more ventilation, and architectural harmony with the natural landscape. We promote efficient land use, minimal visual pollution, and long-term

building quality. We also try to create quiet luxury meaning not necessarily flashy but very well-built, respectful to its context, and long-lasting in terms of both value and function. One of the guiding values is also community without crowding letting people feel connected, without losing their personal space.

Do you think developers have a role in shaping socially inclusive or exclusive urban environments?

Yes more than they're willing to admit. Every design choice we make affects inclusion and exclusion. If you design wide hallways, shared spaces, and flexible apartments, you are promoting mixed-use and mixed-income living. If you close things off, install security gates, and market with elite language, you're building for a very specific group. In luxury markets, developers often say we're just meeting demand, but in reality, we are influencing it too. I believe even high end developers can create communities that are respectful, diverse, and culturally healthy, not just exclusive fortresses for the rich.

Are you aware of any urban policies that support or limit the growth of gated communities?

There are no clear or direct laws that ban or encourage gated communities, but there are zoning codes, height restrictions, green space ratios, and neighborhood character guidelines that indirectly shape what's allowed. For example, District 1's municipality is strict about density and facade consistency. These rules often favor low-rise, secure buildings over tall, dense ones which fits well with gated living. However, there's a lack of national discussion about the social implications of this type of housing. Right now, policies don't address segregation or access. Most of the gated communities emerge through loopholes, informal negotiations, or sheer market power not through planned urban strategy.

### **Interview 2 – Mr. Moghaddam, 55, Retired Developer and Long-time Resident of District 1 (Sahebgharanieh)**

Have you noticed a rise in demand for gated communities in recent years? If yes, what do you think is driving this trend?

Yes, I've definitely seen a noticeable rise in demand, especially since around 2015. When I first started building in District 1 in the early 2000s, most people were still interested in traditional villas or older apartments with larger spaces but fewer services. Now, it's completely different. There's much more awareness about security, community services, and controlled access. Families especially those with kids are looking for places where they don't have to worry about their children playing outside or unknown visitors entering the building. But it's not just safety. People are also looking for peace and order. Tehran is chaotic traffic, pollution, construction

noise so they want to live somewhere that feels like a private bubble. Gated communities offer that, and the prestige associated with them doesn't hurt either.

How has the real estate market changed in the last decade in terms of luxury housing?

The shift has been dramatic. In the past, luxury housing meant chandeliers, big lobbies, and marble walls. Now, buyers are demanding modern design, energy efficiency, smart systems, and well-managed common areas. One big change is that buildings now offer services cleaning, maintenance, gyms, even concierge desks. It used to be that only hotels had that, but now high-end buildings in District 1 provide a hotel-like lifestyle. Also, people care more about who built the building. The developer's reputation matters. If a builder cuts corners or delivers late, word spreads fast. So the market has become more selective and competitive, which I think is good.

How do you market gated communities what messages are most appealing to potential buyers?

When I was still active as a developer, our marketing always centered around trust and exclusivity. We would emphasize features like private parking with license-plate recognition, professional security guards, CCTV coverage, and low unit density. Buyers want to know who their neighbors are not just for social reasons, but because they want a shared sense of lifestyle. So, we often described the building as ideal for professionals, diplomats, and elite families. That kind of messaging reassures people. They feel they're not just buying a home they're joining a circle. Also, practical features matter. We'd promote backup generators, earthquake resistance, and water recycling systems all things that show the building is future- proof.

What are the main values, principles, or characteristics that your recent urban development or planning projects aim to promote?

I've always believed that buildings should serve people's lives, not the other way around. My recent projects before retirement aimed to promote calm, dignity, and sustainability. I worked a lot on integrating green spaces even on rooftops and making sure every unit had ample light and ventilation. The idea was: the home should be a place for rest, not stress. Also, I made sure our buildings were not over- crowded. No more than 2 or 3 units per floor. This lowers noise and increases a sense of privacy. We also designed shared spaces like gardens or lounges in ways that allow interaction without forcing it. You can say hello to your neighbor if you want or just enjoy your coffee alone. That balance matters.

Do you think developers have a role in shaping socially inclusive or exclusive urban environments?

Without a doubt. A developer is like a silent urban planner. The way we build affects everything who moves in, how they live, and whether they interact. If you make buildings that only cater to the upper class, with high walls and restricted entry, you are obviously reinforcing exclusion. But if you design with a little more openness shared areas, visual connection to the street, or more flexible pricing you allow different kinds of people to coexist. That said, the market in areas like Sahebgharanieh doesn't leave much room for mixed-income developments. It's already an exclusive zone. Still, within that, I think it's possible to build communities that are respectful and human not just cold and elite.

Are you aware of any urban policies that support or limit the growth of gated communities?

Most policies here work indirectly. For example, building regulations about density, parking requirements, or façade restrictions make high-security, low-density housing more attractive to developers. The municipality of District 1 tends to support these projects not through formal encouragement, but by approving designs that match the neighborhood's character. However, there's no national urban planning document that seriously evaluates the social impacts of gated communities. We're growing in that direction by demand, not design. Frankly, I think Tehran is overdue for a serious debate about what kind of urban fabric we want in the next 20 years. Otherwise, we'll end up with beautiful but fragmented neighborhoods secure inside, but disconnected outside.

### **Interview 3 – Ms. Tashkouri, 36, Real Estate Consultant for Foreign Clients (District 1, Tehran)**

Have you noticed a rise in demand for gated communities in recent years? If yes, what do you think is driving this trend?

Yes, especially among foreign clients and affluent Iranians who have spent time abroad. Many of my clients including diplomats, NGO workers, and international businesspeople ask for gated residences as their top priority. They want peace, safety, and controlled access. It gives them a feeling of familiarity with the housing style they've experienced overseas. In fact, I've had clients who declined excellent apartments just because the building lacked proper security, a doorman, or a gated entrance. Even local clients, particularly younger couples or families with children, now ask about security systems and who else lives in the building. Privacy, quiet, and community filtering are seen as essentials, not luxuries.

How has the real estate market changed in the last decade in terms of luxury housing?

There's been a real shift in buyer expectations. Luxury no longer means marble floors and heavy golden furniture it's now about functionality and subtle elegance. Buyers want clean designs, floor-to-ceiling windows, integrated smart-home systems, and properly managed buildings. A lot of expats ask for features like underfloor heating, silent elevators, or even soundproof walls. There's also a shift in how buildings operate. Now people ask about who manages the building, how maintenance is done, whether it has backup generators, recycling systems, and even community guidelines. Luxury now includes service quality, not just looks.

How do you market gated communities what messages are most appealing to potential buyers?

I always focus on three main selling points: safety, lifestyle, and community culture. For foreign clients, I present gated communities as secure sanctuaries within the city quiet places with modern infrastructure. I describe it as a place where children can safely ride bikes, where you know your neighbors, and where you don't have to worry about strangers entering the building. Many clients, especially those from Europe or East Asia, are very sensitive about who lives in the building they want respectful neighbors and a building with rules and order. When I use terms like curated community or high-trust living, they respond very positively. The feeling of controlled environment gives them confidence.

What are the main values, principles, or characteristics that your recent urban development or planning projects aim to promote?

While I'm not a developer myself, I collaborate closely with developers and see a strong push toward privacy, calm, and comfort. There's a growing trend of buildings that look very simple from outside maybe even minimalist but offer advanced internal services: 24-hour surveillance, biometric access, underground parking, rooftop lounges, and private gyms. Developers now also understand that people value emotional design spaces that feel open, cozy, and breathable. Buildings that offer this kind of experience tend to attract long-term residents, not short-term investors. The emphasis is less on showing off, and more on delivering a sense of belonging and serenity.

Do you think developers have a role in shaping socially inclusive or exclusive urban environments?

Without question. Every choice from apartment size to pricing to how many units are built determines who can live there. Some developers are very clear that they're targeting a specific elite market. They promote exclusivity in everything gated access, private lobbies, even limiting rentals to approved profiles.

While this creates a calm and clean environment, it definitely builds social walls. Developers may not always intend to create exclusivity, but it's the outcome of their design and marketing strategies. That said, some thoughtful developers now design spaces where different age groups or professional backgrounds can coexist, as long as the shared values of respect and quiet are preserved.

Are you aware of any urban policies that support or limit the growth of gated communities?

There are building regulations that influence density and layout, especially in District 1, which indirectly support the gated model. For example, low-rise zoning and open space requirements naturally lead to buildings that feel more private and controlled. But in terms of direct urban policy? No. I haven't seen any clear support or opposition to gated communities. Most of what we have is market-driven and shaped by developer discretion. The city government doesn't seem to have a strong vision about social integration in housing. It's mostly reactive, not proactive. Personally, I think there should be more public discussion about the long-term impacts of gated growth both the benefits and the downsides.

**Interview 4 – Mr. Shayegan, 45, Senior Sales Strategist for Luxury Towers (District 1, Tehran)**

Have you noticed a rise in demand for gated communities in recent years? If yes, what do you think is driving this trend?

Yes, and not just a rise it's almost a default expectation now for anyone buying property over a certain price level. People have become extremely sensitive about their living environment. They want predictability: no unknown guests, no surprise construction next door, no street noise. Gated communities offer a kind of controlled reality. And let's be honest, part of the demand is also about social distinction. When you say your apartment is in a gated community with biometric access and private elevators, it signals status. So, it's a mix of real comfort and symbolic prestige.

How has the real estate market changed in the last decade in terms of luxury housing?

The buyers have changed, and so has the product. Ten years ago, most of our clients were older, more traditional, and focused on unit size. Now, we get more young professionals, dual-income couples, and expats who value design, efficiency, and digital services over sheer size. That's why we've shifted toward buildings that offer tech-enabled living app-based entry, smart lighting, concierge dashboards, etc. Also, residents expect their buildings to have amenities like cafes, gyms, guest suites, and even in-house services like dry cleaning. Luxury has evolved from how it looks to how it works.

How do you market gated communities what messages are most appealing to potential buyers?

We use a mix of emotional and functional messaging. For example: Live without intrusion The city outside your world inside Privacy. Precision. Peace. Buyers want to hear that this place has been designed for their lifestyle that their car, their child, and their dog all have a safe and elegant space. Also, we often include curated visuals aerial shots, interior simulations, and user testimonials. Many buyers come from noisy or chaotic backgrounds, so presenting a vision of calm, orderly life is very effective.

What are the main values, principles, or characteristics that your recent urban development or planning projects aim to promote?

We focus on user-centered design and predictable community dynamics. This means not only beautiful architecture, but also clear social zoning. For example, we avoid mixing commercial and residential units in the same tower. We define visitor paths, delivery hours, and pet policies. It may sound rigid, but people appreciate boundaries. We also prioritize maintenance quality hiring trained staff, not just casual workers. The logic is simple: if the space is respected, the people living in it will feel respected too. Good design means good living, and good living means long-term value for everyone.

Do you think developers have a role in shaping socially inclusive or exclusive urban environments?

Of course. Developers shape the invisible walls of a city. When we create buildings with high entry thresholds in terms of price, documentation, or even interviews we're clearly building exclusive environments. But we can also use our power differently. For example, we once developed a tower with mixed unit sizes so families of different scales could afford to live there. It wasn't fully inclusive, but it was a step forward. It's not about removing all exclusivity that's unrealistic in luxury but about building respectful, stable, and functional communities that don't feel like castles.

Are you aware of any urban policies that support or limit the growth of gated communities?

The policies don't mention gated communities by name, but many of the building codes unintentionally support them. When you require large setbacks, private parking, and limited unit counts, you're already pushing toward gated designs. There's also a cultural tolerance from the municipality. They don't object as long as zoning laws are respected and the building looks orderly. But I do think it's time for Tehran's planning authorities to officially recognize gated communities and provide clearer guidelines especially regarding their social and infrastructural impacts.

## **Interview 5 – Mr. Rahbari, 40, Smart Housing Developer and Entrepreneur (District 1)**

Have you noticed a rise in demand for gated communities in recent years? If yes, what do you think is driving this trend?

Absolutely. In fact, gated living is not just a trend anymore it's becoming the standard expectation in Tehran's upper districts. In the last five years, I've seen a sharp increase in requests for security-based housing: controlled entry, access logs, camera coverage, even visitor screening systems. Families want physical and psychological safety. At the same time, people want to avoid the unpredictability of urban life noisy neighbors, unregulated buildings, or mixed-use towers with foot traffic. Gated communities offer quiet, curated environments. It's a mix of personal comfort, social identity, and real security.

How has the real estate market changed in the last decade in terms of luxury housing?

A decade ago, luxury was defined by quantity more square meters, taller ceilings, fancier décor. But now, it's all about quality. People ask about smart thermostats, solar panels, air purification systems, underground EV chargers, and noise insulation. Buyers also expect buildings to have digital management systems from online service requests to automated utility readings. The real difference is that today's high-end buyers are very informed. They want to know what kind of wiring is used, who the building manager is, and whether the structure is earthquake-resistant. We're no longer building for show we're building for intelligent, demanding residents.

How do you market gated communities what messages are most appealing to potential buyers?

We sell peace of mind and premium user experience. When marketing gated communities, I always lead with words like digital security, community standards, and zero-noise design. We present the building not just as a place to live but as a daily system that works smoothly. Our messaging often includes: engineered for lifestyle, engineered for protection, and "engineered for trust." It resonates especially with young professionals and tech-savvy clients who are used to digital integration. Also, for families, we highlight children's play zones, school proximity, and safe pedestrian areas. Emotional appeal + technical reliability = success.

What are the main values, principles, or characteristics that your recent urban development or planning projects aim to promote?

Our main principles are: automation, sustainability, and emotional space. We use solar panels on rooftops, thermal insulation in walls, and smart glass for temperature control. But more than that, we try to design emotionally balanced spaces. For example, our corridors have soft ambient lighting and acoustic panels to reduce echo. Balconies are designed for real use with greenery and privacy screens. We also install shared spaces lounges, co-working areas, mini libraries to create

community without crowding. Everything is calculated to reduce friction and increase well-being. A good building should make life easier, not more stressful.

Do you think developers have a role in shaping socially inclusive or exclusive urban environments?

Definitely. Developers act as cultural filters. If we only build for the top 1%, we are creating walls not just physically, but socially. We choose the access level, the pricing, the unit variety and that decides who gets in. So yes, we can make spaces that are inclusive or isolating. I personally believe in soft exclusivity projects that maintain quality and comfort, but avoid arrogance. For example, a building can be clean, secure, and elegant without being intimidating or overly elitist.

It's our job to balance comfort and openness. Otherwise, we're just turning cities into layers of invisible gates.

Are you aware of any urban policies that support or limit the growth of gated communities?

Urban policy in Tehran is often outdated when it comes to modern housing models. Right now, the system reacts to demand instead of guiding it. There's nothing specific that encourages or discourages gated communities, but many regulations favor them indirectly. For instance, policies that limit commercial activity in residential blocks, or that encourage underground parking and green space, make gated models easier to develop. But there's no policy that talks about inclusion, diversity, or community integration. That's a gap. We need new frameworks that recognize gated communities as a growing typology and regulate them accordingly.

### **Interview 6 – Mr. Karimi, 45, Sales Manager in Phase 1, Ekbatan Town**

Have you noticed a rise in demand for gated communities in recent years? If yes, what do you think is driving this trend?

Yes, absolutely. Over the past five or six years, especially after the COVID period, this trend has become very clear. People are no longer just thinking about the price or the size of the house; now the security of the environment and the social quality matter much more to them. In Ekbatan, thanks to its structure controlled entrances,

permanent security guards at each block, and open yet enclosed green spaces it quickly met the needs of these new buyers. Also, the easy access to the metro and major highways has made families feel that Ekbatan offers the perfect combination of safety, facilities, and connectivity. Many clients who used to live in more expensive areas like Zafaraniyeh or Elahieh now prefer Ekbatan for its order, safety, and amenities, even if the apartments here are a bit smaller.

How has the real estate market changed in the last decade in terms of luxury housing?

The market has completely changed. Ten years ago, a luxury home meant heavy stone facades, huge lobbies with crystal chandeliers, or units over 300 square meters. Today, buyers have become much more professional. They are looking for smart homes, proper ventilation, strong soundproofing, and professionally managed buildings. For instance, now clients ask about heating and cooling systems, the speed and reliability of internet service in the building, how monthly building fees are managed, and whether the common areas are clean and orderly. Even in Ekbatan, we can see that units that have been renovated with modern facilities sell much faster.

How do you market gated communities what messages are most appealing to potential buyers?

The first thing I emphasize is security. I tell them, Here, you can let your child play outside without worrying about strangers coming and going. I put a lot of emphasis on the idea of a safe and peaceful lifestyle. I also highlight the excellent access to the metro, shopping centers like Mega Mall, and nearby healthcare services.

Another important point I mention is that in Ekbatan, because of the block structure, there is a stronger sense of community compared to typical high-rise towers there's both a feeling of belonging and a well-preserved sense of order.

What are the main values, principles, or characteristics that your recent development projects aim to promote?

In our recent projects, we are focusing much more on quality of life. That means buildings that not only look stylish but actually function well: Natural daylighting, Cross-ventilation, Sound insulation between walls, Use of earthquake-resistant materials. In renovations too, we focus on improving the quality of shared spaces lobbies, hallways, and outdoor common areas.

The goal is for residents to truly feel they are living in an environment that's built for long-term comfort and sustainability.

Do you think developers have a role in shaping socially inclusive or exclusive urban environments?

Yes, developers play a vital role. The way a project is designed unit sizes, pricing, materials used, even the way it's marketed determines which social groups are attracted. When you build only large, very expensive units, naturally, the middle class gets excluded, and the environment becomes more homogeneous and closed.

But if there's a mix of different unit sizes and a variety of amenities, a much more diverse community can emerge.

Are you aware of any urban policies that support or limit the development of gated communities?

Directly, no. There's no specific law that says you must build gated or non-gated neighborhoods. However, municipal regulations about low-density housing, mandatory green spaces, and height restrictions have naturally led most new projects to adopt a more enclosed and controlled design. Ekbatan, with its older but very organized structure, has adapted well to these changes and remains a good model for semi-open, secure neighborhoods.

#### **Interview 7–Ms. Mahmoudi, 38, Real Estate Consultant in Phase 4, Ekbatan Town**

Have you noticed a rise in demand for gated communities in recent years? If yes, what do you think is driving this trend?

Yes, this trend has become very noticeable. Especially in recent years, as people's concerns about security have increased, and the importance of quality of life has risen too. People are no longer just looking for four walls they want an environment where they can raise children comfortably, stroll safely in open spaces, and not worry about the noise and insecurity of the surrounding city. Thanks to its design, Ekbatan with controlled entrances, clear block structures, and wide green spaces has practically become a model for a successful gated community, without feeling completely closed off. Plus, facilities like the metro station inside the complex and large shopping centers like Mega Mall have made Ekbatan even more attractive to families.

How has the real estate market changed in the last decade in terms of luxury housing?

It's changed a lot. In the past, having a luxury-looking façade and a large unit was enough to sell. Now buyers are much more careful. They care about the quality of interior materials, the heating and cooling systems, building management, even the condition of the parking areas and lobbies. Today's customers prefer apartments

that have smart control systems (like advanced video intercoms or biometric entry) and professionally maintained common areas. We also see this in Ekbatan: units that have been smartly renovated with up-to-date facilities and professional management are selling much faster.

How do you market gated communities what messages are most appealing to potential buyers?

I focus on three key points: safety, peace of mind, and excellent access. I tell clients: This is an environment where your child can play freely without fear of cars or strangers. You yourself can walk at night with peace of mind. I also show them that Ekbatan not only has open green space but also excellent access to the metro and highways much better than similar neighborhoods. And a very important final point: the social culture of the blocks most residents are respectable families, and there's a strong atmosphere of mutual respect and coexistence.

What are the main values, principles, or characteristics that your recent development projects aim to promote?

We aim to introduce projects that care about real quality of life, not just appearance. That means: Buildings with good natural light, Smart internal layouts, Well-managed shared facilities, And environments that foster a sense of belonging. In several recent projects we handled in Phase 4 of Ekbatan, we emphasized better daylighting, soundproofing, internal green spaces, and online management systems for building services. What really matters to customers is feeling both comfort at home and positive energy in shared areas.

Do you think developers have a role in shaping socially inclusive or exclusive urban environments?

Definitely. The decisions developers make from unit sizes to the way private and public spaces are divided directly influence the social character of a neighborhood. If you only build large, expensive units, you unintentionally create a closed, homogeneous community. But if you include a variety of unit sizes, well-designed shared spaces, and accessible community amenities, there's a much higher chance of creating a diverse and dynamic neighborhood.

In Ekbatan, because from the beginning they built a variety of unit sizes (60, 75, 90, 100 sqm), it has allowed different social groups to live side by side.

Are you aware of any urban policies that support or limit the development of gated communities?

There's no direct policy encouraging or discouraging gated community development. However, municipal regulations like low permissible density, mandatory green spaces, restrictions on commercial usage, and encouragement of block-based planning have indirectly promoted this model. Because Ekbatan was originally built with advanced urban planning principles, it has naturally evolved into a successful semi- open but secure community without direct government intervention. Still, I believe that Tehran's urban management needs to create clearer and more purposeful policies for how these models grow especially to handle their long-term social impacts.

### **Interview 8– Ms. Kaveh, 42, Project Manager for Renovations in Ekbatan**

Have you noticed a rise in demand for gated communities in recent years? If yes, what do you think is driving this trend?

Yes, definitely. I've seen a clear and growing demand, especially among younger families and middle-aged buyers who are looking for a safer, calmer urban life. Ekbatan is naturally attractive because of its semi-gated design: the blocks have controlled access, there are guards at key points, and the open green spaces are separated from busy streets. Beyond physical security, I think people are drawn to the sense of order and predictability. In a city like Tehran, where chaos can be overwhelming, living in a place where you know what to expect who your neighbors are, where your kids can safely play is a huge emotional comfort.

How has the real estate market changed in the last decade in terms of luxury housing?

Luxury today is a completely different concept compared to ten years ago. In the past, bigger was always better huge lobbies, chandeliers, heavy stone facades. Now, people care much more about functionality, design quality, and smart integration. Clients ask detailed questions about building maintenance, energy efficiency, noise levels, and available technologies. Even in Ekbatan, we notice that renovated units with better soundproofing, intelligent layouts, and professional management sell significantly faster. People don't want "show-off" apartments anymore they want homes that work beautifully in everyday life.

How do you market gated communities what messages are most appealing to potential buyers?

When marketing properties in places like Ekbatan, I highlight three things: Safe Family Living, Community Feel, Everyday Convenience I usually tell buyers: In this environment, your child can ride a bike or play outside without fear. You know your neighbors. Services are close by, and life feels less stressful. Especially for buyers who are tired of the traffic and disorder of central Tehran, this

promise of stable, manageable daily life is very powerful. It's not just about the apartment it's about the entire experience of the neighborhood.

What are the main values, principles, or characteristics that your recent urban development or planning projects aim to promote?

In my recent projects, especially renovations inside Ekbatan, we aim to enhance comfort, natural light, acoustic privacy, and green connections. For example, when redesigning interior spaces, I make sure there's maximum natural ventilation and daylight in every room. We install better soundproofing between units, reimagine common areas to be more inviting (like adding seating corners and plant walls), and improve the lighting in hallways and entrances to create a welcoming atmosphere. The goal is to build spaces that support mental well-being, not just meet basic functional needs.

Do you think developers have a role in shaping socially inclusive or exclusive urban environments?

Yes, without a doubt. Developers make hundreds of tiny decisions that determine who can live in a building pricing, size of apartments, available amenities, even marketing language. If everything is high-end, big, and expensive, you're automatically excluding diverse groups. But if you create a mix for example, different unit sizes, shared gardens, community rooms you help build a more inclusive and vibrant neighborhood. In Ekbatan, the original planners did a good job allowing for mixed social layers, and I believe developers today should respect and continue that spirit.

Are you aware of any urban policies that support or limit the growth of gated communities?

There's no direct policy saying build gated communities in Tehran. However, the way urban rules are structured like emphasizing green spaces, limiting commercial licenses in residential areas, and requiring proper parking indirectly encourages gated models. In a way, the city's planning system is set up to make gated or semi-gated living easier to develop. That said, I believe it's time for urban managers to actively study the social consequences of gated community expansion. Because if we don't guide this process, we could end up with a city that's highly fragmented socially and spatially.

### **Interview 9 – Mr. Soleimani, 51, Developer and Renovation Specialist in Ekbatan**

Have you noticed a rise in demand for gated communities in recent years? If yes, what do you think is driving this trend?

Absolutely, it's been very noticeable, especially over the past five to seven years. People are much more concerned about safety, cleanliness, and the predictability of their environment now. Ekbatan, even though it's an older development, has maintained a strong sense of order, with guarded entrances, monitored blocks, and well-organized public spaces. Families, especially those with young children or elderly members, really appreciate being able to live somewhere they can trust the surroundings. Also, proximity to the metro station inside Ekbatan and major shopping centers like Mega Mall have made it extremely convenient for daily life that's another major attraction compared to more chaotic parts of Tehran.

How has the real estate market changed in the last decade in terms of luxury housing?

Ten years ago, luxury was mainly about appearance: marble floors, golden chandeliers, oversized units. Now, it's all about living quality. Today's buyers care more about efficient layouts, proper insulation, high-speed internet, smart-home features, and well-maintained common spaces. Even in Ekbatan, units that have been renovated intelligently with upgraded heating, cooling, noise-proofing, and smart entry systems are much more desirable and sell faster. Clients want places that make everyday life easier, healthier, and more reliable not just places that look good on the outside.

How do you market gated communities what messages are most appealing to potential buyers?

When marketing gated communities like Ekbatan, I focus heavily on three main points: Safety and Peace of Mind, Community Culture, Convenience and Accessibility I tell buyers: Here, your children can safely ride bikes in the open spaces without you worrying every second. You can enjoy clean, quiet surroundings. And you'll live among families who share similar values. Another big selling point is the strong sense of familiarity in Ekbatan: neighbors often know each other by name, and people respect shared spaces. Also, access to Metro Line 4 and immediate facilities like shops, clinics, and parks is a huge bonus for daily comfort.

What are the main values, principles, or characteristics that your recent urban development or planning projects aim to promote?

I focus on improving the actual quality of living spaces rather than just the cosmetic appearance. That means ensuring good natural light in apartments, minimizing noise pollution between units, designing proper ventilation systems, and maintaining clean, accessible common areas. When renovating or advising on projects, I also emphasize creating comfortable social spaces not just corridors and entrances, but areas where neighbors feel good passing each other or stopping for a chat. In my view, a truly

successful project is one where residents feel a long-term sense of emotional attachment to their building and surrounding

Do you think developers have a role in shaping socially inclusive or exclusive urban environments?

Absolutely. Developers basically shape the community's social DNA through their design and marketing choices. If a developer only builds ultra-luxury, oversized units, they're naturally filtering for a wealthier, more homogeneous resident base. But if there's a mix of unit sizes, shared spaces, accessible amenities, and different price points, you're giving a wider range of people a chance to live together which is healthier for the city in the long run. Personally, I believe that we should be designing for diversity within order meaning a balanced, respectful community where different people can coexist.

Are you aware of any urban policies that support or limit the growth of gated communities?

There's no explicit policy either promoting or preventing gated communities in Tehran. But building regulations like limiting building heights, requiring green spaces, restricting commercial activity inside residential areas naturally favor the growth of gated or semi-gated projects. In Ekbatan, thanks to the original master planning from decades ago, these structures already existed and have evolved well into modern needs. However, I think urban management should now actively discuss and plan for the social impacts of these trends, rather than just letting them grow organically. Without clear vision and regulation, gated living could either improve the city's residential quality or dangerously deepen social fragmentation.

### **Interview 10: Alireza**

Have you noticed a rise in demand for gated communities in recent years? If yes, what do you think is driving this trend?

Yes, definitely. The high level of security including two levels of guarding, one for the parking areas and another for the lobbies covers all blocks of Ekbatan. Additionally, the presence of green spaces and a calm environment make it highly attractive. Regarding commuting across the city, I must mention that the metro station inside Ekbatan provides excellent access to various parts of Tehran.

How has the real estate market changed in the last decade in terms of luxury housing?

There has been a significant increase in demand over the past ten years, mostly because of reasonable pricing, a secure environment, and strong connectivity.

Sometimes, even people living in more expensive districts preferred to move to Ekbatan because of these factors.

How do you market gated communities what messages are most appealing to potential buyers?

When presenting various property options in Ekbatan, the first thing I highlight is security. Then I focus on the convenient facilities: public transportation such as taxis and metro access, and essential daily needs covered by major shopping centers like Mega Mall and even the older malls that were built alongside Ekbatan itself. These amenities are a major draw for potential buyers.

What are the main values, principles, or characteristics that your recent urban development or planning projects aim to promote?

The factors I prioritize when evaluating a neighborhood include the view from inside the house, the quality of materials used, and again access, security, and nearby facilities like shopping centers or pedestrian-friendly areas designed by the developers. These aspects are what we most often highlight and promote to attract more customers.

Do you think developers have a role in shaping socially inclusive or exclusive urban environments?

In the minds of urban managers, there is definitely an idea of creating separation and distinction. One of the main strategies of Tehran's urban management is to manage high population densities and limited urban space by planning differentiated areas. City managers are developing programs for various districts to promote organized growth and separation of urban spaces.

Are you aware of any urban policies that support or limit the growth of gated communities

Since the revolution, this trend has significantly increased. For example, in different areas like Shahrak Gharb, you can now find a large number of gated communities. Even in District 1, or near Ekbatan itself, we can point to a new gated project called Ofogh Ekbatan. The expansion of such developments shows how urban policies and market demands have together supported the growth of semi-private and fully gated residential areas.

**Urban Stakeholders (Planners, Policymakers, Academics) INTERVIEW 1 , AMIRHOSEIN , PLANNERS**

1- How would you define the role of urban planning in the emergence of gated communities and gentrified neighborhoods in Tehran?

If I want to explain the role of an urban planner, I believe there are different schools of thought in urban planning. However, decisions are ultimately made based on the society's capacity and the city's resilience to foster development. In certain cases, such as the emergence of gated communities or gentrified neighborhoods, it is clear that various factors such as urban policy play a significant role.

2- Are there specific urban policies or land-use strategies that have facilitated gentrification in certain areas?

As I explained earlier, urban policy is the most influential factor in the decision-making process regarding gentrification and gated communities. A major aspect is land use and the areas with old houses that have potential for growth in multiple dimensions. In some cases, planning is oriented in a way that transforms these lands into different types of residential compounds. To elaborate, in Tehran, there are various types of residential complexes for instance, military compounds for military personnel, and private residential compounds that have significantly grown in the past 20 years, although they existed even before the revolution for various reasons. Therefore, from an urban planner's perspective, one of the main concerns is planning for the development of diverse residential communities with various services and amenities for citizens.

3- In your view, what are the main consequences of gentrification and gated communities for housing affordability and social equity?

If I want to discuss the consequences of these developments, there are many points to mention, but at the top of the list is class division and the segregation of society. This type of urban planning must be done with great care to control the rising property prices in various neighborhoods and to ensure social connectivity across different groups. For instance, in districts 1 and 2, we witness a sharp increase in housing prices due to urban development. In my opinion, the key driver is inflation or more accurately, the lack of economic stability in Iran. From a social justice perspective, everything is interconnected. For example, when a specific area is developed, it brings changes to the residents. Instead of creating a mixed society, we are moving toward isolating different groups.

4- Do current planning policies address issues of displacement or social exclusion?

In most cases, I would say no, it is not taken into account. The main reason is the differing perspectives toward society and the involvement of unrelated individuals who make poor decisions and lack sufficient knowledge of urban psychology.

5- What role do private developers and investors play in influencing urban policy and neighborhood transformation?

The two key roles in urban decision-making are developers and investors. I mention this because in some areas, you notice that most private investors prefer to invest in regions with higher growth potential. Several factors contribute to this such as vacant lands and wealthy individuals who prefer to live in areas with full amenities and high security. As a result, developers are naturally drawn to these people, which in turn creates social problems.

6- Do you think social and spatial segregation is becoming a growing issue in Tehran? If yes, are there any policies, interventions, or planning strategies being proposed or implemented to address it?

Yes, absolutely it is increasing at a very rapid pace. From a political perspective, I feel this social separation is part of the broader strategy of policymakers and the government. With a population over 80 million and extremely high economic inequality, when viewed through the lens of urban space, we see stark differences in building construction and street layouts across districts. For example, in District 1, you find more pedestrian-friendly streets, high-quality restaurants, and better amenities, whereas in the southern parts of Tehran, these considerations are completely neglected. The urban fabric is deteriorating, and informal settlements are growing.

7- What planning or policy strategies could be implemented to ensure more inclusive urban development?

Tehran is a very large city, and currently, there is no strong inner-city network. Different areas are inhabited by people with diverse perspectives. I believe all social classes must be considered to develop a comprehensive plan aimed at reducing class disparities. Economically, Iran does not have significant growth, and only a small portion of the society is earning well, while the rest are becoming increasingly vulnerable under inflation. Additionally, outdated infrastructure in Iran has made it difficult to provide essential services like water, electricity, and gas efficiently to everyone.

8- How do you interpret this trend what do gated communities represent in your view?

In my view, the most important implication is the social segregation that results. If we look at it critically, development projects like these should be implemented while simultaneously considering other segments of society, to prevent them from feeling excluded. However, in general, those who live in residential compounds often have distinct mindsets and multiple reasons for choosing such places.

9- What are your thoughts on the future of Tehran's urban form in relation to socio-spatial division, these are the original question, don't change questions

I believe in the future, we will witness an increase in social separation, and Tehran's urban space will experience more spatial fragmentation. Class and social inequalities will continue to rise. Regarding residential compounds, in Tehran there is a form of gated community where, for example, a 4- or 5-story building includes a lobby, a doorman, a private parking area, and various technicians residing on-site and this trend is increasing. In terms of fully gated compounds, there has been a significant rise in the suburbs of Tehran, where wealthy individuals live in highly comfortable, well-equipped, and pleasant environments.

### **Interview 2 – Urban Planner & Lecturer, Age 39**

1-How would you define the role of urban planning in the emergence of gated communities and gentrified neighborhoods in Tehran?

Urban planning, in my view, plays a central role in both enabling and responding to these phenomena. Often, we focus on building and investment without looking at long-term social effects. Gated communities don't appear in a vacuum they are often a product of weak regulation and planning strategies that indirectly encourage isolation, exclusivity, and class-based development. We don't always do it on purpose, but the way we zone, the areas we prioritize, and the policies we enforce all of that contributes to the rise of these patterns in the city.

2- Are there specific urban policies or land-use strategies that have facilitated gentrification in certain areas?

Absolutely. You can see it clearly in some neighborhoods in Districts 1 and 2. Policies that allow for densification, height bonuses, and luxury renovations often come without protections for existing residents. There's no cap on rent increases, no inclusionary housing requirement nothing to slow down gentrification. So when land-use regulations are liberalized in specific areas, developers take advantage, and residents who have lived there for decades are priced out.

3- In your view, what are the main consequences of gentrification and gated communities for housing affordability and social equity?

They worsen inequality. Housing becomes a tool of exclusion. Gentrification might improve the quality of buildings and services, but it does so at the cost of affordability. And gated communities? They're a form of urban retreat a way for people to physically and socially separate themselves. The problem is, cities are meant to bring people together. When we divide space by wealth, we break down the very idea of a shared urban life.

4- Do current planning policies address issues of displacement or social exclusion?

Not in any serious way. There's a lot of talk in planning reports about social justice and inclusive design, but on the ground, these ideas rarely become enforceable policy. There are no strong protections against displacement, no guarantees for affordable housing in new

developments. I think the intent may be there in some departments, but the execution is weak and often overshadowed by economic interests.

5- What role do private developers and investors play in influencing urban policy and neighborhood transformation?

A major one. In many ways, they set the agenda. Developers have access to policymakers and resources, and when their profit aligns with urban growth, they get approvals fast. They're building the future of Tehran, but not necessarily with the public interest in mind. Unless we regulate them properly for example, by requiring social contributions or mixed-use development they'll continue building for the top 5% and leaving everyone else out.

6- Do you think social and spatial segregation is becoming a growing issue in Tehran? If yes, are there any policies, interventions, or planning strategies being proposed or implemented to address it?

Segregation is growing, yes. And it's not just physical it's mental too. People from different backgrounds no longer interact because they literally don't share the same spaces. There are some ideas floating around in academic and policy circles, like mixed-income housing or better distribution of public services, but very few of them have reached the implementation stage. I think we need stronger urban leadership on this.

7- What planning or policy strategies could be implemented to ensure more inclusive urban development?

There are a few things we could start with. One: require affordable housing in every large development. Two: improve rent regulations to stop mass evictions. Three: invest more in the public realm parks, libraries, transit especially in neglected neighborhoods. And finally, open up the planning process so more residents can participate. We need to plan with people, not just for them.

8- How do you interpret this trend what do gated communities represent in your view?

To me, they represent fear. People are scared of crime, pollution, bad infrastructure so they create private versions of a better city. But that's not sustainable. Instead of

fixing the whole city, people are retreating into protected bubbles. It's understandable, but also deeply problematic. Gated communities can be convenient for a few, but they limit interaction, understanding, and trust across social groups.

9- What are your thoughts on the future of Tehran's urban form in relation to socio-spatial division?

If we don't act soon, Tehran will become even more polarized. Wealthy enclaves will flourish, and the rest of the city will struggle. We're already seeing this. But I believe change is possible. With the right policies, with a commitment to equity, we can still build a city that offers opportunity for everyone not just those behind walls.

### **Interview 3 – Urban Sociologist and Researcher, Age 42**

1• How would you define the role of urban planning in the emergence of gated communities and gentrified neighborhoods in Tehran?

Urban planning has been both a driver and an accomplice in these trends. Gated communities and gentrification didn't happen by accident they're often outcomes of specific planning choices. In Tehran, the emphasis on real estate as an economic engine, combined with a lack of strong social housing policies, created the perfect environment for exclusivity to flourish. Planning decisions like rezoning areas for high-end residential towers basically opened the door for private, isolated developments.

2• Are there specific urban policies or land-use strategies that have facilitated gentrification in certain areas?

Definitely. Policies that allow urban renewal without strict protections for existing residents are a major factor. The government encourages redevelopment in older, central neighborhoods, offering incentives like tax breaks or fast-track approvals for luxury projects. At the same time, there's almost no requirement to maintain affordable housing. So naturally, wealthier people move in, prices rise, and longtime residents are squeezed out.

3• In your view, what are the main consequences of gentrification and gated communities for housing affordability and social equity?

The consequences are quite severe. Housing becomes less accessible, especially for younger people and lower-income families. Social mixing declines because neighborhoods become homogenized only people with a certain income level can stay. And psychologically, it creates a sense of us vs. them. Gated communities send

a message that some people need to be protected from others, rather than living with others. It's deeply damaging for the social fabric of a city.

4• Do current planning policies address issues of displacement or social exclusion?

Not in any real, effective way. There are some nice words about social inclusion in policy documents, but enforcement is almost nonexistent. Planning authorities might require a token amount of public space or a few affordable units, but it's not enough to truly prevent displacement. Overall, the system still favors profit over people.

5• What role do private developers and investors play in influencing urban policy and neighborhood transformation?

An enormous role and it's growing. Developers lobby for favorable zoning, influence master plans, and even fund some public infrastructure in return for building rights. When real estate development becomes such a big part of the economy, it's inevitable that developers gain power. The problem is, their priorities maximizing returns rarely align with creating equitable, inclusive communities.

6• Do you think social and spatial segregation is becoming a growing issue in Tehran? If yes, are there any policies, interventions, or planning strategies being proposed or implemented to address it?

Yes, segregation is definitely intensifying. You can see it in the way entire districts are transforming luxury towers on one side, neglected neighborhoods on the other. There are a few experimental projects focused on social housing or mixed-use development, but they're small in scale and often poorly funded. We need much more ambitious, citywide strategies if we want to seriously tackle segregation.

7• What planning or policy strategies could be implemented to ensure more inclusive urban development?

One approach would be mandatory inclusionary zoning every large development must include a percentage of affordable units. Another strategy is to heavily invest in affordable housing in all districts, not just the cheaper southern parts. We also need more mixed-use developments that combine housing, retail, and public services this keeps neighborhoods diverse and vibrant. And finally, strengthen tenant protections to stop mass evictions when neighborhoods upgrade.

8• How do you interpret this trend what do gated communities represent in your view?

I see gated communities as a response to urban failure. When people don't trust public services to provide safety, green space, or good schools, they retreat into private enclaves. It's understandable everyone wants a better quality of life but it's a symptom of a city that isn't delivering for all its citizens. Rather than fixing the whole system, we're building bubbles of privilege.

9• What are your thoughts on the future of Tehran's urban form in relation to socio-spatial division?

If we don't act fast, Tehran will become even more fragmented. We'll see richer and richer areas side by side with areas falling into decline. It's not just about aesthetics it will have real consequences for social stability, economic opportunity, and quality of life. We still have a chance to change direction but it's going to require bold leadership and a real commitment to inclusive growth.

#### **Interview 4 – Urban Development Consultant, Age 50, Former City Council Advisor**

1- How would you define the role of urban planning in the emergence of gated communities and gentrified neighborhoods in Tehran?

Urban planning plays a fundamental but often contradictory role. On one hand, it's supposed to manage growth and ensure livability; on the other hand, it's often driven by political and economic pressures that result in exclusivity. In Tehran, we've seen urban planning used to justify projects that cater to a narrow demographic upper-income groups by labeling them modernization or urban renewal. In reality, these decisions have directly supported the expansion of gated complexes and the gentrification of areas like Niavaran or even parts of Ekbatan.

2- Are there specific urban policies or land-use strategies that have facilitated gentrification in certain areas?

Yes. Land readjustment programs, redevelopment incentives for old buildings, and relaxed height or density rules in targeted districts have all facilitated it. For example, when areas like Sadeghiyeh or Yousef Abad became eligible for vertical development, developers jumped in, bought older buildings, and replaced them with luxury apartments. But there's no parallel effort to protect renters or long-term residents. So displacement happens silently, and the demographic of a neighborhood changes within just a few years.

3- In your view, what are the main consequences of gentrification and gated communities for housing affordability and social equity?

The biggest issue is access. Housing becomes a financial asset rather than a human right. When prices rise, younger families, low-income groups, and even middle-class professionals find themselves pushed to the margins of the city. And socially, the sense of shared urban identity weakens. Gated communities promote exclusivity by design they limit who belongs, who is welcome. This doesn't just affect the people outside the gate; it creates anxiety even inside a fear of difference, of the other.

4- Do current planning policies address issues of displacement or social exclusion?

Not really. There's very little discussion of displacement in planning guidelines, and social exclusion is rarely a measurable outcome. Most policies still treat housing as an economic engine, not a social foundation. We don't have mechanisms to track who's being pushed out or tools to prevent it. That's a big gap and it's one of the reasons gentrification continues unchecked in many neighborhoods.

5- What role do private developers and investors play in influencing urban policy and neighborhood transformation?

They are key players, and in many cases, they have more influence than planners. Developers bring the capital, and municipalities under pressure to show progress often bend rules to attract investment. This means developers can essentially shape a neighborhood based on market demand, not community need. Unless there's strict regulation and citizen oversight, the balance of power shifts entirely toward private interests.

6- Do you think social and spatial segregation is becoming a growing issue in Tehran? If yes, are there any policies, interventions, or planning strategies being proposed or implemented to address it?

Yes, it's growing visibly. Look at District 1 versus District 19 they could be in different countries. In terms of policies, there are sporadic efforts like rent assistance or land value capture ideas but nothing systematic or large-scale. We need integrated urban policies that link housing, transportation, public services, and equity goals. Right now, it's fragmented, and that limits any real progress.

7- What planning or policy strategies could be implemented to ensure more inclusive urban development?

We could start with mandatory inclusionary zoning and social impact assessments for every large project. Establishing public-private partnerships where developers must contribute to affordable housing or public infrastructure could help. Also, rethinking the allocation of public land not selling it to the highest bidder, but using it for mixed-income housing or community services would be a bold and necessary

shift. Transparency in planning decisions is also essential. People must be involved in shaping the future of their neighborhoods.

8- How do you interpret this trend what do gated communities represent in your view?

They represent a loss of faith in the public city. When people don't feel safe, or when public spaces are neglected, the private sector steps in to offer controlled environments. But they are also symbols of inequality they say: "we have the resources to separate ourselves." That's dangerous for democracy, because cities are supposed to be shared, open, and negotiated spaces.

9- What are your thoughts on the future of Tehran's urban form in relation to socio-spatial division?

If nothing changes, Tehran will become more fractured. You'll have pockets of wealth, luxury, and green space surrounded by congested, underserved zones. And the longer we ignore this, the harder it becomes to fix. But I'm still hopeful. Urban form is not destiny. If we act now through inclusive policies, creative planning, and more equitable investments Tehran can still evolve into a more balanced and livable city for everyone.

#### **Interview 5 – Urban Policy Analyst, Age 40**

1• How would you define the role of urban planning in the emergence of gated communities and gentrified neighborhoods in Tehran?

Urban planning in Tehran has unfortunately become quite reactive rather than proactive. Instead of guiding equitable growth, planning often follows where private interests and financial power lead. When you leave neighborhoods open to market forces without clear social objectives, it's inevitable that gentrification and gated communities emerge.

Urban plans that emphasize economic competitiveness but neglect affordable housing or social inclusion directly contribute to this reality.

2• Are there specific urban policies or land-use strategies that have facilitated gentrification in certain areas?

Yes, particularly policies that promote densification and renewal without ensuring protections for vulnerable populations. Zoning changes allowing for luxury high-rises in historically middle-income neighborhoods are a big factor. Another major driver is infrastructure projects like metro expansions or highway upgrades which make certain areas much more attractive for investment, but again, without plans to preserve affordability.

3• In your view, what are the main consequences of gentrification and gated communities for housing affordability and social equity?

They push out long-term residents and create fragmented urban societies. Affordability suffers massively not just in the newly gentrified areas, but also nearby neighborhoods. We see whole communities being uprooted. In terms of social equity, it fosters exclusion, resentment, and growing social gaps between those who can afford to live in upgraded areas and those who cannot. It's not just about physical displacement it's about emotional displacement too.

4• Do current planning policies address issues of displacement or social exclusion?

In most cases, no. There are guidelines about livable neighborhoods and sustainable development, but these are often superficial. Enforcement is weak, and there's little political will to prioritize inclusion over revenue generation from property taxes and real estate development. The people most at risk renters, low-income families are largely left to fend for themselves.

5- What role do private developers and investors play in influencing urban policy and neighborhood transformation?

They have a huge influence. Developers often propose projects directly to city councils, negotiate special permissions, and push for zoning changes. Their financial clout means their voices are heard much more than ordinary residents. In some cases, even master plans are revised to accommodate the interests of major investors. This imbalance shifts urban transformation toward serving private profits rather than public good.

6- Do you think social and spatial segregation is becoming a growing issue in Tehran? If yes, are there any policies, interventions, or planning strategies being proposed or implemented to address it?

It's a very serious and growing issue. You can clearly see economic borders within the city: Districts 1 and 2 are one world; Districts 17 and 18 are another. Some minor interventions exist for example, small housing subsidy programs but they're very fragmented and insufficient. There's no unified, citywide policy to genuinely bridge these divides yet.

We need serious investment in affordable housing, public services, and mobility options across all districts.

7- What planning or policy strategies could be implemented to ensure more inclusive urban development?

One strong idea is mixed-income development policies making sure that every large project includes a variety of housing types. Another is rent control regulations to slow down the rate of displacement. We also need stronger community consultation mechanisms real participation, not just symbolic public hearings. Finally, city governments should directly invest in affordable housing projects instead of leaving everything to the private sector.

8- How do you interpret this trend what do gated communities represent in your view?

I see gated communities as a reflection of fear and mistrust in the public realm. They show that people feel safer creating private micro-cities than relying on the collective urban environment. It's sad, really it means the social contract is breaking down. Instead of building better cities for everyone, we build walls to keep others out.

9- What are your thoughts on the future of Tehran's urban form in relation to socio-spatial division?

Without major reforms, Tehran's future will be even more fragmented. Luxury enclaves will expand, and informal settlements will grow on the margins.

But it doesn't have to be that way. If we embrace inclusive planning now by promoting social housing, public amenities, and mixed-use neighborhoods we can still reverse the trend. It's a matter of political choice and civic engagement.

### **Interview 6 – Academic Researcher in Urban Geography, Age 46**

1• How would you define the role of urban planning in the emergence of gated communities and gentrified neighborhoods in Tehran?

Urban planning, ideally, should be a tool to guide inclusive development. But in Tehran, it often works as a facilitator of exclusion. Gated communities and gentrified zones are largely outcomes of state-supported planning frameworks that allow unequal development. Instead of directing growth toward balance, planning here ends up reinforcing privilege by allowing projects that isolate, privatize, and fragment the city.

2• Are there specific urban policies or land-use strategies that have facilitated gentrification in certain areas?

Yes, especially land-use rezoning, plot consolidations, and development incentives in older neighborhoods. Policies that label certain districts as underdeveloped or renewal priority areas open the door for demolition and luxury redevelopment. Areas like Tajrish, Farmanieh, and parts of Shahrak Gharb have gone through this. They

were once mixed- income but are now increasingly elite. The lack of social safeguards in these policies speeds up gentrification.

3• In your view, what are the main consequences of gentrification and gated communities for housing affordability and social equity?

The most direct impact is that people can no longer afford to live in their own neighborhoods. Rental prices rise sharply. Property becomes speculative. You also lose diversity cultural, generational, and economic. Gated communities in particular build physical and psychological walls that send a message: This space is not for everyone.

It divides the city socially and emotionally.

4• Do current planning policies address issues of displacement or social exclusion?

Not effectively. There's limited acknowledgment of displacement mostly in academic reports, not official planning language. Social exclusion is rarely addressed as a policy target. Planning documents often focus on infrastructure and beautification without asking: Who benefits from these changes? Who gets pushed out? There's a need for much deeper social awareness in policy-making.

5• What role do private developers and investors play in influencing urban policy and neighborhood transformation?

They play a dominant role, especially in high-value districts. Many urban transformation projects in Tehran are initiated not by municipal goals but by developers identifying lucrative areas. Because local governments rely on construction-related revenue, they're often complicit fast-tracking permits, relaxing regulations, and sometimes even adjusting land-use plans. This undermines public-interest planning.

6• Do you think social and spatial segregation is becoming a growing issue in Tehran? If yes, are there any policies, interventions, or planning strategies being proposed or implemented to address it?

Yes, very much so. Tehran is becoming a city of islands gated north, informal south, congested center. A few pilot programs try to address this like "neighborhood empowerment plans" but they lack continuity, funding, and legal teeth. There's no large- scale integrated plan for reversing segregation. What's missing is a political willingness to confront the economic and social drivers of this division.

7• What planning or policy strategies could be implemented to ensure more inclusive urban development?

First, mandate social housing quotas in new residential developments. Second, introduce rent stabilization policies in high-pressure areas. Third, open up planning processes to real community participation not just token public hearings. Also, improve access to services in underserved districts so people don't feel forced to move for basic needs. Inclusivity needs to be built into the DNA of every project from zoning to budgeting.

8• How do you interpret this trend what do gated communities represent in your view?

They're the architectural expression of inequality. Gated communities create a curated, exclusive version of city life that shuts out the unpredictability and richness of urban diversity. They offer comfort, yes, but at the cost of public engagement. They imply that the rest of the city is unsafe, unclean, or unworthy. In doing so, they weaken the civic culture of shared responsibility.

9• What are your thoughts on the future of Tehran's urban form in relation to socio-spatial division?

If current trends continue, Tehran may become more segmented and socially rigid. The contrast between premium zones and neglected areas will deepen. But cities are dynamic with the right policies, it's still possible to bridge the gaps. We need long-term urban equity planning, better regional balance, and strong public

Institutions that can resist speculative pressures. Otherwise, the city's future may look modern on the surface but deeply divided at its core.

### **Interview 7 – Dr. Shahrzad , Urban Planning Professor,**

1- How would you define the role of urban planning in the emergence of gated communities and gentrified neighborhoods in Tehran?

Urban planning plays a critical but double-edged role here. On one hand, it's supposed to guide equitable development. But in Tehran, many plans indirectly support gentrification through zoning upgrades, infrastructure investment in selected areas, or relaxed density rules in high-demand neighborhoods. Gated communities emerge when planning prioritizes safety and exclusivity for the upper class instead of promoting mixed communities.

2- Are there specific urban policies or land-use strategies that have facilitated gentrification in certain areas?

Absolutely. Land-use changes in places like Districts 1, 2, and even parts of 3 have allowed for luxury redevelopment. Older homes are demolished and replaced with towers marketed toward upper-middle-income groups. Policies supporting increased Floor Area Ratios (FAR) and luxury amenities often ignore long-term residents or tenants with rent control. These policies rarely include protections against displacement.

3- In your view, what are the main consequences of gentrification and gated communities for housing affordability and social equity?

The consequences are significant. Prices go up, and long-term residents are pushed out. Gated communities make this more visible they create an us and them feeling in the city. Over time, Tehran is becoming more spatially segregated. Areas like Ekbatan once represented social diversity; today, they are under pressure to upgrade, which leads to social exclusion.

4- Do current planning policies address issues of displacement or social exclusion?

Not effectively. Most policies are economic or aesthetic in nature they're about raising value, beautifying, or modernizing. There's no strong legal framework to protect vulnerable populations from displacement or to require inclusion in new developments.

5- What role do private developers and investors play in influencing urban policy and neighborhood transformation?

They play a major role. Developers often lobby local councils or use their influence to bypass zoning restrictions. Their vision is profit-driven, so naturally they prefer high- end projects. This shapes the whole urban agenda, and unfortunately, it means that public interest is often neglected.

6- Do you think social and spatial segregation is becoming a growing issue in Tehran? If yes, are there any policies, interventions, or planning strategies being proposed or implemented to address it?

Yes, segregation is clearly increasing. Look at northern vs. southern Tehran even in architecture and street design, the contrast is sharp. There are occasional initiatives, like cultural projects in southern districts or public housing plans, but they lack continuity and political support.

7- What planning or policy strategies could be implemented to ensure more inclusive urban development?

We need participatory planning bringing residents into the conversation. Also, inclusionary zoning, social housing mandates, and protection of rental units would help. More than anything, planners need to think long-term and socially not just economically.

8- How do you interpret this trend what do gated communities represent in your view?

They represent fear and withdrawal. Fear of crime, fear of difference. They reflect growing inequality and the failure of the city to offer security and dignity to everyone. While they might feel safe, they break down the social contract in the city.

9- What are your thoughts on the future of Tehran's urban form in relation to socio-spatial division?

Unfortunately, unless something changes, the divisions will deepen. We'll have more vertical gated towers in the north and neglected peripheries in the south. But I still believe that with political will and better planning tools, we can move toward a more inclusive Tehran.

Interview 8 – Mr. Hamed Karimi

How would you define the role of urban planning in the emergence of gated communities and gentrified neighborhoods in Tehran?

Urban planning in Tehran has become more reactive than strategic. Over the years, instead of proactively guiding development, many plans have simply followed market trends. Gated communities and gentrified pockets are a response to demand for security and modernity, but these outcomes were never publicly debated or deeply assessed. So while planning tools like zoning and land readjustment have supported them, it wasn't always intentional it was more like silent acceptance.

Are there specific urban policies or land-use strategies that have facilitated gentrification in certain areas?

Yes, particularly policies that allowed for high-density development without affordable housing obligations. For example, the incentive-based redevelopment of aging neighborhoods in central Tehran often led to upscale housing. And because there's no rent control or social housing requirement, this becomes an open door for gentrification. Developers are given too much freedom to transform low-income areas into expensive ones.

In your view, what are the main consequences of gentrification and gated communities for housing affordability and social equity?

It undermines both. You end up with people being priced out of neighborhoods where they may have lived for generations. This isn't just about affordability it's also about cultural loss. Gated communities then add another layer by physically separating people. The city becomes fragmented, and the concept of public space starts to weaken.

Do current planning policies address issues of displacement or social exclusion?

Not in a meaningful way. We've had proposals over the years, but implementation is lacking. The focus remains on infrastructure, aesthetics, and economic value. Issues like displacement are treated as unfortunate side effects, not urgent problems. I believe social sustainability should become a required part of every urban project evaluation.

What role do private developers and investors play in influencing urban policy and neighborhood transformation?

They play a dominant role. Sometimes too dominant. It's no secret that in some areas, developers influence land-use change proposals and even design regulations. While their investment is necessary, the lack of strong regulatory oversight leads to unequal outcomes. In effect, developers are steering urban change more than planners are.

Do you think social and spatial segregation is becoming a growing issue in Tehran? If yes, are there any policies, interventions, or planning strategies being proposed or implemented to address it?

Yes, very much so. Northern and southern Tehran feel like two different cities now. There are some recent talks about "equity-based planning," but we need legal reforms and institutional commitment to turn ideas into policies. For now, the interventions are small-scale park creation, pedestrian zones, cultural centers but not enough to reverse the deeper inequalities.

What planning or policy strategies could be implemented to ensure more inclusive urban development?

First, we need a shift in mindset. Urban development isn't just economic; it's also social and cultural. We should introduce mixed-income housing requirements, protect rental stock, and design inclusive public spaces. Also, capacity building at the municipal level is important planners and district officials need better training and tools to manage growth equitably.

How do you interpret this trend what do gated communities represent in your view?

They reflect both aspiration and anxiety. For some, it's about prestige and status. For others, it's a way to retreat from insecurity and social tensions. But the net effect is exclusion both visual and social. Gated communities aren't just walls; they send a message about who belongs and who doesn't.

What are your thoughts on the future of Tehran's urban form in relation to socio-spatial division?

If current trends continue unchecked, we'll see a city of enclaves. Small pockets of affluence surrounded by areas of neglect. But it doesn't have to be this way. With stronger institutions, public engagement, and inclusive planning, we could still redirect the city toward a more integrated form. But time is limited, and the gap is growing fast.

### **INTERVIEW 9 , Rmtin ,**

1. How would you define the role of urban planning in the emergence of gated communities and gentrified neighborhoods in Tehran?

Urban planning has both a direct and indirect role. In many cases, the original purpose of the master plans was to improve infrastructure, housing quality, and urban connectivity but what actually happened in practice was selective development. Gated communities weren't necessarily planned as such, but the way we approved certain land uses and gave permits in higher-income zones paved the way for them. Similarly, with gentrification, planning decisions often favor land value increase rather than social cohesion.

Are there specific urban policies or land-use strategies that have facilitated gentrification in certain areas?

Yes, especially policies that support redevelopment of older housing stock. The urban renewal programs in central Tehran encouraged demolishing small, affordable homes and replacing them with larger, expensive apartments. There's also been a tendency to concentrate investments like parks, metro stations, or upscale shopping areas in already affluent zones. These land-use decisions clearly push gentrification forward.

In your view, what are the main consequences of gentrification and gated communities for housing affordability and social equity?

They widen the gap. In gentrified neighborhoods, longtime renters often can't afford the new costs of living, so they move out. And in gated communities, you're creating physical and psychological barriers. The city becomes less of a shared space and

more of a fragmented one. Social mixing declines, and that's a big loss for any urban society.

Do current planning policies address issues of displacement or social exclusion?

No, not really. The issue of displacement is rarely part of the conversation. There's talk about urban upgrading and beautification, but very little about what happens to the people who can't keep up with the rising cost of living. Most planning documents still prioritize the built environment not the people in it.

What role do private developers and investors play in influencing urban policy and neighborhood transformation?

They are deeply influential. A lot of urban transformation today is driven by investor interest. They target profitable districts, build luxury towers, and reshape whole blocks. What's worrying is that municipal authorities often follow their lead instead of setting boundaries. Developers sometimes have more control over what gets built than urban planners themselves.

6. Do you think social and spatial segregation is becoming a growing issue in Tehran? If yes, are there any policies, interventions, or planning strategies being proposed or implemented to address it?

Absolutely, and it's happening faster than many people realize. The city is polarizing. North Tehran is being built up into a world of its own, while many other areas fall behind. We don't yet have serious, long-term policies to reduce segregation. Some pilot projects promote affordable housing or cultural integration, but these are limited in scale and usually underfunded.

What planning or policy strategies could be implemented to ensure more inclusive urban development?

We need to rethink how we distribute resources. Equal investment in infrastructure, better rent control policies, mixed-income housing, and community engagement processes during planning are essential. We also need transparency in urban decision-making. Inclusive cities don't just happen you have to plan for them deliberately.

How do you interpret this trend what do gated communities represent in your view?

To me, they represent anxiety. A reaction to instability. People are building walls literally to gain a sense of control. But this comes at a price. These spaces reinforce a sense of otherness in the city. They're a sign that people no longer trust the public space or the larger urban system.

What are your thoughts on the future of Tehran's urban form in relation to socio-spatial division

If nothing changes, Tehran will continue moving toward fragmented development more isolation, more exclusion. But if planning becomes more socially conscious, and if we give voice to underrepresented communities, there's a chance to reverse some of these trends. It won't be easy, but it's necessary if we want a livable city for everyone.

## **INTERVIEW 10**

### **Urban Stakeholders (Planners, Policymakers, Academics) – Hamidreza Mobasherian**

1- How would you define the role of urban planning in the emergence of gated communities and gentrified neighborhoods in Tehran?

The emergence of gated communities and gentrified neighborhoods in Tehran is often rooted in systemic issues within urban planning, particularly when institutional corruption allows powerful interest groups to influence decision-making processes through rent-seeking and proximity to political power. These dynamics contribute to spatial and social inequalities by facilitating exclusive and unbalanced urban development. Urban planners play a critical role in addressing these issues by promoting equitable distribution of services and urban amenities, ensuring spatial justice, and creating transparent planning frameworks that reduce opportunities for undue influence and corruption.

2- Are there specific urban policies or land-use strategies that have facilitated gentrification in certain areas?

Yes, certain urban policies and land-use regulations in Tehran have inadvertently facilitated gentrification most notably, the legal provision that allows for monetary compensation in lieu of stricter enforcement or penalties for urban violations. While regulations technically exist, in practice, violations are often addressed through financial fines rather than criminal or administrative consequences, and rarely result in demolition or reversal of illegal construction. This leniency disproportionately benefits wealthier individuals and developers, enabling them to bypass regulations and concentrate investment in affluent areas. As a result, spatial inequality deepens, and affluent neighborhoods continue to expand at the expense of more vulnerable communities.

3- In your view, what are the main consequences of gentrification and gated communities for housing affordability and social equity?

In my view, gentrification and the proliferation of gated communities have significant negative consequences for housing affordability and social equity. These processes limit equal access to urban opportunities, services, and resources especially for lower-income groups. As wealth becomes increasingly concentrated in certain areas, housing prices rise and displacement becomes more common, leading to growing poverty in marginalized neighborhoods. This spatial segregation often contributes to increased social tensions, a rise in crime, and a deepening sense of hopelessness among the younger generation, who feel excluded from the benefits of urban development and upward mobility.

4- Do current planning policies address issues of displacement or social exclusion?

In my opinion, the core urban planning policies in place are generally sound and capable of addressing issues such as displacement and social exclusion. However, the main challenge lies in weak enforcement and the presence of systemic corruption. When regulations are not properly monitored or when violations are addressed solely through financial penalties rather than criminal or administrative consequences, the effectiveness of these policies is significantly undermined. Strengthening oversight mechanisms and introducing more serious legal consequences for violations would enhance policy impact and contribute to more socially inclusive urban development.

5- What role do private developers and investors play in influencing urban policy and neighborhood transformation?

Private developers and investors play a significant role in shaping urban policy and driving neighborhood transformation. While their investments can contribute to urban growth, they also have a responsibility to support social equity. By offering financial incentives or inclusive housing options to lower-income residents, they can help mitigate the negative impacts of gentrification. Additionally, identifying and collaborating with community stakeholders who can contribute to reducing spatial inequality is essential. With the right regulatory framework and social responsibility, private sector involvement can be guided toward more equitable and sustainable urban development.

6- Do you think social and spatial segregation is becoming a growing issue in Tehran? If yes, are there any policies, interventions, or planning strategies being proposed or implemented to address it?

Yes, social and spatial segregation is indeed a growing concern in Tehran. The city's urban development has led to pronounced disparities between affluent northern districts and underprivileged southern areas, exacerbating issues of inequality and social exclusion. Several studies have highlighted the uneven distribution of urban services and amenities, contributing to these disparities. For instance, research

indicates that the least developed areas are predominantly in the south and southeast of Tehran, while the most developed regions are in the north . In response, some policies and interventions have been proposed or implemented to address these issues. The Maskan-e Mehr housing program aimed to provide affordable housing to low-income families. However, evaluations suggest that this initiative may have inadvertently reinforced socio-spatial segregation by relocating residents to peripheral areas with limited access to urban amenities . Moreover, urban renewal projects intended to revitalize certain neighborhoods have sometimes led to gentrification, displacing original residents and further entrenching social divides . To effectively combat social and spatial segregation, it's crucial for urban planning policies to focus on equitable distribution of resources, inclusive development strategies, and active community participation in decision-making processes.

7- What planning or policy strategies could be implemented to ensure more inclusive urban development?

In my view, one of the most fundamental prerequisites for achieving inclusive urban development is the protection of freedom of expression and the empowerment of citizens to voice their concerns. Strengthening civic engagement creates a more transparent and accountable planning system. Once this foundation is in place, legal and institutional reforms can be pursued to combat corruption in urban planning and ensure fair decision- making processes. Additionally, a practical and equitable planning strategy would involve utilizing vacant, underused, or derelict land for public benefit particularly in underserved and marginalized areas. By directing spatial development and investment toward low- income neighborhoods, especially in the southern parts of Tehran, planners can help reduce spatial inequality and create more balanced urban growth.

8- How do you interpret this trend what do gated communities represent in your view?

In my view, the rise of gated communities represents a growing manifestation of corruption and deepening social and spatial inequality. These developments symbolize the increasing privatization of urban space and the retreat of wealthier groups from the broader urban fabric. Rather than addressing the root causes of insecurity or urban dysfunction, gated communities often reinforce exclusion, segregation, and the erosion of collective urban life. Their expansion highlights a city where access to safety, services, and quality of life is increasingly determined by income and privilege.

9- What are your thoughts on the future of Tehran's urban form in relation to socio spatial division?

Unfortunately, if the current trends continue, Tehran's urban form will likely become increasingly fragmented, with more neighborhoods becoming isolated and

privatized. This socio-spatial division could lead to the intensification of inequality, where each area becomes more tailored to the needs and privileges of specific socio-economic groups. Over time, this could exacerbate urban tensions, limit opportunities for social mobility, and create a more polarized city, undermining the principle of an inclusive, shared urban environment.

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