

# Fragmenting and isolating neighbourhoods: a way of creating flexible spaces and flexible behaviours?

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**Abstract** The paper discusses changes that have occurred in Poznań neighbourhoods over the last decades. All issues discussed in the article are in the context of two kinds of flexibility: flexibility of neighbourhood spaces (city-planning meaning) and flexibility of neighbourhood behaviour (sociological meaning). A flexible neighbourhood space is understood here as one allowing various groups of inhabitants conflict-free and liberal use to pursue their individual lifestyles, but also a possibility of entering collective life. Flexible neighbourhood behaviours are such life strategies which are chosen by an individual without restraints resulting from a strictly developed area, formal commands, or cultural rituals. The aim of the paper is to seek an answer to the question of the extent to which fragmented and isolated neighbourhoods turn into a rigidly defined common territory and the extent to which they are a space allowing flexible behaviour patterns, and what social behaviours can be found in those areas. I examine this issue in two perspectives: city-planning (flexibility of neighbourhood spaces) and sociological (flexibility of neighbourhood behaviour).

**Keywords** Flexibility · Fragmenting · Gated communities neighbourhood · Neighbourhood behaviours

## Introduction

For nearly 20 years now, space in Polish cities has been undergoing a process of commodification. The transformation has primarily affected the biggest of them, but it is also visible in smaller towns. Over the last two decades a lot of new categories of objects have appeared in urban public spaces, like class A office blocks, amusement centres, shopping centres, conference facilities, as well as pubs, clubs and Internet cafés (Sagan 2000; Liszewski 2001; Parysek 2005; Zborowski 2005; Maik 2005). They are often established in excellent downtown locations. Also changing has been the neighbourhood space. There have appeared spatially isolated ('gated') communities as well as guarded and monitored modern housing estates offering high, sometimes even very exclusive, standards of living (Jałowiecki and Szczepański 2002; Bachvarov 2005; Kotus 2005a, Szczepański and Ślęzak-Tazbir 2006). Side by side with them one can usually find old, dilapidated and battered tenement houses and run-down courtyards. In the Polish cities one can ever better perceive a division into a 'world of wealth' and a 'world of poverty', of 'glamour' and 'shadow'. This is not

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solely a division at the architectural level, but at a social one as well. The people one can find in commercial public spaces, amusement centres, and on major city promenades are predominantly young, better educated, and richer. The poorer, older and less educated live in the shadow of the ‘urban salon’, in their tenement-house or block-of-flats neighbourhoods and spend time in egalitarian hypermarkets. Naturally, those two worlds have existed in the town of every epoch, but the cities of today have been undergoing very rapid changes and the social rate of urban life has accelerated as it has never done before. Hence also the urban areas of glamour and shade emanate their spatial and social stigmata as they have never done before. Public spaces of great cities are certainly increasingly flexible, more and more open to a variety of users, permitting anonymous and individual behaviours and assorted lifestyles. However, is this flexibility of the urban landscape egalitarian? The city offers a choice, although the choice is guaranteed to the richer members of society. Representatives of the middle class ‘play with the city’ and in the city. Poorer and older persons have fewer choices, or make their choice at an entirely different level (Golka 2005). For some, the eye of a security camera means freedom, for others, a prohibition or at least a warning. Public spaces tend to differentiate into those of freedom and surveillance, into flexible and strictly regulated places, areas of access and exclusion.

There arises a question as to what happens with big-city neighbourhoods. Are they, like public life areas, turning into spaces of individual choice, anonymity understood as freedom of action and flexible lifestyle, but also into spaces of decline, degradation and collective exclusion? Perhaps so. On the one hand, the late twentieth century was a period of blurring of the spatial and social boundaries in the spatial structure of the city. It was the blurring of the clear-cut division into the centre and the periphery. Cities became places of intensification of socio-spatial processes which fragment settlement units and turn them into enclaves. Social micro-worlds alternate. On the other hand, however, the city of today is full of territories, boundaries, fences, and cameras. The urban processes discussed by the founders of the ecological school nearly a hundred years ago are still at work, but their trajectories are much more dynamic and they affect smaller areas. Some contemporary

urban territories are delineated by delicate spatial and social markers, others by restrictive fences, walls, cameras, and security guards. Areas marked by boundaries in a precise and striking way, almost isolated, have their separate history. In this respect a lot has changed since Jacobs’ (1961) “nostalgic Sesame Street”, and the street itself has often become a synonym of threat and exclusion. In contemporary neighbourhoods there appear walls and fences. They seem to be a counterpoint to the flexibility of the urban landscape. But are they really? Does isolation in this case mean the creation of rigid landscapes entailing specified behaviour patterns, or on the contrary, does it contribute to the creation of a flexible city? Perhaps there are no social neighbourhood structures in the seemingly hermetic neighbourhood spaces? Or do they give rise to flexible social behaviours, individuality, and freedom of choice? Does a gated community mean a spatially walled set of unitary lifestyles, and is the area itself a no-man’s land rather than a common territory? Perhaps the seemingly scrupulously delineated neighbourhood spaces give their fenced-in residents a freedom of choice of lifestyles and help them to individualise their behaviour?

The aim of the paper is to discuss the last issues and to seek an answer to the question of the extent to which fragmented and isolated neighbourhoods turn into a rigidly defined common territory and the extent to which they are a space allowing flexible behaviour patterns, and what social behaviours can be found in those areas. We shall examine this issue in two perspectives: city-planning (flexibility of neighbourhood spaces) and sociological (flexibility of neighbourhood behaviour).

A flexible neighbourhood space is understood here as one allowing various groups of inhabitants conflict-free and liberal use to pursue their individual lifestyles, but also a possibility of entering collective life.

Flexible neighbourhood behaviours are such life strategies which are chosen by an individual without restraints resulting from a strictly developed area, formal commands, or cultural rituals.

To illustrate changes in the neighbourhood space of Poznań on the ‘flexible–inflexible landscape’ scale, an analysis was made of selected examples of isolation of housing complexes. The key question here was whether the growing tendency towards

spatial isolation of residents supported or disproved the thesis about the flexibility of the urban landscape.

The discussion of flexible social behaviour is conducted at two planes:

- types of flexible behaviour hindering neighbourly contacts, and
- types of flexible behaviour facilitating neighbourly contacts.

The former covers the increasingly frequent cases of people staying outside their places of residence, and the latter, the ever more popular neighbourly contacts via discussion lists on the Internet.

### **Between the city of flexible landscapes and the spatial isolation of neighbourhoods— a global perspective**

In the literature on the subject, attention is paid to the growing role of broadly understood flexibility in the contemporary life and the domination of socio-spatial networks (Amin 1994; Ong 1999). Flexibility of space and behaviour patterns is also discussed in terms of the urban landscape. Urban space undergoes reproduction as a result of what individual actors do and provokes them into agency and taking causative action (Gottdiener 1985). There develops positive feedback between the user and the area used. At the same time, in the postmodern era the part of territorially defined communities in the life of an individual keeps declining in favour of social networks (Wellman 2001), the role of the Internet as a means of internal communication of various communities keeps growing (Hampton and Wellman 2001), while grass-roots initiatives and the participation of residents in creating urban space tend to increase (Lepofsky and Fraser 2003; Spears 1997). Another manifestation of flexibility is the individuality of lifestyles (Thorns 2002; Elliott and Lemert 2006). Beck (2002) notes that this individualisation of lifestyles results from making oneself the central figure in life, convinced about one's full control over one's fate. The departure from the collectivism of lifestyles is not an exclusive feature of social strata and classes, but it interferes primarily in family and neighbourhood life as well as the private sphere. Individualisation makes possible the simultaneous occurrence of two opposing tendencies: a mass scale

and loneliness (Beck 2002). The contemporary city dweller often 'bowls alone' (Putnam 2000), but in his individual self-reliance he decides to participate in the creation of social networks to satisfy his needs. That is why for a number of residents the fundamental spectacle of urban life shifts to less demanding public spaces, and the everyday nature of family, neighbourhood and occupational spaces is a necessity unworthy of much note. In this way there appear new forms of spending time in the city and new forms of developing space. The lifestyles chosen by an individual and places in the city are more consumption-oriented and more commodified (Corrigan 2003). In particular, a great freedom of choice and flexibility of behaviour patterns thus conceived is now characteristic of the urban middle class (Butler and Robson 2003), while representatives of the 'underclass' have less to say on the subject. For the former the city is growing more flexible, for the latter too constricted.

Side by side with the discussion about the flexibility of contemporary urban socio-spatial worlds, a wide-ranging debate is held on the increasingly mass phenomenon of isolation and the creation of more or less distinct barriers. A special place in the literature is devoted to isolation in neighbourhood space and the appearance of closed (gated, walled) estates, also called urban citadels (Davis 1990), fortified enclaves, barricade perches (Caldeira 1996, 2000; Blakely and Snyder 1997), suburban enclaves, urban fortresses, security-parks, security villages, enclosed neighbourhoods (Landman 2000; Landman and Schönleich 2002), and private neighbourhoods (Glasze et al. 2006). Many researchers throughout the world present examples of physically separated spaces surrounded by walls and fences behind which housing-estate communities spend their lives. 'Spatially isolating communities' can be found in Saudi Arabia (Glasze and Alkhayyal 2002), in cities of South America (Coy and Pöhler 2002), the Republic of South Africa (Jürgens and Gnad 2002), Canada (Grant and Mittelstead 2004), the British Isles (Webster 2001), Indonesia (Leisch 2002), and southern Europe (Munoz 2003).

Blakely and Snyder (1997) observe that gated communities develop as a result of a shaken sense of safety of the city dwellers, but also because of their need to emphasise the preferred lifestyle or membership of a specified social category. One might perhaps extend this categorisation to include the motive of

withdrawing from society and isolation resulting from the individualisation of lifestyles. It should be stated explicitly that today the tendency to become isolated behind gates is being reinforced by the rhythm of life of the postmodern society with its advancing individualisation of personal biographies (Scanzoni 2000; Bauman 2001; Giddens 2001). Spatial isolation, as never before, has come to be a goal in itself, almost a fad (Foucault 1977; Bentham 1995; Wood 2003; Glasze et al. 2006). Thanks to their life on spatially isolated housing estates, their residents have a great choice of lifestyles, can enter into social interactions whenever they wish, but equally easily break off contacts by shutting themselves on their estate or at home.

One may ask if isolation within a gated community is an antithesis of flexible urban landscapes or just the opposite, a documentation of the wish for flexible urban patterns of social behaviour. Perhaps gated communities provoke the thesis that a flexible urban landscape offering a freedom of choice is a kind of utopian dream. In reality, an individual does not wish to make choices and longs for a strictly delimited spatial territory. Flexibility in this case consists in a clear-cut and unequivocal definition of function.

Perhaps it is hard to speak of a single type of flexibility of the city. Thus:

- the flexibility of family spaces and lifestyles in this sphere entails a limitation in the flexibility of neighbourhood and public spaces;
- the flexibility of neighbourhood spaces and lifestyles in this sphere may restrict the flexibility of family and public spaces; and
- the flexibility of public spaces and lifestyles in this sphere may reduce the flexibility of family and neighbourhood spaces.

Likewise, it is hard to speak of a flexibility concerning all the city residents and other users.

### **Dynamics of the contemporary fragmentation and isolation of Poznań neighbourhoods**

A perceptive observer will note that areas of everyday life in the cities of Poland today have been reduced to a flat or house and public places, while the courtyard or square round the corner have become less of an element of the neighbourhood than a spatial

buffer between the dangerous and unpredictable street area and the space of the safe and familiar home. Recently, the buffer has usually been made even more efficient by the addition of a fence, wall, gate, monitoring, and security guards. Following this line of reasoning, one might conclude that living in gated communities is not prompted by a wish to create an integrated community of residents with a group territory of their own, but to become isolated from the rest of the world. What matters is not, with whom we are shut, but from whom we can shut off.

Spatial isolation is a common feature of the new housing units being built in Poland (Jałowicki and Łukowski 2007). It seems to be a broader trend that appeared after 1989 and has manifested itself in Polish neighbourhoods ever since in the tendency to lock staircase doors and individual buildings, and fence off entire areas.

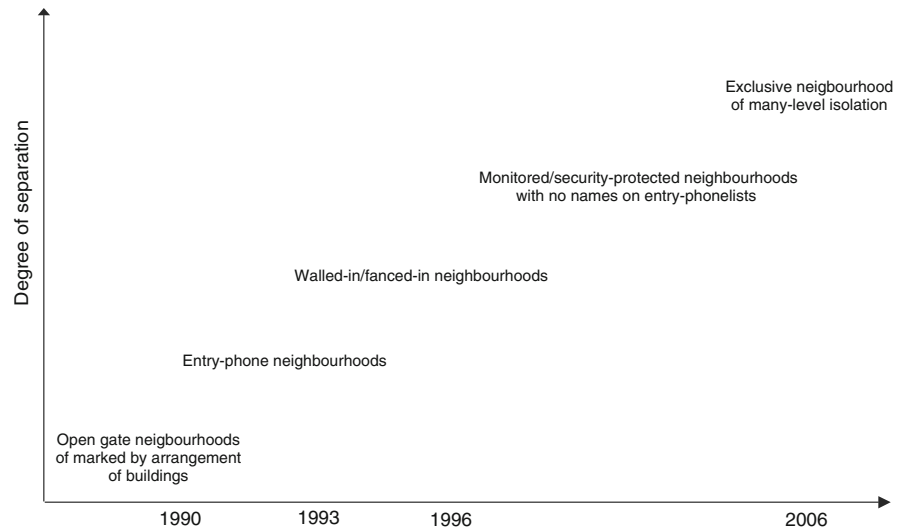
This march towards spatial isolation of the citizens of Poznań, but not only, can be seen to proceed through the following stages (Fig. 1):

- open-gate neighbourhoods delineated by an arrangement of buildings,
- entry-phone neighbourhoods,
- walled-in/fenced-in neighbourhoods,
- monitored/security-protected neighbourhoods with no names on entry-phone lists, and
- exclusive neighbourhoods of many-level isolation.

It is impossible to categorise those stages in measurable and disjoint terms. One can only attempt to construct an arbitrary continuum of the spatial isolation of neighbourhood communities.

The first wave of spatial isolation reached Poznań inhabitants in the late 1980s and early 1990s. It was then that the entry phone became an article of common use. It was installed in old tenement houses, blocks of flats, and new housing units. This technological novelty protecting access to the staircase which had been a practically fully accessible space until recently gave the older residents a shock. On the other hand, younger and middle-aged people were fascinated by the gadget, sometimes they even boasted about it. One can see this period as the most spectacular and widest-ranging stage of formation of ‘gated neighbourhood spaces’. Today an attempt at taking an inventory of all objects in the city’s spatial structure equipped with entry phones

**Fig. 1** Trajectory of spatial isolation of Poznań neighbourhoods after 1990



would be tantamount to listing practically all residential buildings. Those with no such barrier are a rarity at present. The entry phone was certainly the first step towards isolating one's neighbourhood, even though it was not dictated by an attempt to create an integrated neighbourhood community but to provide one's home with a 'protective umbrella'. Recently another big change has been taking place in this respect. Names are being removed from the entry-phone plates with the flat numbers and family names mounted by the door to the staircase. Only flat numbers are left. Most of the residents are probably unaware that by doing this they increase the anonymity of neighbourhood spaces, reinforce the feeling of social disuse of those spaces, and definitely withdraw from staircases and courtyards to their dwellings. In many cases this 'anonymity on request' takes on an even more radical form, viz. the name plate does not appear even on the door to the flat itself (Czarnecki and Siemiński 2004).

The next stage of spatial isolation in Poznań can be dated to 1993. It was the year of completion of one of the first new housing complexes situated in the old, working-class and stereotypically ill-reputed city quarter of Wilda. The estate was surrounded by a fence which separated it from the old buildings and indigenous residents. The fence gates were left open and the gateways had no doors. Soon a discussion started among the estate inhabitants about whether or not the gates should be locked and the gateways equipped with doors. Then the estate began to be penetrated by the residents of the nearby tenement

houses, who devastated the facilities, spoiled the walls, and consumed alcohol. This decided the estate dwellers to close their unit completely and hire security guards.

Then in 1996, in another old city quarter—Jeżyce, one of the first large housing complex was built which was already designed as fenced-in, with cameras, and security guards. The late 1990s saw the start in Poznań of a new type of housing that did not fall much short of the classical definition of a gated community. The gated housing units built at that time were increasingly enriched with playgrounds, lawns, squares and benches, which helped to animate the common inner spaces socially.

The march towards spatial isolation can be said to have reached an end. Today, i.e. in AD 2007, there is only an escalation in terms of form and number of objects. Gated communities acquire ever better service and recreational infrastructure, and more green open spaces. Perhaps this latest stage of the creation of gated neighbourhood spaces can be called one of internally flexible neighbourhoods. In 2006 an investment known as CityPark was begun in Ułańska and Wyspiańskiego streets, the most exclusive gated-community project in Poznań so far. In architectural terms, it is to resemble old cavalry barracks, and incorporates the existing fragments of an old brick wall. The estate is going to include luxury apartment houses, recreational facilities, open spaces, and shopping facilities for the exclusive use of the residents. Apart from a 17-m-long swimming pool on the last floor, a sauna, a gym, and winter gardens,

the estate is planned to have a rare protection measure: a papillary line reader. Some of the investment is to occupy two historic barracks buildings from before the Second World War. All buildings are to blend with the old-growth park trees of the site.

The CityPark investment is not the only gated luxury residential area being built in Poznań today. Others include:

- apartments in a historic palace surrounded by a brick wall,
- a luxury apartment house on the Warta river equipped with a sauna, a fitness club, a swimming pool, and a private marina in front of the building, and
- large luxury flats, so-called lofts, in a historic waste-incinerating facility and an old brewery, with a spa centre, a bathhouse, a sauna, and a tunnel leading to a lake.

Residential Poznań tends to become increasingly spatially gated, isolated and enclave-forming, and selected residential areas are probably going to become distinctly luxurious in the years to come.

### **Case studies of the fragmentation of neighbourhood areas in Poznań: between common territory and no man's space**

To illustrate the spatial fragmentation of Poznań neighbourhoods, two cases were chosen:

- Creation of 'neighbourhoods of two worlds' and 'neighbourhoods within neighbourhoods'. This case describes the blurring of neighbourhood areas through intensification of a 'mosaic' building pattern.
- Fragmentation of a decades-old housing complex through fencing off individual residential blocks. This case describes the blurring of neighbourhood areas through grass-roots parcelling.

Case I—creation of 'neighbourhoods of two worlds' and 'neighbourhoods within neighbourhoods'

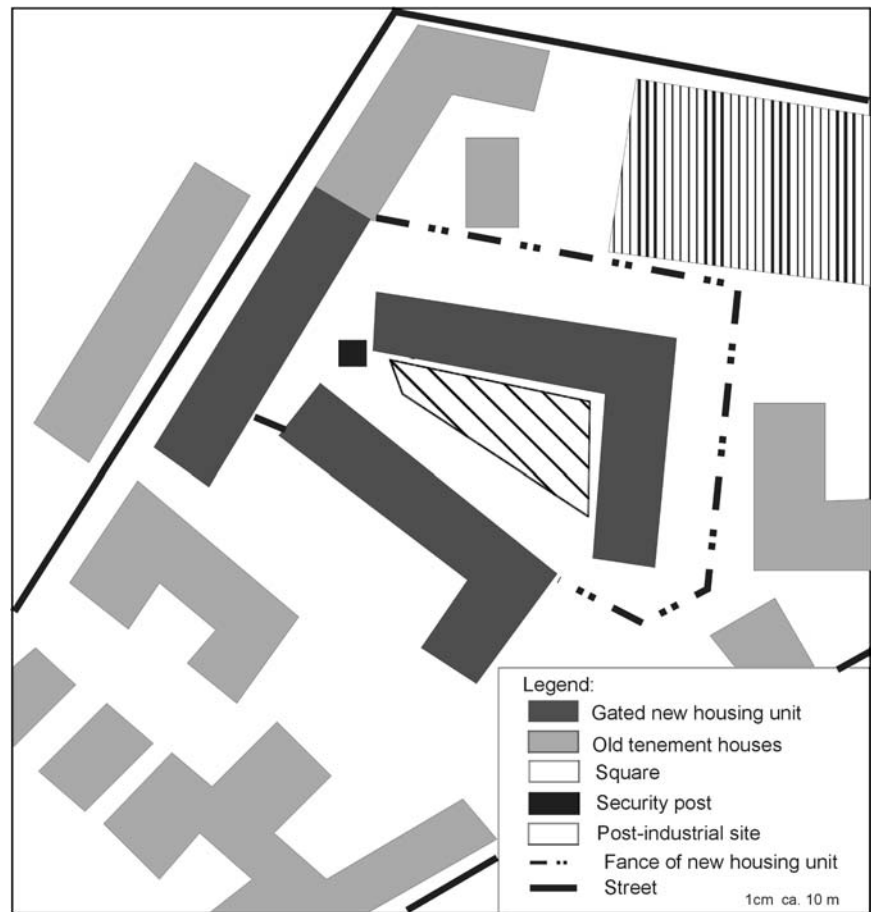
In each of the three examples discussed below, one can speak of the creation of some sort of 'neighbourhoods

within neighbourhoods' or 'neighbourhoods of two worlds'. On the one hand, a new gated housing complex can be regarded as an isolated, hermetic, élite micro-world. The question is, is this an internally flexible world, i.e. one offering its residents a sense of freedom of use and no conflicts in this respect? On the other hand, those gated units perform the function of spatial disintegrators of the old neighbourhoods into which they have been incorporated, but also from which they have been separated. In this case one may ask about an external function of their flexibility.

In the first example (Fig. 2), a new 1993 housing unit has been incorporated into the layout of old tenement houses. In comparison with the surrounding houses, the new complex is technologically advanced and functional. Also different are the social and demographic characteristics of the inhabitants of the two worlds. The new unit is usually inhabited by young, economically active people, often elastically adjusting their pursuits to the time of the day. They spend less time in the neighbourhood, usually dividing the day between work, e.g. from 8.00 to 17.00, and the evening entertainment in pubs and clubs. As is usual with investments fitted into a restricted site, these are strictly speaking a neighbourhood type of units consisting of a few buildings. However, most of those 'new neighbourhoods' are physically isolated from the old buildings surrounding them and rather disruptive to the spatial continuity of the given quarter. A new unit resembles an exclusive island in a sea of dilapidated tenement houses; an island in fact lacking a collective inhabitant in the form of a group of residents, being merely colonised by individuals and atomised families. The territorial closure of the two worlds and socio-demographic differences between them clearly separate the adjacent neighbourhoods. Additionally, the gated housing units built in the early 1990s practically do not offer any diversification of neighbourhood behaviour patterns. They are very compact and have no common inner spaces in the form of squares, playgrounds, etc.

Similar signs of neighbourhood fragmentation can be found in the building pattern of block-of-flats estates. Built in Poland in the years 1946–1989, i.e. the socialist period, they were designed with a flourish on a large scale and had quite a lot of common open spaces. Today, many of those spaces have an unclear ownership status and as such have

**Fig. 2** Gated and walled new housing unit surrounded by old tenement houses



still preserved their open character. However, many have also been filled with new residential buildings and shopping centres. The new housing complexes are fenced off and as gated communities disrupt the old architectural layout (Fig. 3). The building pattern of many of those walled estates is so dense as to make them dormitories rather than multi-functional neighbourhood spaces for various groups of users.

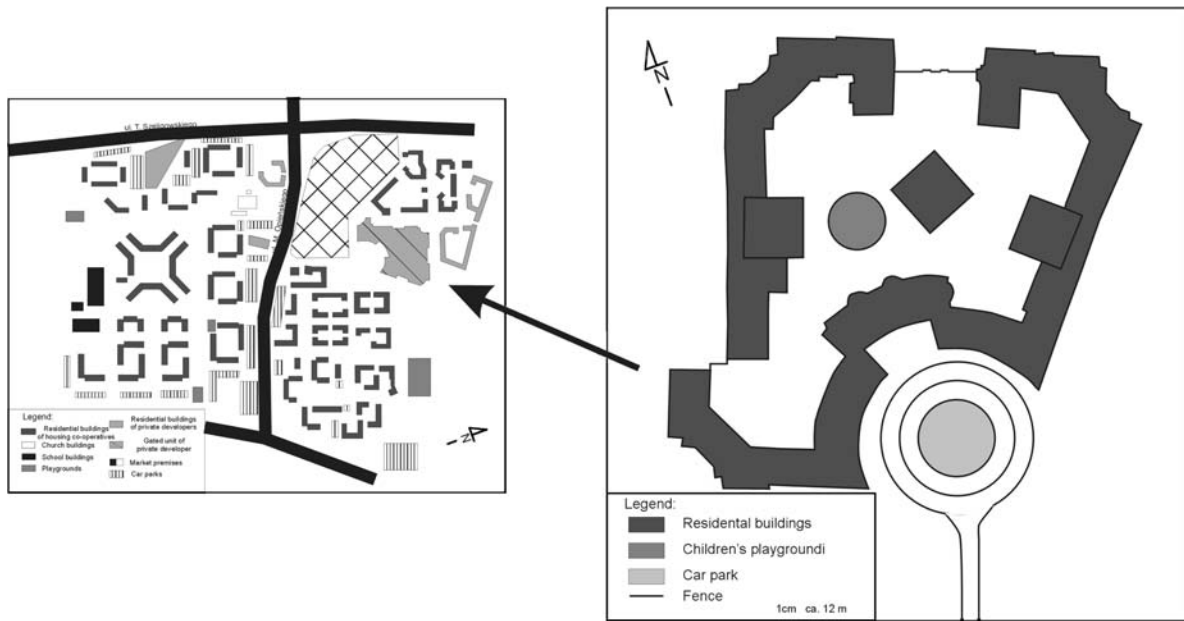
The third example of creating neighbourhoods physically isolated from their surroundings is an even more striking illustration of the commodification of space and spatial fragmentation of the city's inner structures. In one of the Poznań neighbourhoods a years-old kindergarten has been demolished. It was located in the centre of the neighbourhood and incorporated into an expanse of greenery. It was also a local playground. After demolition, a new housing complex is being erected which will be a gated community. In itself, it is a very interesting, fully integrated neighbourhood unit, but it is evidently

dysfunctional towards the neighbourhood into which it is going to be incorporated (Fig. 4).

#### Case II—fragmentation of a decades-old housing complex

A totally different example of a fragmentation of a neighbourhood space is the case of a housing complex built in Poznań in 1928.

The investment was interesting in that from the very start it was a unit physically enclosed by a fence (Fig. 5). It was therefore a forerunner of the gated communities so popular today. Its design was clearly that of a distinct neighbourhood complex made up of three buildings. The remnants of the northern fence can be seen even today. The unit was locked for the night, and order was kept by two watchmen, a day and a night one. Residents returning home at night had to wake up the watchman, who unlocked the



**Fig. 3** Gated housing unit surrounded by a block-of-flats estate

gates for them. Although it had gates and a fence, during the day the unit was open and fully accessible.

With time, however, things changed for the worse: the fence gates were liquidated, a part of the fencing was removed, and the gateways through the buildings were turned into two flats, probably not quite legally. In the 1970s there were still such facilities as a hand-operated mangle used by the residents of the three houses, washrooms in the attics, a children's common room open in the afternoons during the school year, and two playgrounds. There is no doubt that those places also performed hidden functions besides the official ones. On the one hand, they were used by the residents as intended, but on the other, they were places of neighbourly meetings and spontaneous integration. As areas in common use, they intensified various types of neighbourly interactions, from passing the mangle key to the next user to an exchange of information organising the everyday life of the community.

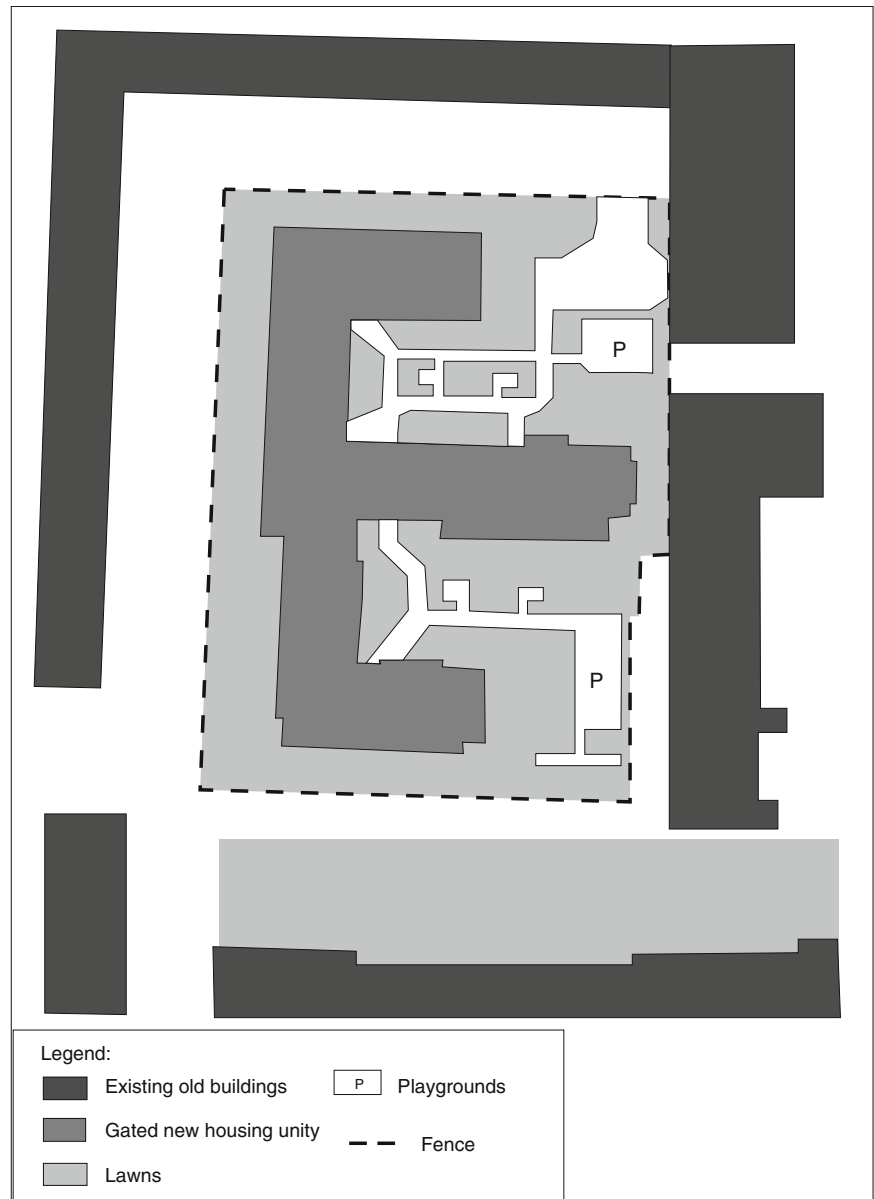
A separate chapter in the story of degradation of the common territory and disturbance of the spatial order of the complex in question was opened with the appearance of the car in mass use. Garages were built that destroyed the children's playground. The close of the twentieth century and the start of the twenty-first saw a huge wave of motorisation of society; for the

complex it meant a flood of individual cars parking in every single free space in its area. In the 1970s the benches disappeared never to come back again, and in the 1990s the last historic part of the wall separating the complex from Szamarzewskiego Street was demolished. However, the fencing has been reconstructed and is now the last physical manifestation of the territorial closure of the housing unit.

Today the complex is going through a crisis of quite a different kind. The inhabitants of the particular blocks seek a consent to manage the space surrounding their blocks. Their only intention is to fence off each of the three blocks, and they reject emphatically the possibility of returning to the prewar conception of closure of the whole complex, which would reconcile the interests of all. They show not a trace of interest in matters of the neighbourhood as a whole. Instead, there is a display of interests of single residents and an individuality of attitudes which comes down to caring only about 'my block', 'my staircase', or possibly even 'my flat'. In other words, the complex inhabitants want to fence off what they think is theirs but, unlike the first, prewar residents of the neighbourhood, what they consider theirs is only the nearest space, viz. a flat or block. They seem unable to grasp that their housing unit can, or even should, be treated as a single neighbourhood.



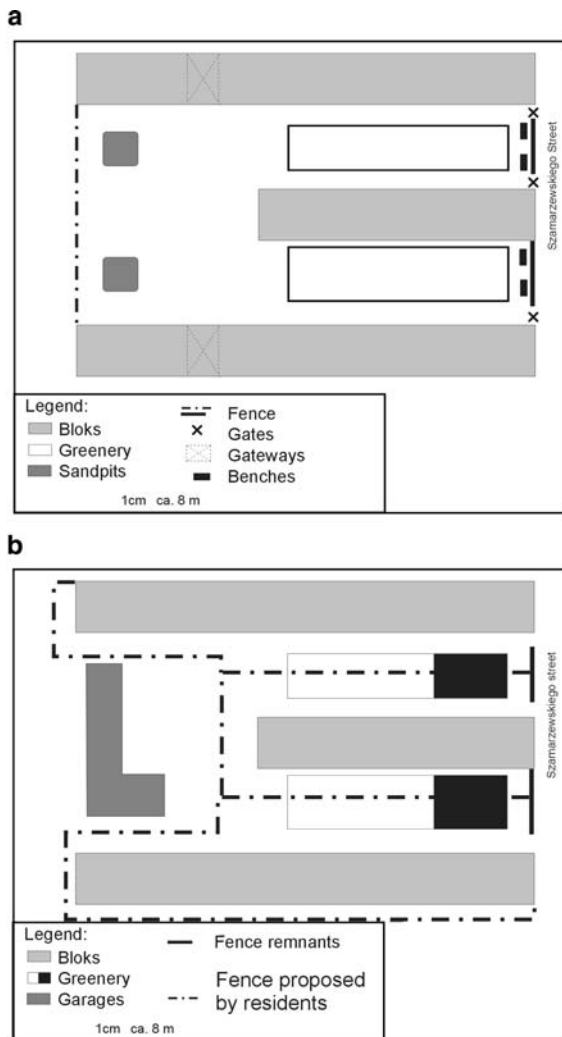
**Fig. 4** New gated housing unit inside a old neighbourhood—“a neighbourhood within a neighbourhood”



**New social behaviour patterns in neighbourhoods**

The year 1989 brought changes in Poland that were felt in many areas of life. The changes could not fail to affect the spatial structures of the city and the lifestyles of their inhabitants as well. The two planes of change are interrelated, although it is hard to establish the strength of the relationships or directions of change. Still, one can observe a change in the lifestyles of residents of Polish cities, especially big ones.

The research conducted by the present author shows that in many of their everyday behaviours some groups of city inhabitants clearly withdraw from living in neighbourhoods and keeping up neighbourly relations. Instead, for some years now Poznań citizens have preferred to spend their time in areas of public life, such as clubs, pubs, cafés, and amusement centres. In comparison with the socialist period, there has been an explosion of such facilities in the city, and one of its effects has been greater activity of the inhabitants in public spaces. For some people, also the Internet has



**Fig. 5** **a** Plan of the Szamarzewski Street unit in 1928, **b** Plan of the Szamarzewski Street unit in 2007 with the resident's proposed fencing and losses in spatial development

become an attractive and accessible urban 'space' in which to spend their free time. Rather than sit in the estate courtyard or visit a place of amusement, they choose to surf Internet pages and maintain interpersonal relations through Internet communicators. Thus, neighbourhoods are becoming a secondary, or even a tertiary, urban scene. The essential city show has stopped being staged on an estate bench or a courtyard lawn. It has shifted to dwelling spaces (the Internet) or public spaces (places of amusement). The people especially susceptible to the change are those who are young, better educated, childless, and better paid. And as the observations of the housing market show, it is

primarily this category of people who buy flats on new gated estates.

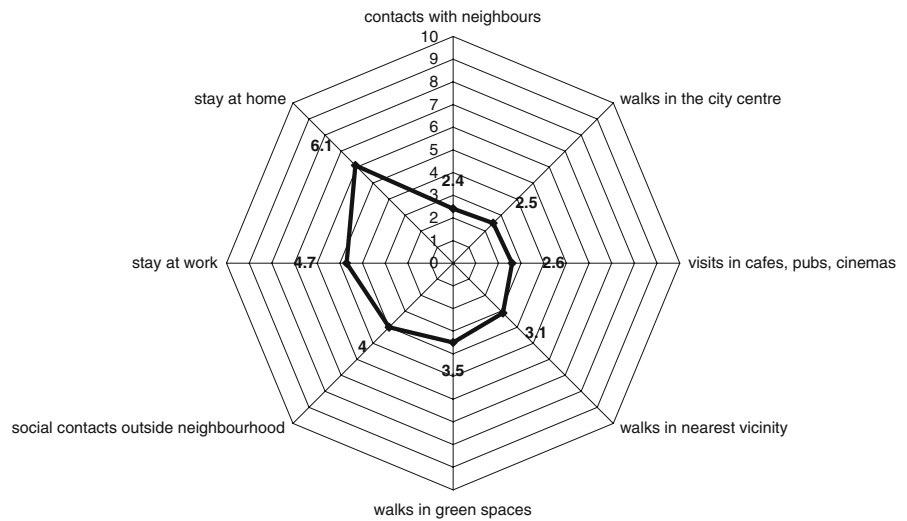
Gated neighbourhoods as dormitories of no man's space: flexible behaviours eliminating neighbourly contacts

In 2000 the present author conducted a survey research among the residents of a new gated housing unit presented in Fig. 2. Apart from their opinions about interpersonal relations, a fact worthy of attention was that they were mostly fairly young couples, often with no children (Kotus 2001). Also, some tenants let their flats to people who were still students or had just graduated. The typical daily routine looked as follows: the morning journey to work/university, work/classes until late in the afternoon, a lunch eaten downtown, a stay in the flat between 18:00 and 20:00, and a return to the downtown area in the evening to spend the time in such places as pubs, clubs and cinemas. During the week most of the residents were away from home and spent their time away from the neighbourhood.

Similar tendencies in the social behaviour of Poznań inhabitants have been confirmed by another of the author's studies (Kotus 2005b). In answer to one of the questions establishing the respondents' attitude towards public places and the neighbourhood space, they were to assess the time they spent in the particular categories of place (on a scale of 1—very little, to 10—very much): stay at home, walks in the nearest (neighbourhood) vicinity, contacts with neighbours, stay at work, social contacts outside the neighbourhood, walks in the city centre, walks in green spaces, and visits in cafés, pubs and cinemas (Fig. 6). Most of the respondents stated they spent most time at home and at work, with social contacts outside the neighbourhood coming third. They devoted the least time to neighbourly contacts. Detailed information about the ways and places of spending time can be derived from a comparison of the results obtained against selected socio-demographic characteristics:

- It is usually young people who claim they spend very little time in their flats. This opinion is especially popular with people between 18 and 25 years of age and those aged between 26 and 39. The number of persons who prefer to spend their leisure time at home grows with age. Among

**Fig. 6** Self-assessment of time spent in selected places of the city



those aged 40–49 the increase is still moderate, but in the group of those between 50 and 59 and over 60 the stay-at-home option is very popular. Walks in the nearest vicinity are mostly the pastime of the 26–39 and over-50 age groups, while contacts with neighbours are more frequent among those over 50. Staying at work is largely the choice of Poznań residents between the ages of 18 and 49, i.e. the group most active economically. Visits in cafés, pubs and cinemas are most popular with persons aged 18–25.

- Respondents with primary and vocational education predominate among those inclined to stay at home and engage in contacts. Staying at work is declared mainly by persons with vocational and secondary education, followed by those with higher education, while those with primary education form the smallest group here. More time is spent on social contacts outside the neighbourhood as well as on visits to the city centre, cafés, pubs and cinemas by people with secondary and higher education. Persons with primary education devote less time than the other groups to walks in green spaces.
- Most time spent at home is declared by respondents living on an estate of single-family houses, slightly less by the inhabitants of a block-of-flats estate. The former category of persons also spend more time on neighbourly contacts and at work. Staying at work also occupies more time of people living in tenement houses than the residents of the block-of-flats estate. The residents of those two last city-planning units spend more

time on social contacts outside their neighbourhoods and slightly more time on visits in cafés, pubs and cinemas.

- Female respondents spend more time than males in their homes and on neighbourly contacts, while men are more inclined than women to give their time to visits in cafés, pubs and cinemas. Sex is not a discriminatory factor when staying at work and other forms of spending time are concerned.

Still another survey research carried out in 2006 highlighted the attitude of the residents of new housing units towards their nearest vicinity—their neighbourhoods—in an even more explicit way (Table 1). While the respondents showed much sentiment for their dwellings and the city, the nearest vicinity and the estate were not highly regarded. The weakest attachment to their direct surroundings was expressed by the inhabitants of housing units built after 1990 and usually walled.

Gated neighbourhoods as areas of virtual contact—flexible behaviours provoking neighbourly contacts<sup>1</sup>

Social contacts organised on-line are an example of a highly casual, anonymous and psycho-socially safe

<sup>1</sup> To show the specific nature of contacts on estate neighbourhood forums, an analysis was made of statements by discussion participants. Those quoted and commented in the article are taken from the open parts of discussion lists of the forums.

**Table 1** Assessment of sentiment towards selected urban areas

Area	Building pattern		
	Block-of-flats estates, 1970–1980	New block-of-flats estates, 1990–2004	Prewar urban-villa estate
Flat, house	53.6	56.8	65.9
Courtyard, nearest vicinity	19.8	5.6	54.0
Housing estate	21.7	−0.8	47.6
City quarter	5.3	−19.1	6.9
City	49.8	62.4	66.8
Other parts of city	−24.7	−4.0	−2.6

*Source:* own research; the index of positive responses was obtained by subtracting the sum of negative responses from the sum of positive ones and ranges from −100 (a highly negative assessment) to 100 (a highly positive assessment)

type of interpersonal relations (Turkle 1995). People seeking contact through Internet communicators can easily establish such relations, and equally easily break them off if they find them too burdensome for any reason. At the time of contact they do not expose their face, dress or behaviour that can serve to identify their personality and attitude. They need not fear that the discussion partner will recognise their social position, class, or age. Also, in most cases members of on-line communities are not constrained by cultural norms and the typical everyday rituals of interaction. In this way on-line contacts have become a very free form of communication with other people; a form which helps to eliminate barriers limiting real-life contacts, e.g. shyness. One may say that they are a highly elastic form of social behaviour.

A special kind of on-line contacts, and a relatively new development in Poznań, is the Internet neighbourhood forum, or the so-called e-neighbourhood. In this case the Internet is a medium allowing a totally new type of neighbourhood behaviour. Such Internet forums are established by the residents of new housing complexes. Through the Internet the residents get acquainted, discuss things, meet in real space, and organise themselves to deal with matters of their estate.

There are two well-developed portals on the Web that can be considered neighbourhood-, or more broadly, estate-oriented. Both are initiatives embracing new gated housing estates. The new technologies employed in the construction of gated communities allow each flat to be equipped with Internet connections. Thus, the residents can join the Internet and then set up and visit estate discussion forums. The two most dynamic portals are:

- The Wilczak Estate Portal ([www.osiedle-wilczak.pl](http://www.osiedle-wilczak.pl)), which has developed from an open discussion forum of the daily “Gazeta Wyborcza” into a semi-gated one. On 20 August 2006, there were 37 households already authorised, eight awaiting authorisation, and one waiting for the procedure to start. Out of those 46 households, there are about 10 participants more active in the discussions. The Forum is administered by two persons who are the central links of the portal.
- The Polanka 2 Estate Portal ([www.polanka2.performer.pl](http://www.polanka2.performer.pl)), which has existed in its present form since 13 May 2006. Between that day and 19 December 2006, 140 people logged on to the portal. There are twelve very active members of the e-neighbourhood, i.e. people who have sent more than 100 posts, or single messages. Another six persons approach 100 in their post counts. Out of those 18 residents, 15 joined the discussion within the first 10 days of forum existence. Students form a small group of users.

The portals are administered by the most active: one or two residents. Both portals offer a similar range of topics, namely:

- an exchange where one can buy or sell practically everything,
- practical information about what is where in the estate vicinity,
- contact with the estate administration, reports of malfunctions,
- an open forum on which the residents start a variety of topics, and
- discussion forums for the residents only.

The most interesting categories for the present study seem to be the last two, which offer the estate inhabitants virtual contact. A discussion forum is only accessible to the residents, and access has to be authorised by the administrators of discussion groups. Each resident has the right to obtain access after the identification of his/her estate address. The administrators of the Wilczak forum additionally demand that other residents should vouch for a new member, or that he/she should contact them directly before authorisation is granted. This is intended to eliminate chance and irresponsible persons from the group of users of the resident's part of the e-neighbourhood forum.

One can hardly imagine a more flexible form of neighbourly contacts. As it turns out, it is flexible and efficient enough to transform partly into actual neighbourly meetings and initiatives. Examples are provided by the following statements made by the surfers.

#### The Wilczak estate forum

On the forum the residents initiate a meeting of the housing community. Through Internet contacts actual meetings are arranged which are then described on the Web as follows: "Generally I'm glad so many nice people live here. There was a moment when I thought the meeting was going to turn into a session of shouting about all the problems and how terrible and hopeless everything was, and costly, too ... our little Polish hell ... but no, I saw that I live among people who are able to come to a constructive decision in a large group and I'm very pleased about it. I'm also pleased there are people who devote their private time to dealing with community matters. It's even crossed my mind that perhaps we the residents should show them some kind of appreciation ... maybe even financial. I don't know about the rules governing housing communities, but personally I'm of the opinion that if someone devotes their time and skills to make our lives better, cheaper, etc., they should be remunerated" (nickname QULL).

The Internet forum also inspires some estate residents to informal actions and those connected with common recreation. Through discussions on the Web, neighbourhood football teams started to be set up: "Me, I'm no football fan (...), but I'm eager to play just for the company and inter-block integration" (nickname WW).

"Well, summing up [the discussion about the setting up of two estate football teams—author's note]: block 1.1—1 person, block 1.2—2 persons, block 1.3—1 person, block 1.4—1 person. We go on collecting applications. Ask friends/neighbours. To play we must have 10 people. We have a half—for the first day not bad anyway" (nickname SIXEN).

#### Polanka 2 estate forum

Persons engaged in the estate portal Polanka2 and participating in forum discussions on a regular basis also try to arrange real-world integration meetings. Here is a poster announcing one of them:

"Visit the one and only forum of the Polanka 2 estate: [www.performer.pl/forum](http://www.performer.pl/forum). There you will find answers to a lot of questions and an opportunity to share your experiences with others. There you will get to know your mysterious neighbours. An additional attraction is a barbecue we are organising on 15 July 2006 in the courtyard between blocks 59 and 63, just by the low wall. We start at 20:00 and invite everyone willing! Bring whatever you like. We guarantee great fun and extra attractions, everybody's welcome! See the forum for details".

The participants do not restrict their activity to the Internet: "You can download the posters, print them, cut with scissors and insert in mailboxes, and if you don't feel like playing the spammer, you can stick them to the entrance door or put them up on the community board..." (nickname RAIN).

However, they note themselves that their estate initiatives meet with poor response of the other residents: "This is by way of summing up our poster action—despite the appearance (for a moment) of a gentleman in his prime and a young couple with a kid (also for a moment), and the registration of three new members on the forum, the operation should be considered a failure. Have we, perhaps, reached a state of saturation?", Rain asks. In reply another discussion participant writes: "I think the other people:

- are too lazy to get around to watching the forum,
- have no Net,
- have no computer and no Net,
- cannot use the above,
- feel no bond with their estate and want to be left alone,
- are asocial,

– prefer calling the police to enjoying themselves...” (nickname KONSIA).

A major precedent in the processes of resident integration has been the proposal one of the discussion participants put forward on the forum: “As a rescuer I’m involved in first-aid instruction. We organise really great courses which you can see on my website. Since the weather isn’t too good for a barbecue, perhaps we could spend a weekend together at a noble site near Poznań, “The Forest Dwelling”, and get integrated, and I would give you a lesson in first aid, together with my team... I think if we collected 12–14 people, it would be an excellent opportunity for integration and spending time together” (nickname SIDI).

The discussion forum is also a place where an attempt is made to establish relations with the nearest neighbours: “hello, hello! Neighbours from gate 59A, please introduce yourselves nicely and present any suggestions you have as to a meeting (for me even the lift is OK—a mirror is there already), I’m keen to meet my neighbours, real space preferred” (nickname KONSIA).

The example of Polanka 2 shows that a very great advantage of the Internet is that it allows fast mobilisation of the active minority which can then employ conventional means to arouse the remaining estate residents and other members of the urban system. One of the forum participants writes: “I think we should pressurise the city Transport/city authorities about both, the so-called no-noise and ‘green’ rail tracks. This is in the interest of all inhabitants, also those who will come to live in the Łacina quarter in the future. The repair of the tram track system will have a years-long effect, and that is why it is so important that it should be done solidly, in accordance with the world standards. We appeal to Ataner, the biggest investor in the area so far, and to the estate management to support our lobbying” (nickname MEJBI).

## Conclusions

In response to the question posed in the title as to whether we can find in the fragmenting and isolating neighbourhoods a tendency towards the formation of a flexible city (a city of flexible neighbourhood

spaces and flexible patterns of neighbourly behaviour), we should consider two issues:

1. So far, changes in the spatial structures in Poznań neighbourhoods have displayed a tendency towards making boundaries more distinct through the introduction of fences, walls, cameras and security guards (Grant and Mittelstead 2004; Low 2004; Jałowicki and Łukowski 2007; Kotus 2007). Spatial fragmentation and turning neighbourhoods into enclaves do not facilitate the development of architecturally flexible neighbourhood spaces. Rather, the spaces created do not allow a wide range of behaviour patterns and provoke conflicts among the various groups of their users.
2. Residents of the new housing units are people who opt for the individualisation of lifestyles unmet in the history of man’s life in the city so far, and they have means of implementing this choice (Giddens 2001, Bauman 2001, Dahrendorf 2003). Undoubtedly, an example of flexible behaviour is the phenomenon of creating e-neighbourhoods. In this case this type of behaviour seems to promote neighbourly relations. Another type of flexible behaviour, but not neighbourly, is the withdrawal from activity in neighbourhoods and its transfer to public places (Blokland and Savage 2001). Here the flexibility of behaviour can be interpreted as a counterpoint to neighbourly behaviour. There is no doubt, however, that the individualisation of lifestyles and the possibility of giving up life in a neighbourhood (while residing in it) are manifestations of the flexibility and freedom of choice of the city dweller at the start of the twenty-first century.

Can we, therefore, conclude our reflections with a simple statement that in architecturally inflexible neighbourhood spaces live people whose lifestyles and urban behaviour patterns are increasingly flexible? Does the example of Poznań corroborate the claim that what we deal with in the big cities of Poland is the architectural inflexibility of neighbourhoods and social flexibility of their residents? Perhaps this conclusion is justified, and more importantly, right.

On the other hand, however, in the very isolation and closure of neighbourhoods one can detect a yearning for a flexibility of behaviour and freedom of choice. Through voluntary spatial separation of the separated, they can establish interpersonal contacts at

will and break them at will. Paradoxically enough, in the isolated milieu of a gated community a person acquires flexibility of behaviour because he himself decides at which moment and in which space he enters into interpersonal contacts. In this case space and time serve, in a sense, the inhabitants of this type of neighbourhoods. They themselves choose the time and the space for their social interactions. Their gated neighbourhood does not oblige them to collective behaviour patterns; what is more, it even individualises the activities of its residents. A natural consequence of gated communities is the transfer of neighbourly contacts to a virtual world. One can hardly imagine a more anonymous, casual and individual form of maintaining interpersonal relations. This type of contact does not oblige one to introduce oneself, and neither does it require the socially elaborate rituals of establishing and breaking relations. In its social pattern, it is a decidedly more flexible behaviour tactic than real-life relations. In a world of cameras and fences, neighbours (often next-door neighbours) get acquainted and chat through Internet communicators (Smith 1992; Wadhwa and Kotha 1999). From a social point of view, it is much simpler and safer to ‘knock’ at the e-mail box of an unknown neighbour than at his door. There is yet another category of behaviour offered by e-neighbourhood: one can passively watch on-line discussions of one’s neighbours while maintaining anonymity.

There is no doubt that the inhabitants of Poznań manifest flexible urban behaviours. They are conducted outside the neighbourhoods, but also within them. The only question to settle is whether Poznań gated communities are an element of a ‘flexible urban landscape’. On the one hand, those areas are not examples of flexibility. They are very compact, densely built neighbourhood enclaves which do not offer a full freedom of choice of behaviour patterns. Through their intensive design, they often give rise to conflicts among various groups of users-inhabitants. On the other hand, those areas are examples of flexibility because they allow their residents to join in the life of the city and neighbourhood, but also to refrain from this type of relations. While living in a gated community, one need not be a member of the neighbourhood community. It can even be said that the Poznań gated communities cultivate the individuality of behaviour patterns. The question is, when

one lives in a Poznań gated community, can one become a member of the neighbourhood community if one wants to give up individuality in favour of the collectivism of behaviour patterns?

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