

The emergence of gated communities in post-communist urban context: and the reasons for their increasing popularity

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Abstract This article considers the emergence of gated communities in the post-communist urban context and discusses the reasons for their increasing numbers and popularity. Narrowing in on a Polish city, the description focuses on the forms that gated communities take and on who the residents are, as well as their motives for moving into gated housing. Other explanations for the emergence of gated communities are reviewed. Interviews with residents of gated communities, a questionnaire, and previous studies on the topic form the basis of the material used in the study. It is argued that the motives for moving to gated communities are tightly intertwined with the communist past. While Polish gated communities are obviously an effect of the spatial planning and the housing market at the national and local level, they are also emerging in reaction to the housing conditions prevailing under communism.

Keywords Gated communities · Post-communist cities · Spatial planning · Housing · Privatization · Poland · Gdansk

1 Introduction

Residential areas defined as ‘gated communities’ have for some time now drawn the attention of urban sociologists and other researchers around the world (Blakely and Snyder 1997; Webster et al. 2002; Low 2001). For quite a while, the topic has been treated as an ‘American’ phenomenon, even though gated and closed residential areas have been visible in cities around the globe. Gated communities have been observed not only in the West under typically ‘Western’ conditions but also in other parts of the world such as Lebanon, South Africa, Saudi Arabia, and Latin America (Webster et al. 2002, p. 316–17).

Since the 1990s the proliferation of gated communities has affected the urban landscapes of European cities (Atkinson and Flint 2004; Graham and Marvin 2001; Glasze et al. 2006). As early as the 1980s some guarded housing complexes emerged along the

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coasts of Spain and France. Within 10 years the phenomenon of gated housing spread to Madrid and Lisbon and further to capitals and other cities in Western Europe (Webster et al. 2002, p. 317). The fall of communism in the early 1990s and the subsequent systemic changes, along with the decentralization and gradual privatization of the housing market, opened up post-communist cities to the gating trend, although the practice was not completely new (Stoyanov and Frantz 2006). Nonetheless, only recently has the occurrence of gated communities in post-communist urban spaces been taken up and discussed by academics. This ‘hot’ new topic in the post-communist framework is still for the most part unexplored.

The aim of this paper is to examine different forms of and explanations for the emergence of gated communities in a post-communist urban context. The focus lies on the forms (location, spread, physical appearance, age, size, social composition, etc.) of and the driving forces (residents’ motives, housing market, spatial planning, etc.) behind the formation of gated communities in a Polish city. The city of Gdansk, in the northern part of Poland, was chosen as a particularly relevant case to illustrate the anatomy of the phenomenon of gating.

This paper starts by giving a short literature review of the topic and continues by presenting research questions for the study on gated communities. It then describes the methods and data used in the study and goes on to define the term ‘gated community’ and present the author’s standpoint on the phenomenon. The next part of the paper presents the empirical findings and examines reasons for the formation of gated communities in the city.

2 Previous studies on gated communities

The term ‘gated community’ entered discussions on urban spaces at the end of the 1980s and the early 1990s when it was initially used to describe the development in American cities. The spread of gated communities began in the US, where their initial function was to “protect estates and to contain the leisure world of retirees” (Low 2001, p. 45). In the 70s and since, closed and gated residential areas have found a broader market among the upper-middle class and the middle class in American cities, increasing already existing cleavages and creating exclusionary patterns in the housing market (Blakely and Snyder 1997; Higley 1995; Lang and Danielson 1997).

The first book to extensively treat the topic of gated communities was *Fortress America: Gated Communities in the United States* (Blakely and Snyder 1997). The authors defined gated communities as “residential areas with restricted access in which normally public spaces are privatized” (1997, p. 2). Among public spaces they include “streets, sidewalks, parks, beaches, rivers, trails, playgrounds—all resources that without gates or walls would be open and shared by all citizens of a locality” (1997, p. 2). They go on to distinguish three types of gated communities in the American context. The first is ‘lifestyle communities’ and the second ‘prestige communities’; both categories are based on initiatives by developers who privatize space and services in order to sell properties to interested customers. The third one is called ‘security zones’; unlike the first two categories, it is based on residents’ initiative to secure their residential area by limiting access to it (for instance by putting up fences, barricades, a monitoring system, etc.).

Since Blakely and Snyder’s study, a significant number of books and articles have appeared on fortified communities, resulting in various definitions. The broad definition of gated community used in this paper embraces all housing areas that are closed to the public

by gates, walls, or fences, regardless of the tenure or form of housing. This broad interpretation is needed to study the post-communist urban context, since the formation of gated communities in post-communist cities does not follow any specific pattern when it comes to tenure (renters or owners) or form of housing (terrace houses, apartments, single-family houses, etc.).

The body of research on gated communities in post-communist cities is not as rich as that on cities in the West. This is partly due to the delayed emergence of gated communities in post-communist societies. Yet some scientific reports have been trickling in since the beginning of this decade: the Bulgarian case of gated developments outside of the city of Sofia (Stoyanov and Frantz 2006; Hirt and Stanilov 2007); the Russian case of Moscow (Blinnikov et al. 2006; Lentz 2006); the case of Budapest in Hungary (Bodnar 2001); and the case of Warsaw in Poland (Chabowski 2007; Gašior-Niemiec et al. 2007; Gądecki 2007; Zaborska 2007). In the Polish capital, Chabowski (2007) concentrated on the typology of gated communities, distinguishing various types of gated neighborhoods in terms of their location, period of enclosure, and form of housing. Gądecki (2007) examined the existing discourses on gated communities in Poland (popular, professional, and media). According to these discourses, such communities offer lifestyles that promote social and economic success, a new aesthetic, stability, and well-being and thereby appeal to the wealthier strata of the Polish population. In Warsaw, Zaborska (2007) investigated the residents' housing preferences—their ideal housing—and discovered that aspects such as a safe and clean environment together with nice neighbors are valued more than fences or monitoring. Owczarek (2007) found out that residents of Warsaw's gated communities are well educated, have high cultural capital and relatively high incomes, but are short on social networks and frequent contact with neighbors. Gašior-Niemiec et al. (2007) investigated the spread of gated housing throughout the capital and concluded that these forms of housing are glocal phenomena separating different social groups in space.

All of the above works on gated housing in post-communist contexts concern the appearance of gated communities in capital cities only; they did not investigate its spread in other (non-capital and smaller) cities in these countries. Capital cities are quite different from other large cities within a country. They are ranked highest in the urban hierarchy and their function is often central at the national level. From an international perspective, capital cities are those that hold the highest position in the “new international division of labour” (Lin and Mele 2005, p. 223) and those that are dominated by investments and the developments of markets. The development of housing has its own logic in capital cities and is often faster and more intensive than in the rest of the country. Large cities such as Gdansk are for that reason more representative of the country's housing-market development. Moreover, as the phenomenon of gating spreads throughout Poland (media reports are coming in from Płock, Bydgoszcz, Białystok, Gdańsk, Katowice, Radom, Poznań, Łódź, and Olsztyn), it is both interesting and important to study the types of and causes for gated housing developments.

The above-mentioned Polish studies on gated communities are still in their initial stages and touch upon the topic only cursorily. Moreover, all of the studies are written in Polish and are therefore difficult for non-Polish-speakers to access. This paper focuses on the city of Gdansk and discusses the emergence of gated communities in a non-capital city. Its objective is to investigate whether the forms, the reasons for moving in, the preferences of the residents, and their social profiles differ from those found in the capital. In other words, this study mixes several of the above-mentioned approaches when examining gated housing in Gdansk.

2.1 The case of Poland and Gdansk

The systemic change since 1989 has brought along economic reforms and structural changes in Poland's economy. Even though Poland has recorded the highest growth rate until 2003 among Central European countries, this process has been accompanied by high unemployment rates (Rapacki and Prochniak 2009). The first years of the economic transformation were characterized by declining income and consumption inequality, and the gap gradually widened after 1992 (Keane and Prasad 2002). Studies of sustainable economic welfare show that social stratification has been increasing steadily in Poland since 1990 caused mainly by the differences in personal incomes (Plich 2008, p. 138). These processes have had a radical impact on the Polish housing market and the development of urban landscapes in the country overall. The new market economy introduced property rights in the country, initiating an intense and widespread privatization process. An extensive privatization of land and buildings began in 1990, side by side with the restitution of property and the complicated process of ratification of the new owners of land and buildings. Formerly state-owned land was either given back to its prior owners (from before the period of communism), to the municipalities, or made available for selling to private investors. These changes resulted in much of the formerly state-owned property falling into the hands of private actors. That in turn prompted a shift in responsibility for the maintenance, financing, and future renovations onto the new owners.

In the field of housing, the systemic change meant that current occupants could purchase their dwellings, often for a token amount. Since 1990 the structure of ownership on the housing market has changed successively. Before the fall of communism in 1989 the majority of land located in urban areas was state-owned and most of the rural land was owned by private persons (Marcuse 1996, p. 167). In 1994 the privately owned part of the housing stock was still smaller than the publicly owned part consisting of cooperative housing, enterprise housing, and state/municipal housing as "all [...] three types of tenures belonged practically to the public sector, because cooperatives benefited from financial subsidies from the state... and the dwellings owned by enterprises were built by state-owned enterprises" (Bonczak-Kucharczyk et al. 1999, p. 35). The latest figures from 2007 show the advancement of the privatization process; 63% of the total housing stock in the country is privately owned (see Table 1).

The city of Gdansk is the cultural, economic, and educational center in the northern part of the country, with a flourishing labor market, 14 higher education institutions, and thriving economic activity (Statistical Office Gdansk 2007). Moreover the region (voivodship) in which Gdansk is located was ranked second-best in living conditions by its inhabitants in 2007 (Czapinski and Panek 2007, p. 107) and had a quite low unemployment rate: 3.7% compared to 10.9% in the whole country (Statistical Office in Gdansk 2007). In other words, Gdansk is a prosperous city where privatization in the field of housing is even

Table 1 Housing tenure in Poland and Gdansk in 2007

	Poland (%)	Gdansk (%)
Municipal housing	9	4.6
Housing cooperatives	24.4	6.9
Social housing	0.05	0.07
Enterprise housing	2.3	3.3
Private housing	63	79.6

Source: Central Statistical Office 2007

more widespread than at the national level; almost 80% of the housing stock in Gdansk is privately owned.

The most extreme form of the privatization of urban space occurred at the end of the 1990s with the emergence of the country's first gated communities (Gądecki 2007, p. 92). There are no official figures on the spread of this type of gated housing, but all of these properties were constructed by private developers. The first gated community in Gdansk was built in 1999, just 2 years after the very first gated residential development was constructed in Warsaw. As we shall see later, the emergence of gated housing has spread steadily throughout the city. Most of the gated properties prior to 2004 were constructed by domestic developers, adopting their architectonic ideas from abroad. The role of foreign investors in housing-market development has strengthened since the accession of Poland to the European Union. Before accession, the regulations, laws, and administrative procedures on the purchase of land by foreigners were very complicated; such transactions required a permit from the Polish Ministry of Internal Affairs. Since 2004 more foreign investors have been entering the Polish housing market.

3 Research questions

The point of departure for this article is that the gated community cannot be seen as a neutral phenomenon in the urban landscape. This author agrees with those researchers who argue that its emergence poses a threat to the social cohesion and social interaction between the residents of a city (McKenzie 1994; Low 2001). Gated housing affects the form but also the function of cities and creates socio-spatial segregation, keeping out those who cannot afford to live behind gates and walls. Furthermore studies have shown that the emergence of gated communities might pose a threat to democracy and local government since their residents, who pay extra for the services within the community, might not wish to contribute to the community outside the gates (Minton 2002). In light of these arguments there seems to be a paradox in the emergence and spread of gated housing in Gdansk. Gdansk is located in northern Poland and is inhabited by 460,000 people. The city has often been described as very successful in its transformation to the new systemic order since the fall of communism; recent descriptions of the city emphasize its location within an expanding metropolitan area, its low unemployment rate, the relatively high quality of life and housing, and the city's advantageous position on the country's labor and investment markets. But the city of Gdansk is known first and foremost as the birthplace of the Solidarity movement in the 1980s: as the city where the employees of the shipyard started the strike that eventually led to the end of communist rule and the introduction of democracy in the country. Considering the city's past, the emergence of gated forms of housing is an interesting but also current issue: Why are the people who once fought for democracy and solidarity choosing to hem themselves in today?

In a special issue of *GeoJournal* dedicated to the topic of gated communities, some recent research was presented on the subject, and the editors suggested some topics for further research (Brunn and Frantz 2006). Among the first priorities was a further examination of the forms and functions of gated communities in societies undergoing 'Westernization' (financial investments, values, market economies, etc.) where the phenomenon of gating was still 'fresh' (2006, p. 3). The focus of the present paper accordingly expands upon the forms of gated communities that are emerging in the city and explores the possible explanations of their formation. It addresses the following research questions:

- Which forms can be distinguished among gated communities in the city?
- Who are the inhabitants of these gated communities?
- What are the residents' main motives for moving to gated communities?
- What conclusions can be drawn about the emergence of gated communities in the Polish context?

4 Methods and data

This study is based on various kinds of material: interviews with residents of gated communities, a questionnaire, and studies of advertisements, all conducted in the autumn of 2007 and the spring of 2008, together with previous studies on the topic. There are some obvious limitations to this material; gated communities are difficult to study because of their physical boundaries and inaccessibility to outsiders. In most cases, they are impossible to enter, and the lack of information on their numbers or their residents' characteristics does not make the task any easier.

Among the three types of gated communities existing in the post-communist context—that is, “those which existed prior to 1989 and formerly served Communist Party officials; those developed immediately after 1989 in response to market demand by people who were able to profit most from the changes; and those developed for people who have subsequently been able to gain access to wealth, through entrepreneurship or other means” (Stoyanov and Frantz 2006, p. 58)—only the last type of relatively newly built gated communities will be under consideration in this study (from 1999 onward).

A questionnaire, for which the respondents were randomly selected according to their address of residence within three gated communities, was distributed to 120 addresses and answered by 86 residents. The three gated communities were selected according to their location within the city (suburbs/inner city) and the types of buildings they were made up of (detached, twin, terrace houses/apartments). The questionnaires were sent out to randomly chosen addresses within these three developments Table 2.

The questions covered demographic and economic profiles of the residents (age, sex, education, educational level, income, marital status, etc.) but also the reasons for moving to the area, the relations with the neighbors, and the future residential plans. The questionnaire was designed to cover the main themes of interest but also to be concise and not too time-consuming, as the residents of gated communities have the reputation of being busy business people with many other priorities.

Additionally, nine semi-structured interviews were conducted with inhabitants of three gated communities in the spring of 2008 covering similar issues with a focus on the residents' motives for moving to a gated community. Some of the interviewed respondents were approached when entering their residential areas and some were contacted through a snowball technique (already interviewed persons were asked to recruit future interviewees).

Table 2 The distribution of questionnaires among three gated communities in Gdansk

Type of housing/location	Inner city	Suburbs
Detached/twin/terrace houses	Non-existent	Case 2 (40 questionnaires) Received: 31
Apartment buildings	Case 1 (40 questionnaires) Received: 29	Case 3 (40 questionnaires) Received: 26

This was a protracted process, as most of those approached declined to participate, claiming a lack of time as the main reason. Moreover, as the topic of gated communities is perceived by many as controversial, several of the approached residents, when told about the aim of the study, were reticent and adopted a defensive attitude.

All of the interviews were semi-structured; key themes running through the open-ended questions gave the interview its coherence. Most interviews were conducted in the respondents' homes or close by (local park, cafés, etc.), and a tape recorder was used in all cases. Due to the topic's delicate nature, the respondents were guaranteed anonymity; as no names of either respondents or their place of residence are mentioned in the text, it is impossible to identify the individuals taking part in the study.

To examine the driving forces behind the development of gated communities in the city, the analysis was based on advertising material used by developers to attract customers and above all on the answers obtained during the interviews and from the questionnaire. Furthermore, the analysis used previous studies on gated communities but also on the regulation of spatial planning in the country as well as studies on privatization processes and their implications.

In sum, to explain the emerging forms of gated communities in Gdansk, the study used advertisements and observations in the field. In order to give a picture of the residents of gated communities in the city, the questionnaire forms the basis for interpretation in combination with findings from previous studies. The analysis of driving forces behind the development of gated communities is based on information gained from the questionnaire and interviews but also from advertisements and relevant literature on the topic.

5 Forms of gated communities in Gdansk

It was difficult to estimate the number of gated communities in the city. After an initial mapping exercise at the end of 2007, the approximate number of existing and planned (for 2008–2009) gated communities was determined to be approximately 35, and this number is rapidly increasing. Studies of gated communities in Warsaw, the Polish capital, indicate as many as 200 gated residential areas existing within the borders of the city (Zaborska 2007, p. 113).

A study of advertisements for housing (on one of the largest real-estate websites covering primary and secondary markets for apartments and houses in the country) at the beginning of 2008 showed that four out of the 31 apartment investments planned in the city of Gdansk for the years 2008 and 2009 are not behind gates (www.tabelaofert.pl). The rest of the apartment investments on offer, amounting to 87%, are fenced and one-third of them are also guarded. Furthermore, one-third of these investments are planned to include, apart from playgrounds and parks, commercial services (for instance restaurants, hairdressers, shoemakers, etc.) within the fenced area.

The asking prices in the fenced residential areas are higher than those for properties without fences and guards (between 1000 and 2000 PLN or 285–570 EUR higher per m²), depending on the size of the apartment, the number of rooms, and the floor it is located on (www.tabelaofert.pl). Each gated community has a name, and most of these evoke associations with nature, peace, and idyllic spots: Happy Planet, Green Slope, Sunny Valley, Peaceful, Royal Hill, Sunflowers, At the Beach, etc. A typical advertisement for a gated community stresses the location, the green and stylish setting, but also the security of the new housing development.

There are different types of gated communities in Gdansk. The architecture among these varies, as do the forms of housing and the size of the buildings. There are one-family houses, twin houses, terraced houses, and apartment houses, all gated and guarded. A notable distinction among these housing types is that the detached, twin, and terraced houses are mostly built far from the city center, while gated apartment housing is predominantly built in the inner city and around other commercial centers, depending on the surrounding architecture and the density of housing.

Another distinguishing factor among gated communities is their age and size. The oldest one identified by the author was built in 1999, while the majority were realized between 2003 and 2008. The smallest one in Gdansk comprises 54 household units (Green Slope) and the largest encompasses 36 buildings with room for between 16 and 24 households in each building (Peaceful Neighborhood).

As is evident in Fig. 1, gated communities are dispersed throughout the city. Some are located in the inner city, but the majority lie west of the city center. Their location is often accidental and is dependent on access to land, which is in turn dependent on the regulated legal conditions regarding property ownership (Jałowicki and Szczepański 2006, p. 303). Since the fall of communism and the subsequent privatization of the housing market, the regulations regarding ownership and property rights have been very complicated. They have been interpreted in different ways depending on the preferences of the government in office at the time (Renaud 1996, p. 11). The complicated procedure of the restitution of property to prior owners after the fall of the former system, together with the confusion about the extent of the property rights, hinders a more integrated and systematic approach to spatial planning in Polish cities. The problem of the extent of property rights manifests itself in the different interpretations of what one is allowed to do with one's property, ranging from the absolute and unrestricted right to the property to more restricted forms of ownership. The ability to act and secure public interests, often at the expense of real-estate owners and housing developers, is dependent in such cases on the interpretation of such rights at the central and municipal level. The municipalities bear the responsibility for spatial planning in Poland. Their ability to take action is often limited by strapped municipal budgets combined with the

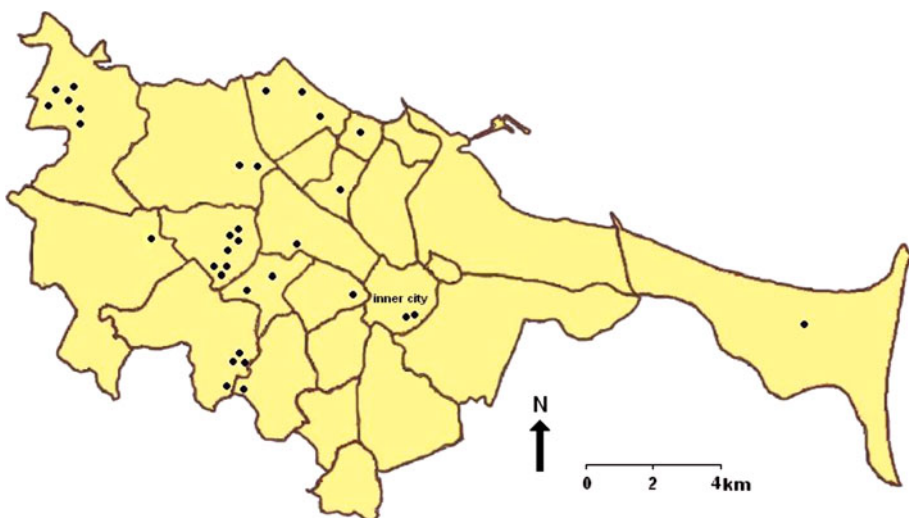


Fig. 1 The distribution of gated communities in Gdansk, 1999–2009

lack of knowledge about spatial planning. The resulting impasse may lead to corruption and selling off municipal land to private actors in order to safeguard the budget. Last but not least, it may create confusion about regulations on the responsibility for public spaces and newly built constructions but also on the division of these responsibilities between the municipalities and the housing developers (Jędraszko 2005, p. 74). Yet there is another problem causing the ‘accidental’ location of gated communities in the Polish cities: the limitations originating from the imprecise and consultative nature of spatial plans. Since these plans have no regulatory capacity, they are often interpreted in favor of the landowners and new constructions. Moreover there are shortcomings in the legal framework that permits construction in un-urbanized areas without requiring the existence of local spatial plans (Billert 2007, p. 2). All these complications and shortcomings at the municipal level create a pro-development environment where the municipalities turn a blind eye to issues such as the integrated order, social cohesion, common interests, aesthetics, or environmental matters (Jędraszko 2005).

5.1 Small-scale and secure design

The degree of closure of gated communities in Gdansk varies. The most common form of closure is a fence around the property, but there are other means of limiting access to the area by outsiders: guards, a reception desk for residents and visitors, guarded gates for cars, monitoring, a videophone connection to the apartment, electronic cards, underground garages, but above all a special design of the area and the buildings.

A point that is often mentioned in the advertisements on apartments within gated communities, and works as a selling device, is their small-scale and secure design. Real-estate developers have established a concept for the housing market (*‘kamaralna zabudowa’*) that is widely used and encompasses these ‘desirable’ dimensions. Unfortunately this term is not easily translated into English, because it lends itself to various interpretations: private, chamber-like, quiet, small, narrow, and cozy. The concept refers to all of these dimensions in Polish (Oxford Polish-English Dictionary 2004). Despite its ambiguity, this term captures the sought-after ideal of housing on the housing market in present-day Poland. The ideal image is the very opposite of the large-scale structures (blocks of flats) built under communism. It alludes to small-scale, private, cozy forms of housing. The urban architecture of post-communist cities is in various ways “trying to ‘forget the past’, improving many different modernizations in urban infrastructure” (Isański and Mickiewicz 2007, p. 231).

All of these new housing investments are extremely well planned. They are designed according to ideas about housing forms that would, apart from the already mentioned security techniques, enable residents to control the areas around their housing (cf. Newman 1972). Smaller gated units in the city are often designed so that the buildings surround the private yard of the gated community (see Fig. 2).

Along with ideas about housing forms and building types as ways of controlling space, there are specific ideas and practices of street design prevailing among developers active in Gdansk. When gated communities are built in the suburbs of Gdansk, on sites where no previous housing exists, the architects must often design the whole infrastructure of the gated community. The street layout is an important technique used by the developers in constructing new developments, one significantly contributing “to the quality and character of a community” (Southworth and Ben-Joseph 2003, p. 113). Figure 3 depicts the street pattern of a gated community located in the suburbs, consisting of twin, one-family,

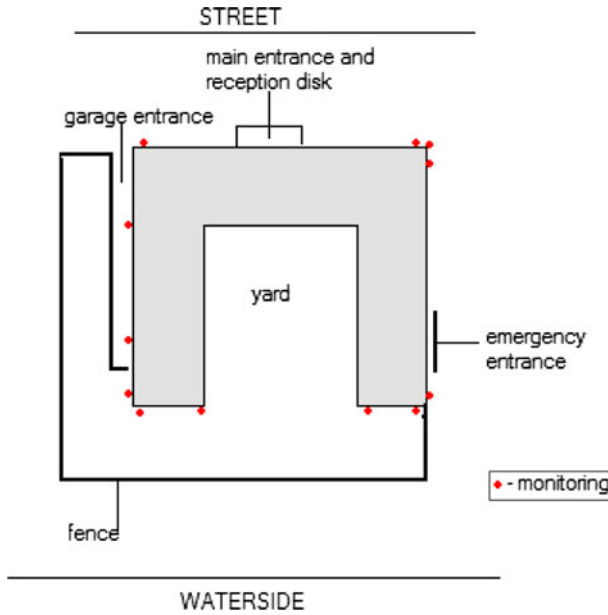


Fig. 2 The design of an inner-city gated community in Gdansk

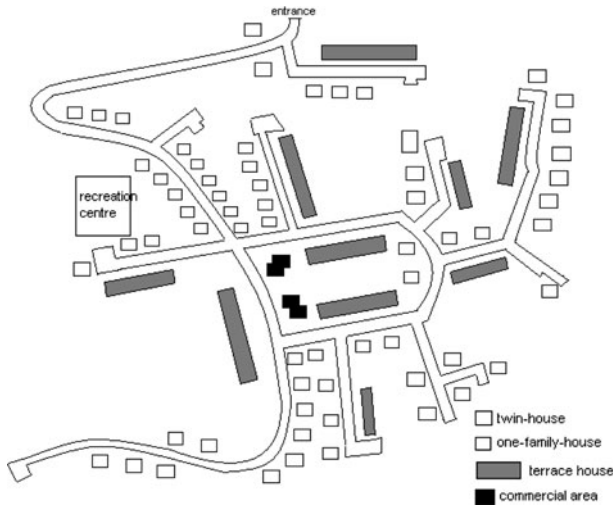


Fig. 3 Street pattern in a gated community in Gdansk

and terrace houses. What is striking about the street patterns in this example is that access to the community is limited to one entrance. The streets within this kind of gated community do not form any networks and do not allow many route choices, since many of them are discontinuous and end in cul-de-sacs.

5.2 The residents of gated communities

Although the empirical material for this study has obvious limitations, it is still possible to outline the social profile of the residents of gated communities in the city. The average age of the respondents to the questionnaire sent out in the fall of 2007 was 35 years old and the majority were married or cohabitating (see Table 3). Over half (58%) stated that they had children living with them. Furthermore the majority of the respondents had a high level of education and all earned around or more than the average income for the city (3410PLN/month in December 2007) (average income among the respondents: 4080PLN/month). The majority of the respondents owned the apartments/houses they lived in, while 17% rented them from the owner. The respondents' age, education, and income did not deviate from the expected outcomes. According to a study made among visitors to two Polish housing fairs in 2006, the majority were highly educated (70.1 and 76.3%) and 53% were 26–35 years old (Zaborska 2007, p. 116). Moreover, the findings of Owczarek confirm this, noting that residents of Warsaw's gated communities combine high education with high cultural capital (2007, p. 130).

When asked about future residential plans, those living in gated communities consisting of houses answered that they planned on living in their current place of residence in the future. One-third of those living in gated apartment complexes (located in the suburbs and the inner city) tended to answer that they would be living somewhere else in 5 years' time. During the interviews a typical vision of the future was to move to a larger apartment/house, preferably a single-family house if possible.

I think that in 5 year's time if our economy lets us we would like to move to a single-family house. For now we are living in a twin house, which is two houses set together. If it is possible we would like to live separate from the neighbors, not sharing the area,

Table 3 Socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents

Age (average)	35 years
Sex	
Male	38 (44%)
Female	48 (56%)
Marital status	
Single	5 (6%)
Married	77 (89, 5%)
Cohabitating	4 (5%)
Living with children	
Yes	50 (58%)
No	36 (42%)
Education	
Basic vocational	4 (5%)
Secondary and post secondary level	22 (25%)
Higher	60 (70%)
Income (average)	4080 PLN/month
Form of ownership	
Renters	15 (17%)
Owners	71 (83%)

not because we don't like them or so, but... to have our separate yard and have a single-family house... (interview 2).

The majority of the informants considered the relations with neighbors to be significant, but few of them described their social interaction with neighbors as taking place on a daily basis. Many stated that their contact with neighbors was limited to greeting when meeting; few had developed personal relations with their neighbors (almost exclusively those living in houses).

We live in times when work comes first and unfortunately there is not much time left for recreation and meetings, playing bridge or over a beer, or any at all. Therefore we meet our neighbors rarely; our meetings are not frequent. In the garden when we water our flowers... during the summer some barbequing together, but we don't meet very frequently otherwise (interview 1).

When asked about the reasons for the limited interaction between neighbors in their place of residence, the interviewees brought up the long hours spent at work, the short period of time they have been living there, together with the role of security (walls, fences, etc.) in preserving the anonymity of neighbors. The limited contacts within the communities in Gdansk very much correspond with a study made among residents of gated communities in Warsaw. There, the author above all draws the conclusion that his informants have relatively few contacts in their place of residence and are not particularly socially active with their neighbors (Owczarek 2007).

5.3 The motives for moving to gated communities

In order to understand the emergence of gated communities in the city and the motives behind the residents' decision to move to enclosed residential areas, the questionnaire was supplemented by nine interviews with residents of gated residential areas. The respondents to the questionnaire were asked to rank the importance of aspects such as security, privacy, high standard, nice neighbors, and prestige on a 1–6 scale (1 for not important, 6 for most important) for moving to a gated community. The results were as shown in Fig. 4. The most important aspect for moving to a gated residential area, according to the respondents, was the security the area was expected to assure.

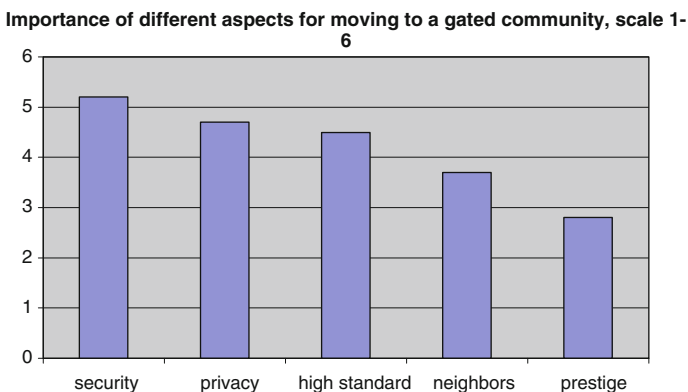


Fig. 4 The importance of different aspects for moving to a gated community, *scale 1–6*

Even in the interviews with inhabitants of gated communities, the significance of security was highlighted. All stated that they felt safer after moving to their present place of residence. Many of the interviewees emphasized the younger composition of residents in gated communities compared to block-housing areas, where people are generally more numerous and older.

We feel much safer in the company of younger people because they react better, and older people are more insensible. If something happens, like a housebreak or car theft and so on...they'll react faster because they are young... in comparison with older people. And the fact that it is a gated community scares away the thieves, because we are all gathered, with the exception that we are only 14 families, but we are in this congregation and everybody keeps watch over everybody. We can trust each other and it is more secure than in an open housing area. Or in apartment-block areas, where people are more anonymous... (interview 1).

The interviewees perceived living in a gated community as much safer than living in an open housing area. The perceived threats brought up during interviews were burglaries, car thefts, robberies, and the dangers of letting children play out of doors. In this context gated communities were often described in contrast to the block-housing areas built under communism. Housing areas with these open blocks were portrayed as worn-out, deteriorated, and inhabited by older people but also associated with insecurity and vandalism; gated communities, in contrast, were considered secure environments meeting the demands of the young and the successful.

The second-most important reason selected in the questionnaire was the aspect of privacy that gated communities offer, which went along with the aesthetics of the buildings in the area. Privacy was a recurrent topic in the interviews. The interviewees pointed out their busy schedules and lack of time as the main reason for their need for privacy. They all stressed the convenience of not being called on unannounced, which all of them had experienced in their previous (open) place of residence. When asked about the importance of privacy nowadays and during communism, they all agreed that privacy has become more important over time. They sought the explanation in the 'new times', which are accompanied by exacting work and the pressure to make a career. One of the interviewees said:

Me and my husband work very hard and sometimes we do not come home until late in the evening. We do not want to be disturbed then. When our friends or family come by, we always know it in advance... and that's the way we like it (interview 6).

Aesthetics were also considered very important. The interviewees talked a great deal about the 'new' architecture, exclusive materials, and interior design. The 'new' architecture represented by the gated communities they lived in was contrasted to the 'old', represented by the (large-scale, high-rise) housing built in the period of communism. Many of the interviewees stressed the good condition of the buildings, high standard of the apartments, and clean stairwells in the newly built housing in the city. According to them this was not always the case in older buildings in the city. They appreciated the new and 'clean' environment. To move, for instance, into a high-rise building dating from the communist era, where these standards were not met, was not to be considered. Many of them explained the demand for better standards and aesthetics by stressing that today's Poles have become more comfortable since they earn more.

Gated communities are always finalized with a higher standard than other housing. And today almost all, maybe not all but 70–80% of the new built housing is gated

and made with a better standard. Maybe because the price requires higher comfort and people have become more comfortable (interview 2).

The respondents to the questionnaire ranked the aspect of nice neighbors in fourth place among the six motives for moving to a gated community. As already discussed, many of the respondents had limited relations with their neighbors. When the interviewees were asked about this discrepancy in their answers, they stated that they expected to have nice neighbors when they moved to a gated community, but at the same time they lacked the time to develop any more personal relationships with their neighbors than those they already had. As one of the interviewees put it:

On one hand we are living in a closed community and it is a type of enclave and all of the other people living around don't have direct access to our area and in this way we are isolating ourselves from them. But on the other hand there is a playground near our community that is public and the children can meet there and so can we... It is contradictory in a way... But at the same time the contacts are limited because everybody is chasing the money and the times are different and people don't have time for each other, and there is only the fight for a financial security for one's family and therefore everything got lost... It was different in former days, Poles were known as very hospitable and they were meeting frequently and always left the tables ready... The times have changed... today it is not as popular as before...(interview 4).

Even in the discussion on the relationship with their neighbors, most of the interviewees brought up the opposition between the 'former days' and the present times. As illustrated in the quotation above, the interviewed residents perceived the past times of hospitality as gone, times when neighbors visited neighbors and every week culminated with visits among relatives and friends within the walls of somebody's home. The present times are characterized by an impersonal striving for economic security, and most of the activities undertaken with relatives and friends take place outside the home in cafés, theaters, parks, etc.

When asked about the importance of prestige for the decision to move to a gated community, the respondents to the questionnaire ranked it fifth on the scale. It seemed not to be the most important reason for the choice to live in a gated community. Yet in the interviews, the residents talked about a trend on the housing market whereby people tended to choose gated real-estate investments before open ones. The more the investments seemed to offer in terms of services, the more prestigious they were perceived to be. The more they were closed and monitored, the higher status they had, according to the interviewees.

People are generally earning more today and they can spend more money. They are therefore demanding more... and investors are tempting them with gated areas and security. In these gated communities there are gyms, swimming pools and saunas that all inhabitants of the gated community are welcome to use (interview 7).

The interviewees were asked to think about other possible explanations of why people chose to move to gated communities. They answered, among other reasons, that buying real estate, and especially within gated communities, could be a good economic investment for some. Others pointed out the convenience of living in a gated area since many things were taken care of as long as the residents could afford to live there and talked about the times when none of this was possible. They argued that since many of the residents of gated communities were working long hours and making careers, they wanted to come

home without worrying about the security of their homes or the maintenance of the public space outside of their dwellings. The families with small children would highlight the importance of a nice playground and safe environment within the area. Some pointed out the actual location of the gated community as one of the most important aspects of their attraction to the area. Those living far from the center would emphasize the importance of price for their choice.

5.4 The importance of housing markets and spatial planning

In addition to the individual motives for moving to gated communities, an important aspect to study is the context in which gated communities are emerging. In particular, this refers to the housing market and the spatial planning prevailing in the country and as practiced on the municipal level. The phenomenon of gated communities and their increasing popularity in Gdansk and Poland as a whole must be seen in light of the increasing supply of gated forms of housing. The selection offered by the developers in recent years has been dominated by gated developments. There is not much to choose from when looking for relatively newly built housing of high standard.

Furthermore, the lack of an explicit national urban policy and the near absence of governmental programs for co-financing renovations (except for one fund for thermal insulation of buildings) is clearly making its mark on the urban landscape of the city and encouraging the emergence of gated communities. In 1990, spatial planning became primarily the responsibility of municipalities. Ever since, their work has been obstructed by the lack of resources and knowledge, which in turn has hindered the creation of an environment for integrated and systematic spatial planning (Jędraszko 2005, p. 74). The lack of resources manifests itself in extreme cases in the preparation of spatial plans sponsored by private investors, leading to the neglect of aspects such as environmental concerns or spatial order. Furthermore, another result of the lack of resources at the municipal level is the practice of selling off randomly located municipal land and real estate to private investors. Though done with the aim of taking pressure off the municipal budget, in the end this leads to spatial chaos. The disarray results in developers having a relatively free hand when constructing gated communities in urban areas. In many cases the land is sold to a developer and he is free to do anything he wants with it as a consequence of the earlier mentioned interpretations of property rights and the inability of municipalities to intervene (Jałowicki 2008, p. 39).

Another important explanation for the increased number of gated communities in Gdansk and other Polish cities that already has been touched upon is the question of ownership. The restitution of property to prior owners in 1990 has complicated the process of privatization in Poland and other post-communist societies (Tosics 2005). Unclear title to buildings and land after the restitution of property will hamper incentives for improvement and revitalization of the already existing housing stock. The lack of clarity manifests itself further in confusion over the extent of the rights and the maintenance of property. As the title to many buildings has not been established yet, already damaged constructions continue to decay. Modernization of these buildings is delayed, if not impossible, for that reason (Węclawowicz 2005, p. 68). The rise of gated communities in the city is in a way a response to the demand for better standards in housing. It increases the contrast between spatial concentrations of degradation and wealth, attracting those who can to move to newly built developments.

6 Conclusion

The fall of communism in 1989 and the transformation to a new systemic order brought about many social changes in Poland and other post-communist countries. In the wake of the ongoing changes many people lost their jobs, their positions, and security on the labor market. Crime rates rose dramatically in the first years, along with the growing inflation in the country. The living standards deteriorated, budgets were stretched, and status hierarchies changed. Great contrasts in prosperity concentrated in space became visible in the post-communist cities (Szelenyi 1996; Kovacs 1998; Węclawowicz 1998; Sýkora 1999). In this context the first gated communities emerged and spread, but their emergence in the Polish case was contradictory. The majority of these gated developments were built in times of decreasing crime rates in the country (i.e., since 2003). At the same time, public opinion surveys showed that 53% of Poles considered Poland a safe country to live in, the highest rate since the fall of communism (CBOS 2007). Residents of gated communities are often convinced that living behind gates will give them greater protection against crime (cf. Low 2001). The developers are successfully using this knowledge on the Polish housing market when constructing and advertising new housing developments. The consequences of such scaremongering on the housing market are obvious in the case of Gdansk; the walls and gates build barriers to social interaction and restrict access to open spaces of the city. This in turn leads to limited contacts within the gated area but also to the limitation of social contacts between the residents of gated housing and the world outside.

Most importantly the phenomenon of ‘forting up’ in Poland contradicts the ideals, so strongly propagated by the communist rulers in the past, of mixed neighborhoods and smoothing out housing differences. Could this development be interpreted as a turn away from the values represented in the communist times? The emergence, popularity, forms (small-scale, secure, ownership), and resident profile (relatively young, well-educated, and wealthy) of gated communities confirm this assumption. Gated communities in Gdansk, by being (privately owned) homes for the wealthier parts of the city’s inhabitants and by being drastically different from the housing built during the communist period, reflect this turn away from the former socialist ideas on housing. On top of this, gated housing is described by its residents as the opposite of the housing constructed during communism, which in turn is associated with insecurity, deterioration, crime, and the past. In light of these arguments, I would like to posit that these gated communities should be understood as a reaction to the communist past. In the Polish case of Gdansk, the gated communities are—over and above their prestige, lifestyle, and security characteristics—even considerably different from the forms of housing predominating in the period before 1989. In light of the interviews with the inhabitants of these gated communities, pointing out how tired they were of the housing offered under communism, I interpret that distinction as an implicit but very important motive for moving into gated housing developments. The large-scale apartment blocks built during communist rule play a crucial role in setting current housing norms and in the appraisal of the housing built since 1989. At the same time, the features of prestige and lifestyle are important as class markers in the new social and economic order that has evolved since 1989. Increasing social stratification and rising income disparities might serve as some of the explanatory factors behind the emergence of gated communities in Poland. In the case of Gdansk, its thriving economic and living conditions mean that more individuals can afford and have the possibility to live behind gates in the city than in other less prosperous parts of the country. Old high-rise housing, multi-story apartment blocks, and the egalitarian ideas underpinning communist housing are therefore being left

behind by those who can do so for what is perceived as more private, exclusive, and secure housing.

To sum up, the specificity of the emergence of gated communities in Poland, and in particular Gdansk, is a mix of diverse processes: growing social polarization combined with the unclear ownership of buildings and land, hindering revitalization and creating a desire for better housing standards and privacy among the better-off parts of the population; the spread of a culture of fear; the weakness of the present spatial plans and the loopholes in the regulation of new construction; the municipalities' inability/unwillingness to hinder the development of gated communities; and the housing developers' advantageous conditions on the housing market. Most importantly this study has shown that Gdansk's residents are choosing new forms of housing that clearly differ from the housing associated with the communist past.

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