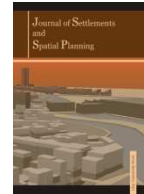




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Spatial Problems of Gated Communities in Poland. The Case of Toruń

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ABSTRACT

In large Polish cities, flats located in gated housing estates make up the majority of recently completed dwellings. As this is a relatively new form of housing, present in the Polish cities only since the second half of the 1990s, there have been no clear-cut guidelines for the development of space among the building units of this type so far. This leads to all kinds of errors and omissions, which are reflected in the negative phenomena observed in the gated housing estates (e.g. problems related to the lack of recreational areas and access roads and the location of service entities). Such an example is the gated community presented in the article where a number of adverse phenomena negatively affecting its operation have been recognised.

1. INTRODUCTION

Gated communities are a worldwide phenomenon. They can be met on every continent, in countries of different levels of socio-economic development and belonging to different cultures [1]. The first gated communities built for free market sale appeared relatively recently in Poland, namely in the late 1990s [1], [2], [3]. Initially, they were located mainly in Warsaw, but over time they have begun to appear in other major urban centres. Presently, gated communities are common in both large and medium-sized cities and within the adjacent suburban areas. In many places they have become the dominant form of newly created housing estates.

Due to the prevalence of this phenomenon and the lack of appropriate legal regulations the issue of gated housing estates has become one of the most important problems of the modern spatial transformation of Polish cities. This is especially true in the face of the realities of neo-liberal economy where the conditions are dictated by the market.

2. THEORY AND METHODOLOGY

From a global perspective, the phenomenon of gated communities is explained by the impact of two social issues. The first one is the importance of the sense of universal fear and threat among the inhabitants of large cities and refers to a public sentiment seen in the United States since the early 1970s [4], [5], [6], [7]. The second phenomenon is in turn associated with the need to emphasise the prestige and high social position and is the result of class changes taking place in societies. For many city dwellers owing a house or apartment within an exclusive estate, inaccessible to people from outside, is the manifestation of a privileged social position. The so-called "good address" becomes synonymous with successful life [6], [7], [8], [9]. Gated communities therefore satisfy two important needs in human life: security and prestige.

Despite obvious similarities, the described phenomenon has a different character and intensity depending on the country or region of the world. Gated communities can be regarded a socio-cultural and

architectural-urban phenomenon, which combines what is global (tendency to be isolated from the surroundings common to all gated communities), with what is local (varied architectural-urban dimension, local socio-cultural context) [6], [10].

The first gated communities built for free market sale appeared in the post-communist countries only in the 1990s. The popularity of gated communities in this part of Europe is often explained by the changes of social structures associated with the transformation of the political system. This is because modern gated housing estates reproduce the patterns of voluntary stripping from the surrounding associated with the communist nomenclature [1], [6], [11], [12], [13].

The difference is that the place of relatively few enclaves designed for the party decision-makers was taken by common gated housing developments designed for a new middle class. Poland takes here a special place, because the apartments located in gated estates make the majority of the dwellings newly built in the large cities. The scale of this phenomenon can be regarded as significant, even by the American standards [7], [13]. Given the nature of the building, most of the Polish gated communities take the form of multifamily residential buildings, separated from the city by fences and gates. Guarded estates that meet the criterion of complete closure with the access protected by a doorman are relatively rare.

On the other hand, considering the reason of residence within the gates community, it is hard to see any parallels to the classical typology formulated by E. J. Blakely and M. G. Snyder¹, as the sole criterion for the availability of apartments within the majority of Polish gated communities is the residents' wealth (the affordability of a dwelling) [14]. Moreover, the very estates are much more "gated" rather than the "community" [1]. The purpose of this paper is to present the specificity of Polish gated communities, especially the negative phenomena regarding their space. For this purpose, a case study was used in the form of one of the gated communities located in Toruń, a city of 205,000 inhabitants (16th by population size in Poland), located in the Kujawsko-Pomorskie *Voivodeship*. The presented object can be approached as an example of a gated community built for middle class and can be used as an example in discussion on Polish gated communities in general.

The material used as the basis for this study was collected during many years of field research conducted in the described estate. Additionally, the author carried out a series of semi-structured interviews with residents and a number of observations, which allow him to present the object of the study as specifically as possible.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. General information

The estate presented in the article is located in the central part of Toruń, in the immediate vicinity of the old town. To its south-east, the housing estate is adjacent to the military unit (Artillery Training and Armaments Centre). The other boundaries of the area are determined by the following streets: Jana III Sobieskiego (north and west) and Ludwika Waryńskiego (south). Besides two blocks of flats built in the 1990s, the area earmarked for the investment was owned by the Military Property Agency and previously served as a military training ground. In the immediate vicinity of the building complex, along Ludwika Waryńskiego Street, there is a park, and a little further to the north-east there are a hypermarket with a shopping gallery and a wellness centre. The location of the housing estate, therefore, can be described as very good, and given the land available at the time of the commencement of the project; it was one of the most preferred investment areas for multifamily housing in Toruń.

Despite being considered by the city residents as a coherent whole (evidenced by the common name of the estate - "The Sunny Terraces", which comes from one of the investments located within the area), the housing estate is actually a conglomeration of several investments of three developers. The first two residential buildings erected on the site date back to the 1990s when the owner and manager of the area were the military, and the blocks were intended for soldiers and their families. In later years, as a result of the privatisation of the remaining land at the discretion of the Military Property Agency, the area was transferred into the possession of developers. This resulted in the erection of a number of new blocks of flats in the area. Currently, the estate covers an area of 7.5 ha, within which there are 22 five-storey multifamily residential buildings, of which the last was completed in 2012.

3.2. The residential space

The space of the housing estate is divided into smaller gated sub-units "Centre", "Sunny Terraces" and "Sobieskiego", built by various investors and having separate entrance gates (so far, 14 gates and barriers have been located in the estate). The northern and eastern parts of the estate consist of two closed units with seven apartment blocks each. In turn, the central and southern parts contain single gated buildings (see figure 1).

The above-mentioned conditions differ from the model situation in which every investor, before commencing any activity on the building plot, follows a specific space planning approach regarding the current

¹ Blakely and Snyder's general typology includes three types of gated communities: lifestyle (common amenities, shared interests), prestige (privacy and exclusivity, few shared amenities), and security zones (restricted public access in order to limit crime or traffic).

state of development and investment plans of other developers. In the case of the discussed housing estate, those requirements have been met as inept or not satisfied at all, resulting in numerous adverse phenomena present in the area. As a result, within the residential estate there is architectural chaos resulting

from the realisation of investments according to various schedules and based on a number of land development projects (at the time of commencement of the project only the north-eastern part of the estate had a valid Local Development Plan).



Fig. 1. Housing estate: "Centre"/"Sunny Terraces"/ "Sobieskiego" (view from the south). 1, 2, 3, 4 - residential buildings constructed by various investors; 5 - garages; 6 - playgrounds; 7 - a public road; ◐ - entrance gates.

The housing estate, depending on the adopted perspective, can be seen in two ways. Seen from the perspective of a passer-by it is a classic example of a gated community, with clearly marked boundaries and

inaccessible inner space. On the other hand, from the perspective of a resident, the estate is a conglomerate of several smaller groups of buildings, erected by various investors and linked with a common communication

system. The housing estate lacks space accessible to its all residents. The only space available to all residents is a dead-end public road located in the central part of the area. Due to its little aesthetic qualities and significant traffic it has a negative impact on the neighbourhood (fig. 2).



Fig. 2. Section of a public road located within the housing estate "Centre"/"Sunny Terraces"/ "Sobieskiego" in Toruń.

A number of adverse effects were observed in the housing estate. Among them the most troublesome issue is its fragmentation. In the area four sub-units can be distinguished: two large ones located along Jana III Sobieskiego Street (including seven blocks of flats each) and two smaller ones including single buildings. The other apartment buildings do not meet the criterion of the total gating.

This situation not only affects the daily lives of people (the need to override fences to get to other parts of the estate), but is also becoming a hotbed of conflict over the space which for various reasons has not been gated so far (such as parking spaces and sections of internal roads) (fig. 3).



Fig. 3. Gating space inside the housing estate "Centre"/"Sunny Terraces"/ "Sobieskiego" in Toruń.

The division of the gated community into several distinct sub-units has also led to irrational land use in the housing estate, which, paradoxically, has its roots in the pursuit of the most efficient use of land by each developer. Thus, the residential building density is very high. There is also a shortage of recreational areas, which are in most cases cut out from the plots of individual blocks and are relatively small. Such activities stem from the fact that every building is run by a separate residential community. As a result, due to shortage of space most of the recreational facilities do not fulfil their function (fig. 4).



Fig. 4. Example of the recreation area (playground) located within the housing estate "Centre"/"Sunny Terraces"/ "Sobieskiego" in Toruń.

There are situations in which the adjacent recreational areas belonging to different communities are separated by a fence.

Another negative phenomenon is the unregulated status of streets located within the estate. While the public road, laid out back in the 1990s, is freely available, the internal roads have been blocked by ramps. As a result, a network of local roads seems a kind of a labyrinth of "extraterritorial corridors" (fig. 5).



Fig. 5. Gated space of the housing estate "Centre"/"Sunny Terraces"/ "Sobieskiego" in Toruń – due to the presence of numerous fences, roads within the housing estate seem to be "extraterritorial corridors".

This has led to a situation in which some people may use only one access road, although the traffic system potentially provides access to all residential buildings, both from Ludwika Waryńskiego and Jana III Sobieskiego streets.

Another problematic issue is the location of many service entities within the buildings of the gated community. While the idea of setting aside some units for this type of activity does not necessarily have a negative impact on quality of life and at the same time can have a positive effect on the budget of specific communities, it is controversial in the face of difficult access to them for people from the outside. This also provokes situations where parking spaces intended for residents of the concrete blocks are appropriated by the customers of the service centres, and undesirable outsiders appear in the residential space. On the other hand, the commercial tenants need to provide access to potential customers, which is in contradiction with the idea of a gated housing estate. The negative phenomena described above are not related to the quality of the buildings themselves, but are the outcome of improper land use decisions within the housing estate. Developers flawlessly complied with the obligation to deliver buildings of the agreed standard, but made a number of bad decisions regarding the space of the housing estate. The result is a non-functional multifamily housing estate with a relatively high standard of housing, which makes daily lives of citizens difficult and often becomes a scene of conflict for space.

3.3. The main factors of spatial problems within gated communities

The material presented in the article made it possible to diagnose the main factors determining spatial problems of gated communities in Poland.

1). *No requirement to create space planning (local development plans) for areas designated for multifamily buildings.* No obligation to prepare planning studies for the areas with multifamily buildings leads to a situation in which the use of space is formed in an *ad hoc* manner by investors, often with a lack of respect for the idea of spatial order. Investors often modify the final shape of the housing estate during its construction, without consulting the future residents. It leads to a situation in which buyers of apartments do not have a full knowledge about the future shape of the housing estate, and the local authorities have no legal grounds to intervene.

2). *Entrusting the land for construction with several investors.* Allowing a few developers to invest in one housing estate, without a formal requirement of cooperation, leads to the erection of architecturally and functionally disparate housing units.

3). *Fencing of individual buildings.* In a situation in which the construction investment spreads over time (residential buildings within the estate have

been erected within a few years) or the investor erects just one building, individual buildings are often gated. This leads to fragmentation of the space inside the housing estate and inefficient use of available land.

4). *Location of service facilities within the gated residential area.* Services oriented to customers "from the outside" stand in contradiction to the idea of a gated community. The basis for their existence is to attract customers from the outside, who are often perceived as intruders by the inhabitants of the estate. This leads to frequent conflicts between clients of service facilities and local residents (e.g. related to parking spaces).

4. CONCLUSION

Gated communities should form a coherent whole. The proper solution would be to introduce an obligation to enact local development plans for the entire area designated for the investment regardless of the number of developers involved, and the obligatory cooperation of investors in spatial planning. Compliance with these demands would stop lawlessness of investors who are trying to spice up their offer so much that this sometimes leads to the opposite - the emergence of residential areas of the disturbed spatial structure and inconsistent architectural expression.

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