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Uniwersytetu Ekonomicznego we Wrocławiu

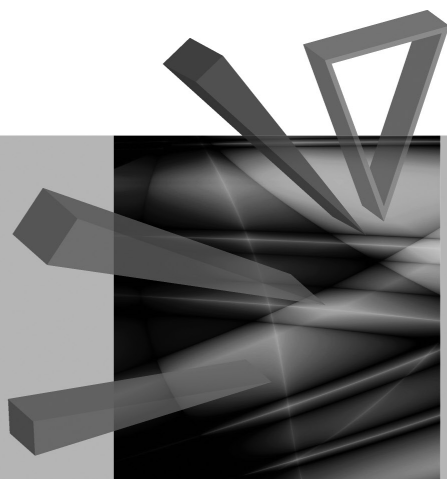
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# **Local Economy in Theory and Practice**

## **Planning and Evaluation Aspects**



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## Contents

Introduction.....	7
<b>Ryszard Broł:</b> Theory and practice of local development strategic planning .	9
<b>Andrzej Sztando:</b> Local development strategic planning and social responsibility of communal authorities: the Polish experience.....	20
<b>Tatiana Zhelyuk:</b> Strategic planning as a tool to enhance the competitiveness of territories .....	31
<b>Justyna Anders, Wawrzyniec Rudolf:</b> Placing collaboration in LED strategies – evidence from selected Polish cities.....	40
<b>Grażyna Karmowska, Katarzyna Bilyj, Katarzyna Mazur:</b> The development of the Rewal and Bogdaniec communes – a comparative study.....	48
<b>Ewelina Szczech-Pietkiewicz:</b> Competitiveness of Polish cities in a European environment.....	58
<b>Veronika Humlerová, Eva Cudlínová, Ivana Faltová Leitmanová, Renata Klufová, Ladislav Rolínek, Milan Jílek:</b> Rural development in terms of economic support – a case study from the Czech Republic .....	68
<b>Janusz Sasak, Beata Domańska-Szaruga:</b> Application of process benchmarking in improving the functioning of public administration.....	81
<b>Sara Bonini Baraldi, Luca Zan:</b> Managing heritage sites in China. The case of the Guan Lin Temple .....	90
<b>Artur J. Kożuch, Katarzyna Peter-Bombik:</b> Target costing as an instrument to ensure efficient fulfillment of public needs at local government units..	104
<b>Joanna Kenc:</b> The effects of town twinning in the Lower Silesia voivodeship – a comparison of the situation in small, medium and large towns .....	112
<b>Dorota Sikora-Fernandez:</b> Private cities. Spatial and economic consequences of gated communities in Poland .....	122
<b>Miroslav Žižka:</b> Multi-dimensional evaluation of economic pillar of territorial analytical data .....	130
<b>Katarzyna Przybyła, Alina Kulczyk-Dynowska:</b> Economic evolution of the Lower Silesia subregions.....	139
<b>Edward Wiśniewski:</b> Evaluation of investment attractiveness of the Central Pomerania communes by local governments .....	147

## Streszczenia

<b>Ryszard Broł:</b> Teoria i praktyka planowania strategicznego rozwoju lokalnego	19
<b>Andrzej Sztando:</b> Planowanie strategiczne rozwoju lokalnego a społeczna odpowiedzialność gminnych władz. Polskie doświadczenia .....	30
<b>Tatiana Zhelyuk:</b> Planowanie strategiczne jako narzędzie do zwiększania konkurencyjności terytorialnej.....	39
<b>Justyna Anders, Wawrzyniec Rudolf:</b> Umiejscowienie współdziałania w strategiach rozwoju lokalnego na przykładzie wybranych miast w Polsce	47
<b>Grażyna Karmowska, Katarzyna Biłyj, Katarzyna Mazur:</b> Rozwój gmin Rewal i Bogdaniec – studium porównawcze.....	57
<b>Ewelina Szczech-Pietkiewicz:</b> Konkurencyjność polskich miast w otoczeniu europejskim .....	66
<b>Veronika Humlerová, Eva Cudlínová, Ivana Faltová Leitmanová, Renata Klufová, Ladislav Rolínek, Milan Jílek:</b> Rozwój obszarów wiejskich w warunkach wsparcia gospodarczego. Studium przypadku z Republiki Czeskiej.....	80
<b>Janusz Sasak, Beata Domańska-Szaruga:</b> Aplikacja benchmarkingu procesów w doskonaleniu funkcjonowania administracji publicznej .....	88
<b>Sara Bonini Baraldi, Luca Zan:</b> Zarządzanie miejscami dziedzictwa kulturowego w Chinach: studium przypadku świątyni Guan Lin .....	103
<b>Artur J. Kożuch, Katarzyna Peter-Bombik:</b> Rachunek kosztów docelowych jako instrument zapewniający sprawne zaspokajanie potrzeb publicznych w JST .....	111
<b>Joanna Kenc:</b> Efekty współpracy partnerskiej w województwie dolnośląskim – porównanie sytuacji w małych, średnich i dużych miastach.....	121
<b>Dorota Sikora-Fernandez:</b> Miasta prywatne. Przestrzenne i ekonomiczne konsekwencje zamkniętych osiedli mieszkaniowych w Polsce .....	129
<b>Miroslav Žižka:</b> Wielowymiarowa ewaluacja gospodarczego filaru terytorialnych danych analitycznych .....	138
<b>Katarzyna Przybyła, Alina Kulczyk-Dynowska:</b> Przekształcenia gospodarcze w subregionach Dolnego Śląska .....	146
<b>Edward Wiśniewski:</b> Ocena atrakcyjności inwestycyjnej gmin Pomorza Środkowego według samorządów lokalnych .....	158

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## **PRIVATE CITIES. SPATIAL AND ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES OF GATED COMMUNITIES IN POLAND**

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**Summary:** Gated communities are a symbol of the transformation taking place in cities and in the structure of urban communities. They create not only a new urban fabric, but they are also a factor that causes irreversible changes in the structure of the city. Public space is, without a doubt, a place that should create social bonds in the city. It is also an area which should integrate the urban fabric and connect separate parts of the city into a coherent whole. The purpose of this article is to analyse the social and economic consequences stemming from the increase in gating of and closing the space, privatising it for the benefit of a certain group of users, in the context of the overall changes occurring in the spatial structure of the city.

**Keywords:** gated communities, urban space, ghettoization.

### **1. Introduction**

The privatisation of public space, expressed in the isolation of fragments of urban space according to their specific functions, has been a process of growing prominence in Poland for the last 10 years. This process is particularly evident in residential areas, where new developments are fenced in from the rest of the city. The creation of gated, often supervised residential developments, is a part of the suburbanisation processes currently occurring in Poland. City centres are perceived as locations with high crime rates, unattractive, polluted and suffering from all the urban problems of our times. Owners of houses or apartments located in gated areas will argue that a closed, walled-in area is the best place to live in. However, such developments are created not only in the outskirts but, more and more often, in more valuable locations with good communications with the downtown area and high land rent. Unfortunately, even collections of two or three blocks of flats fenced in from the urban space are called gated communities in Poland.

Closed housing developments not only create a new urban fabric, they are also a factor that causes irreversible changes in the structure of the city. The purpose of this article is thus to analyse the social and economic consequences stemming

from the increasing gating of and closing the space, privatising it for the benefit of a certain group of users, in the context of the overall changes occurring in the spatial structure of the city.

## 2. The essence of gated communities

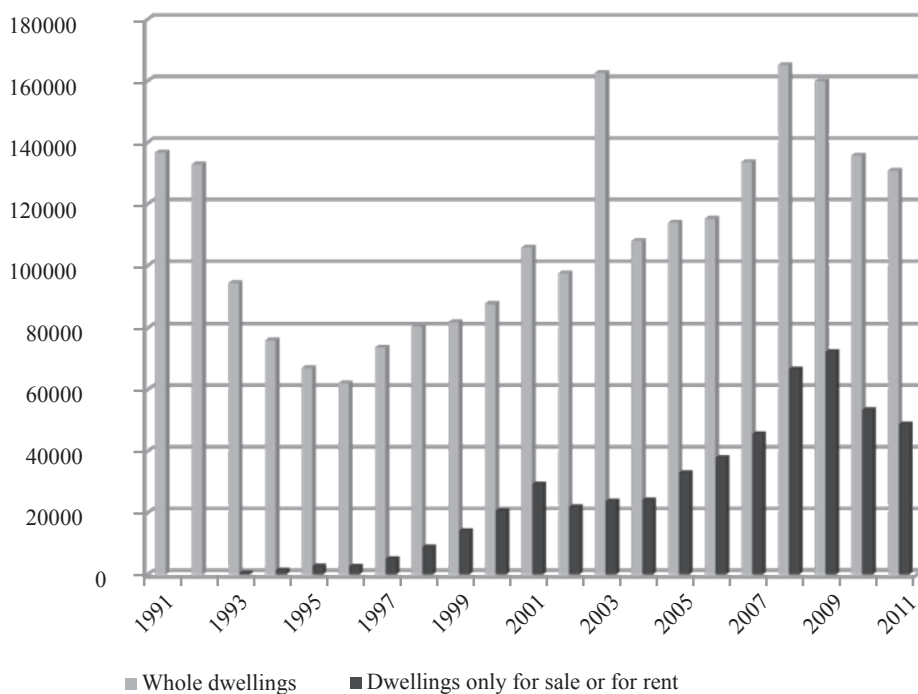
Closed housing estates are a symbol of the changes occurring in the urban area and in the structure of urban communities. Such developments can be defined as predominantly private, spatially isolated residential areas with their respective technical infrastructure with controlled, limited access from the outside, inhabited by residents. These residents isolate themselves from the outside world using architectural means, such as walls or other kinds of fences, entry gates opened by a porter or remotely, the security and internal monitoring.

The closing of public space within cities is not a new phenomenon. In the cities of Mexico and South America, the phenomenon of the wealthier population isolating themselves from the less affluent groups is historically determined by ethnic differences. During the colonisation, many city centres were closed to the indigenous population, primarily because ethnic affiliation was the main determinant of social position. The mid-20th century, on the other hand, brought about an increase in crime rates and the resulting lack of safety in many districts of the United States. This was the main reason for the creation of closed residential areas for the affluent population. This process caused another one – the creation of their own, private system of managing the gated zone. Gated communities thus became a new form of social order, called “social governmentality”, which concentrated on the displacement of undesirable social groups or activities from the inhabited area. This order is maintained by creating zones, where certain groups of people are protected from the behaviour of other groups [Low 2006, pp. 45–46].

The studies of the phenomena of creating gated residential estates focus on several causes for the emergence of such developments. These are the globalisation of the economy, local institutional changes, the stability of property values in closed estates and the trends in territorial marketing implemented by local authorities [Carrasquillo Suarez 2011, pp. 444–451]. Above all, two motivations are usually cited: the search for a safe place to live in and the search for a prestigious location. Initially, it was the desire to provide a safe environment that caused the inhabitants of big cities to create gated communities. Given that security can be thought of as a product, with the inhabitants as a consumer of the newly-created solutions in security control, the emergence of these new forms of spatial arrangements, the gated communities, is simply a market need. The failure of the state to ensure order and security, forces some forms of self-organisation and the transfer of responsibility from the state authorities to the citizens [Gądecki 2009, pp. 124–125].

Urban space, as well as all the processes taking place in it, is subject to market rules and is included in the production and consumption system. Sociological studies

have shown that currently one of the most important factors leading to the fencing-in of residential areas is the desire to belong to a particular social group. Such developments have, therefore, become a product, subject to wide-spread marketing by the development companies, that compete in providing their potential customers with new services and in meeting their needs. Selling a house in a gated community is not anything new any more but, increasingly, the real estate sector is trying to create a new philosophy of life, a symbol of belonging to an exclusive community sold along with the house [Sikora 2007, pp. 229–233]. The growth of groups that are homogeneous in terms of their socio-economic status is visible [Dymnicka 2007, p. 56].



**Figure 1.** Dwellings built between 1991–2011 in Poland

Source: Central Statistical Office in Poland.

In the process of enclosing the developments, it seems advisable to determine the role of the private developers in creating new spatial forms in the city. The changes in the state economic policy, privatisation and deregulation of the economy, as well as the state's withdrawal from providing certain goods and services in favour of private suppliers, have created a climate beneficial to the developers building gated residential communities. Developers became important players in the housing market in Poland in the mid-1990s. Since then, there has been a steady increase in the

number of gated communities. It is estimated that by 2006, development companies controlled 30% of the primary housing market [Gądecki 2009, p. 134]. The figure below shows the number of dwellings built during the last 20 years in Poland.

Closing the public housing space ruins the concept of urbanity and makes the artificial borders build social divisions [Dymnicka 2007, p. 53]. The nature of closed spaces is in opposition to the idea of the public sphere and turns the space that is supposed to be a public good into a “club” good. Small spaces, with one or a few multi-family houses, are being walled-in in virtually anywhere. The age of the buildings does not matter either – longstanding homeowner associations can make a decision to isolate themselves from the surroundings mainly to provide safety and order around their place of residence. New, large developments that often include various forms of housing, are mainly located in undeveloped spaces, on the outskirts of cities or in revitalised downtown areas near recreational grounds. Such developments are usually well connected with the centre, which improves the quality of service for their inhabitants [Mierzejewska 2006, p. 314]. However, this service is public in character, which means that, in theoretical terms, gated communities can be considered “clubs” standing between the public and the private [Csefalvay 2011, p. 737].

The development of gated communities is fostered by the social climate, they become a symbol of deeper social change and the rise of individualism expressed through the changes in the city’s structure and the disappearance of traditional public space. Due to the fact that ensuring public safety should be one of the most important public services, the initiatives taken in this area by closing the space by certain social groups are a shift in the preventive powers from the local government to the neighbourhood level [Csefalvay 2011, p. 738].

### **3. The functioning of gated communities**

In Poland, gated communities function as homeowner associations. According to the *Law on Ownership of Premises*, homeowner associations are comprised of the owners of separate premises in a building. The owner is entitled to co-utilise the property according to its intended purpose. The common property includes the plot of land, parts of the building and the equipment not used exclusively by the owners of the premises. Each of the owners is required to bear the full cost of maintenance of their own premises and to participate in the cost of maintaining the common parts of the property. Owing to the financing of common parts, the residents have an exclusive right to use these spaces. Belonging to a social group of similar income status fosters common privately financed decisions.





**Figure 2.** Closed housing development in Warsaw

Source: photo taken by the author.

Gated communities are characterised by compact construction, where the distances between the buildings are reduced to a minimum due to the high cost of acquiring land in the city by the developer. The common parts of the whole development usually include the areas used for recreation (a playground or a square), as well as an area used for trash collection. The scope of protection depends on the decision of the members of the association, but most frequently involves a fence with an entry gate equipped with an intercom. More prestigious locations can have a reception booth with a security guard who controls access to the development.

In Mexico, gated communities have various forms and sizes, but their internal organisation is similar [Barajas 2002, p. 99]. A person purchasing a house automatically becomes a member of a neighbourhood association (*Asociacion de Vecinos*), and is thus obliged to pay the costs of maintaining the common parts of the estate, security and management costs. The common part of the development may include the recreation area (a swimming pool or tennis court), a car park, an entry gate, pavements, squares, etc. Such an infrastructure is only accessible to the residents.

The management committee (*Comité Directivo*) elected from among the residents, manages the issues of the development and represents the residents in the eyes of the local government. It also deals with administrative matters or concludes

a contract with an external administrator on behalf of the residents. As far as more luxurious housing estates for residents with a higher economic status are concerned, they often play the role of a “mini-city” within a city, with its own security guards and municipal services.

#### **4. The consequences of creating gated communities in a city**

Studies on gated communities have shown a number of effects that their construction causes, both in urban areas and on the outskirts. The potentially positive economic effects include the improvement of the local economy by the creation of new workplaces for unqualified workers (janitors, security guards, gardeners), as well as an increase in tax revenue. However, the positive effects are minor compared to the devastation that this form of development causes in the spatial and social spheres. This in turn leads to higher costs for the residents of the city as a result of its operation.

Another negative effect of enclosing the space is its fragmentation and lack of continuity. This spatial disintegration leads to social segregation by creating better and worse locations. M. Castells [Castells 1976, p. 171] defines segregation as a process of organising space into internally homogeneous zones, with concurrent social dispersion between them. This dispersion is not only a characteristic differentiating separate areas, but also a factor that determines the hierarchy of areas within a city. The social segregation processes become institutionalised mainly through the physical and morphological fragmentation of space. Segregation may also be considered as a factor isolating – voluntarily or involuntarily – various social groups. There is no doubt, however, that some social groups are forced to congregate in strictly defined areas, whose position is pre-determined.

#### **5. Conclusion**

The construction of gated housing communities is currently very dynamic and has resulted in an excessive urban sprawl. The use of public space is dominated mainly by transport. In addition, its excessive use causes severe pollution and the formation of traffic jams. Instead of public spaces, facilities similar to the American *shopping malls* that combine entertainment, commercial and service function in one place are built more and more often. There is, however, a lack of parks, squares and other types of space usable by the whole local community. Moreover, the space is being divided into old, degraded areas, which often include the city centre and the new area, which combines a shopping centre with isolated, gated and exclusive residential areas.

Urban life is concentrated not in public squares and streets, but in shopping centres and separate colonies. This results in the further marginalisation of economically vulnerable groups and, paradoxically, decreases the overall safety in the city, instead

of improving it. The new spatial organisation also interrupts its continuity and makes the city grow outwards. With the increase of urban space, the maintenance costs of the city also rise.

Municipal government policy concerning spatial management cannot be viewed through the interests of different social groups. It should include strategies for spatial management and the creation of public spaces in historical centres, tough neighbourhoods, new developments and other areas emerging in the cities. Public spaces should be considered in the context of the metropolitan functions served by the city, as well as in the context of the layout of all spaces within the city. Public space is, without a doubt, a place that should create social bonds in the city. It is also an area which should integrate the urban fabric and connect separate parts of the city into a coherent whole.

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## **MIASTA PRYWATNE. PRZESTRZENNE I EKONOMICZNE KONSEKWENCJE ZAMKNIĘTYCH OSIEDLI MIESZKANIOWYCH W POLSCE**

**Streszczenie:** Prywatyzacja przestrzeni publicznej, wyrażająca się w odgradzaniu fragmentów przestrzeni miejskiej pod określone funkcje, jest w Polsce procesem o tendencji wzrastającej w ciągu ostatnich 10 lat. Proces ten szczególnie widoczny jest w przestrzeni o funkcji mieszkaniowej, gdzie nowe osiedla powstają za płotem odgradzającym je od reszty miasta. Zamknięte osiedla mieszkaniowe nie tylko tworzą nową tkankę miejską, ale są także czynnikiem powodującym nieodwracalne zmiany w strukturze miasta. Celem niniejszego artykułu jest zatem analiza konsekwencji społecznych i ekonomicznych, wynikających z coraz częstszego zamykania przestrzeni, prywatyzowania jej dla ściśle określonej grupy użytkowników, w kontekście przemian zachodzących w przestrzennej strukturze miasta.

**Słowa kluczowe:** społeczności zamknięte, przestrzeń miejska, gettoizacja.