

Gated Communities in Prague

Tomáš Brabec and Luděk Sýkora

Abstract

The paper presents an introductory study of gated and guarded residential places and areas in Prague. Until recently, gated and guarded residential areas have not presented a prominent type of development in the Czech Republic and in the city of Prague. However, with maturing residential property market, developers introduced a specific niche residential property development that attracts residents paying attention and willing to pay premium for life in an environment of security and peace achieved through physical separation from the outside world. The paper presents the growth of gated places, their types including territorial distribution within metropolitan area and discusses the major driving forces that brought their constitution.

Introduction

Gated communities are an important phenomenon of urban development around the world. Recently, gated and guarded residential developments started to mushroom in former socialist countries of Central and Eastern Europe. The nature of separation of affluent population behind gates and fences attracted attention of researchers, politicians and general public. While the research on gated communities in Western countries and notably in United States is well established, very little is known about such places in post-communist countries. This is given by the relatively recent emergence of gated places. However, the rapid growth of gated communities points that we need study their formation and social consequences in the context of post-communist Central and Eastern Europe (BRUNN & FRANTZ 2006). While seminal studies are available for Bulgaria (STOYANOV & FRANTZ 2006), Hungary (CSÉFALVAY 2007) and Russia (BLINNIKOV et al. 2006), no systemic research of gated communities has been made for Czech cities.

This paper offers introductory insights into gated communities in Prague city region. We can find gated places also in other Czech cities. However, they are rather individual cases. Prague is the largest urban place in the country and prime command and control centre which concentrate the wealthiest population. Consequently, it also provides conditions conducive to gated communities formation. Since the beginning of millennium we could observe remarkable growth of gated communities. We take Prague as a case study of a city with the far highest concentration of this phenomenon in Czechia. The paper presents the growth of gated places during past decade. Furthermore it discusses their main types and territorial distribution within metropolitan area and discusses the major driving forces behind their production.

Method

ATKINSON & BLANDY (2005) define gated communities as “walled or fenced housing developments, to which public access is restricted, characterized by legal agreements which tie the residents to a common code of conduct and (usually) collective responsibility for management.” This definition was used for the study of gated communities in Prague. The research started with a compilation of a list of gated communities. They were searched in developers' and real estate agencies' marketing materials and confirmed in field inspection of every site. Each gated community was characterised by name, location, developer/investor, year of accomplishment, number of dwellings, price per sqm, presence of physical barrier and security guard. The survey database reflects situation in November 2008. There are gated areas

that were not initially developed as gated communities and where gates were added only later (Figure 1). We added known cases into the database, however, admit that the coverage might not be full. Specific case is represented by privately owned streets marked with signs about private property. Provided access is not restricted, we have not included them into gated communities. Finally, many single-building condominiums are equipped with reception at the building entrance. As these single building are not complexes and surrounding streets are in public use we do not include them into the database. It also would be difficult to cover all instances of the last two cases, as they are not specifically marketed and a field survey with a complete coverage of all buildings in Prague is far behind the possibilities of authors.

Fig. 1:
Pisnice Gardens



Source: author

Types of Prague's gated communities

BLAKELY & SNYDER (1997) distinguish three major features of gated communities: lifestyle, prestige, security. Gated communities are characterised by their physical separation from other places supported with private security service. We used these two features for basic classification of Prague gated communities into three main categories: (1) guarded and walled communities, (2) guarded communities and (3) walled communities. The first type is characterised by the combination of fenced area with the presence of 24-hour security guard. 45.4 % of communities were walled and guarded at the same. They include the most luxury project ranging from small to large. The second type includes guarded communities with private 24-hour security service in a community area which is not fenced area. This type is represented with large multi-dwelling buildings' projects, both luxury and less luxury and accounts for 26.0 %. The third type of walled communities accounts for 28.6 %. These places have only a fence or a wall around the area without security service or guard. They are usually small places with only a few detached (family) houses and lower luxury.

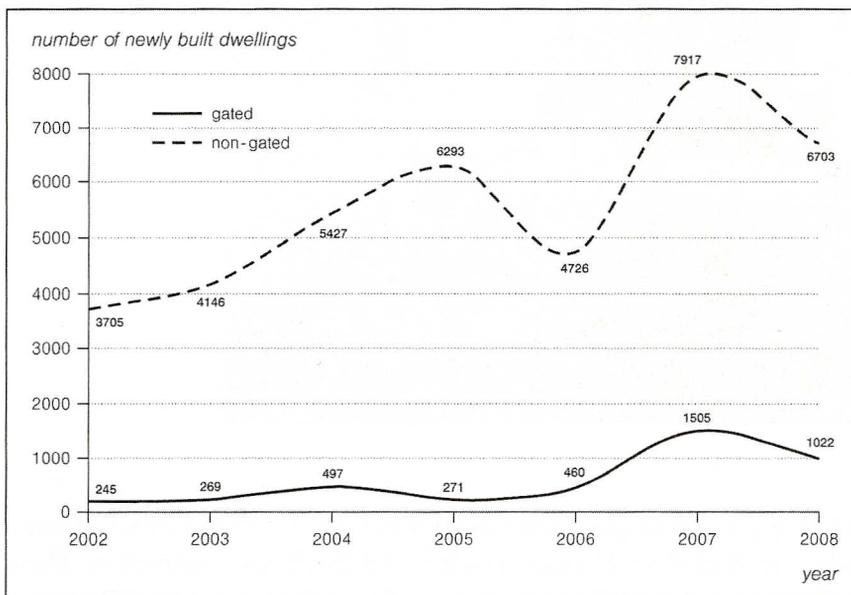
The growth of gated communities

The growth of gated communities dates from 2002. Until this date, there were only few places that took the form of gated communities. Probably the most remarkable of them is “Mala Sarka”, a master planned community for expatriates (foreigners accounted for 85 % and university educated for 65 % of inhabitants in 2001). This unique residential project was constructed since mid 1990s in several phases together with the campus of the International School of Prague. Mala Sarka is located within Prague administrative boundary at the edge of Nebusice village (population 2300) that now has a status of city borough. It consists of 145 villas, detached and semi-detached single family homes occupied by over 300 inhabitants. The locality is managed by Mala Sarka management company whose shares are owned by property owners (SÝKORA 2007). The company organises security patrol as well as other services such as road cleaning and snow removal. Consequently, Nebusice local government does not provide here some of the common services. Mala Sarka and the rest of Nebusice are two separate worlds with only a minimum of mutual contacts.

The construction of gated communities has increased since 2002. Dwellings in gated communities annually account for 5-20 percent of new housing construction (Figure 2). In 2002 and 2003 five development projects of gated communities were completed (4 walled and guarded; 1 walled), all with luxury housing for the upper classes and rich foreigners. Two of them are located in gentrification area of the inner city (Figure 3). They take a form of multi-dwelling condominiums forming a residential complex that is guarded and fenced and where residents can enjoy common facilities such as a swimming pool. The prices of m² are almost five times higher in comparison with other newly built dwellings in Prague.

Since 2004 we can observe that developers of gated communities targeted this housing also for the middle class population. During 2004 and 2006, ten projects of all types were built; both small and large, luxury for upper classes as well as less luxury for middle classes. For instance project “Podvinny Mlyn” (Figure 4) which is with its 345 dwellings the largest gated community in Prague offered housing for prices not significantly exceeding the usual price level in non-gated residential complexes.

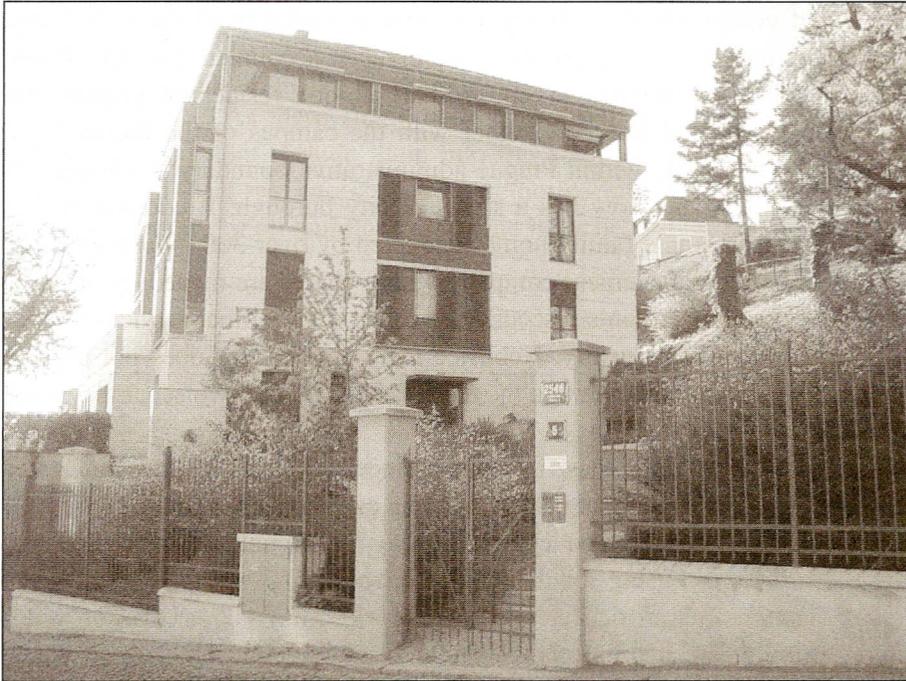
Fig. 2:
Housing construction in Prague (2002-2008)*



*It is only an assessment for the year 2008

Source: Authors' research; Czech Statistical Office

*Fig. 3:
Americka Park*



Source: author

*Fig. 4:
Podvinny Mlyn*



Source: author

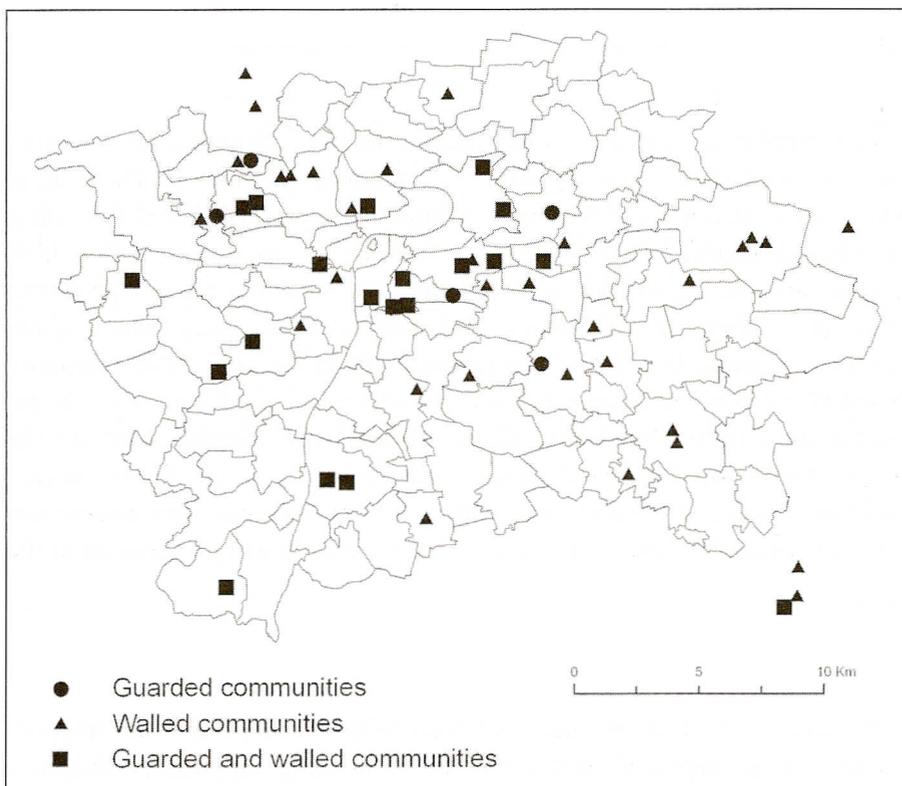
2007 and 2008 have seen an explosion of gated communities in Prague with three fold increase in 2007. Gated communities accounted for 15 percent of the total dwellings construction. These years saw a remarkable housing boom not only in Prague but also in the whole Czech Republic. In the environment of tight competition, investors and developers were seeking to provide

products for specific segment in the market, where they could for marginal increase of cost maintain price level and generate profit. Such a niche was found in gated communities that were by realtors represented as a perfect place for living with its own security and physical separation from the outside world presented as full of crime and violence. The developers' advertisements were based on concepts such as safety, luxury for everyone, exclusive living, etc. Residents were willing to pay a premium for living in an exclusive and secure environment. The supply generated by property industry well met the hidden desires and aspirations of certain segment of population resulting in growing presence of gated communities in newly emerging urban residential landscapes.

Territorial patterns

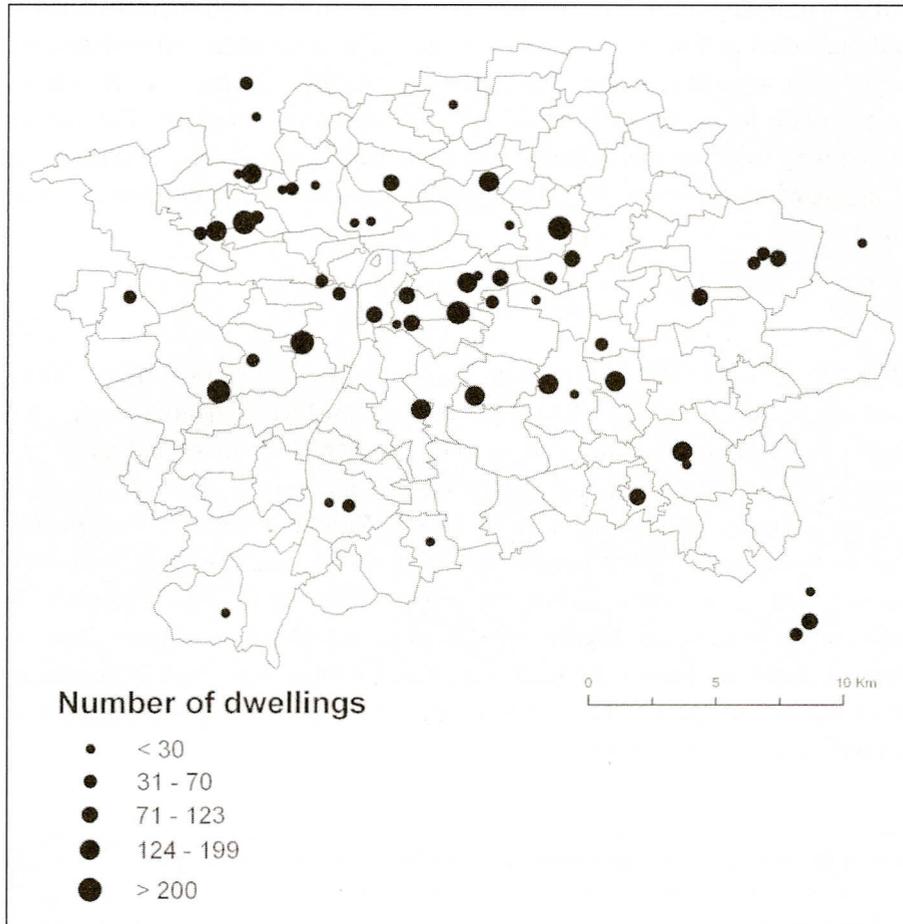
In the USA (BLAKELY & SNYDER 1997; LE GOIX 2005) or Latin America (COY 2006; THUILLIER 2005) gated communities are prevailingly located in suburban residential areas. This contrasts with Prague where gated communities can be found mainly in the inner and outer city (Figure 5). Spatial distribution of Prague's gated communities is thus more similar to England (ATKINSON 2004). In Prague metropolitan area, only six gated communities are located outside the city administrative area. Suburban gated communities are rather small fenced clusters of single family houses. Largest gated communities in terms of population and number of dwellings can be found in the inner city (Figure 6). However, suburbs have higher share of population living in gated communities on the total population of the area. And importantly, number of gated communities emerged right at the compact city edges in good location in relation toward city as well as urban hinterland.

Fig. 5:
Territorial distribution of the types of Prague gated communities (November 2008)



Source: authors' research

Fig. 6:
 Number of dwellings in Prague gated communities (November 2008)



Source: authors' research

Most of Prague gated communities are located in three main types of residential areas. The first represent the traditional areas of luxury housing with the wealthiest population. These areas include neighbourhoods such as Dejvice, Bubenec or Vinohrady with pre-2nd World War villas and apartment houses. They are characterised by the highest level of population education, high share of western foreigners and the highest prices of housing. The second group is represented by areas which are now under major transformation of former land use. They include some traditionally working class and petite bourgeoisie neighbourhoods in the city centre proximity (for instance Zizkov) and selected brownfields areas with good or attractive location and larger spaces for new development projects (Vysocany, Karlin, Holesovice). Finally, there are the suburban places offering better environmental quality and living in single family homes (Modrany, Uhrineves, Horni Pocernice). Gated communities are only exceptionally constructed in less attractive areas – for example there is only one in the zone of housing estates from the communist times.

Conclusions

At the end of 2008 there were 57 gated communities in Prague with 16 other under construction. The last two years witnessed an unprecedented explosion of housing supplied on Prague's residential market in gated communities. This boom of gated residential projects is driven by developers who introduced a specific niche on residential property development targeting

customers willing to pay premium for the pace and security of their private life. The current economic recession is likely to affect the number of produced housing units, however, it will probably only strengthen the trend of socio-spatial separation and the share of those wishing to live behind the gates that separate them from the volatile world outside the fence.

Acknowledgements

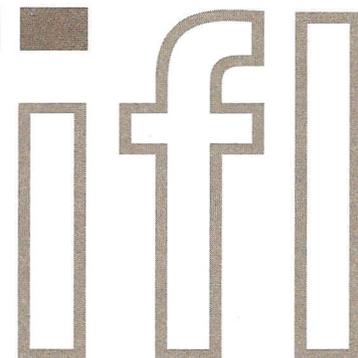
Authors acknowledge the support provided by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the Czech Republic, project no. MSM0021620831 "Geographic Systems and Risk Processes in the Context of Global Change and European Integration".

References

- ATKINSON, R. & S. BLANDY (2005): Introduction: International Perspectives on The New Enclavism and the Rise of Gated Communities. In: *Housing Studies*, 20 (2), pp. 177-186.
- ATKINSON, R.; S. BLANDY; J. FLINT & D. LISTER (2004): *Gated Cities of Today: Barricaded Residential Development in England*. ESRC Centre for Neighbourhood Research. Glasgow.
- BLAKELY, E. J. & M. G. SNYDER (1997): *Fortress America: Gated Residential Communities in the United States*. Brookings/John Hopkins Press. Washington, D.C.
- BLINNIKOV, M.; A. SHANIN; N. SOBOLEV & L. VOLKOVA (2006): Gated communities of the Moscow green belt: newly segregated landscapes and the suburban Russian environment. In: *GeoJournal*, 66 (1-2), pp. 65-81.
- BRUNN, S. D. & K. FRANTZ (2006): Introduction. In: *GeoJournal*, 66 (1-2), pp. 1-3.
- COY, M. (2006): Gated communities and urban fragmentation in Latin America: the Brazilian experience. In: *GeoJournal*, 66 (1-2), pp. 121-132.
- CSÉFALVAY, Z. (2007): *New Segregation with New Conflicts - Gated communities in Hungary*. International Conference Private Urban Governance and Gated Communities, Paris. Available at: <http://gated.parisgeo.cnrs.fr> (last accessed on 2nd September 2008).
- LE GOIX, R. (2005): *Gated Communities: Sprawl and Social Segregation in Southern California*. In: *Housing Studies*, 20 (2), pp. 323-343.
- STOYANOV, P. & K. FRANTZ (2006): Gated communities in Bulgaria: interpreting a new trend in post-communist urban development. In: *GeoJournal*, 66 (1-2), pp. 57-63.
- SÝKORA, L. (2007): *Separace sociálně silných: Postavíme mezi sebe oddělující závory? Obec a finance 2007*, 2, pp. 60-61.
- THUILLIER, G. (2005): *Gated Communities in the Metropolitan Area of Buenos Aires, Argentina: A challenge for Town Planning*. In: *Housing Studies* 20 (2), pp. 255-271.

forum

Herausgeber Sebastian Lentz, Ute Wardenga

The logo for the Leibniz-Institut für Länderkunde (ifl) is located on the right side of the cover. It consists of the lowercase letters 'i', 'f', and 'l' in a stylized, outlined font. The 'i' and 'l' are simple vertical bars with a small horizontal bar at the top. The 'f' is more complex, with a vertical stem and a horizontal crossbar that has a small gap in the middle.

Heft 11

Christian Smigiel (Ed.)

Gated and Guarded Housing in Eastern Europe

Leibniz-Institut für Länderkunde, Leipzig 2009