

# Aspects of Gated Neighborhoods in Transitional Society

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**Key words:** gates & walls, safety & security, exclusion & separation, transition, crime

## **Abstract**

The paper studies some aspects of gated neighborhoods in a traditional society such as Serbia, giving an overview of situation in the capital of Belgrade. Using the developed countries experiences as the comparison the paper underlines the differences in living conditions and standards, traditional form of society and family, mixed development, crime level and racial homogeneity. The conclusions provide some predictions of future need for development of gated neighborhoods. The aim is to recognize the critical moment when gated communities will become necessary and prepare for their appearance and impact upon the urban tissue.

## **1 Introduction**

By definition, gated neighborhood is a special residential complex, walled off from the surrounding area, with extra security measures (guards and surveillance cameras), that provides peaceful and safe living conditions to the middle and upper income groups.

They offer quiet, litter and graffiti-free place to live and for sure, totally safe, with no crime community. They stand in contrast to the noise, bustle and social mix in other parts of the city. Behind the gates, the complex usually has all exclusive facilities, like its own recreational area, wellness, supermarket, bar, restaurant, postal box and decked communal areas. It is clear that it is tailored just for wealthier people.



Figures 1 & 2: inside the walls

The reasons for choosing this kind of polarized community for home are probably different, but fear of crime is mentioned as the most common one. The growth of the gated community may continue until the public confidence in police is restored. But some opponents think that living in a gated community could dramatically increase people's fear of crime and consequently, of their poorer neighbors outside the gate.



Figures: 3 & 4: various facilities (pools, golf course...)

## 2 Developed countries examples

Nevertheless, more and more people want to reside in gated residential communities. Because of this, gated residential communities and garden apartments across the USA are being built at record rates. In the 1970s there were approximately 2000 gated communities nationwide. In the early 2000s, there were over 50,000 gated properties with more being built every year. That equates to about seven million households or 6% of the national total behind walls or fences. About four million of the total is in communities where access is controlled by gates, entry codes, key cards or security guards.

A report on gated communities by Sheffield Hallam and Glasgow University quotes figures indicating stark differences between the two populations inside and outside the gates and suggesting that the two rarely come into contact. For example, it states 73% of adults inside the gates are economically active as opposed to 57% outside. The majority of adults within the gates are in social classes 1 and 2, whereas the residents outside are overwhelmingly from classes 3 and 4. The report also found that 48% of residents inside the gates were owners-occupants, compared to only 3% outside.



Figures 5 & 6 : gated entrances

When we use the examples, we usually refer to USA [1,2] or UK [3] models, although we can find numerous settlements of this or similar kind in the rest of Western Europe, Canada, Australia, South Africa [4] or countries of South America. Tourist resorts in some Caribbean, Asian or Arab countries by its security level, entrance control of locals and dedication to high income guests, remand to excluded living areas. There are Israeli examples of new communities which are designed to prevent attacks and give protection to inhabitants [5]. This is not just a question of many years of practical experience, number of isolated neighborhoods, great area of occupation, including inside facilities or style, but very serious and long term studying process, with precise differentiation of types, statistical data with evaluation of spatial impacts and social change, and many more. The issue of terrorism becomes more important, as much as crime prevention or simple wish of isolation and segregation.

### **3 Transitional surrounding**

Compared to this, in East Europe, where transition brought about the new forms and trends of living, gated communities are at the very beginning. To examine the situation in one of those countries, we shall use the capital Belgrade as a paradigm of situation in Serbia, because this is the largest urban settlement in the region, with 25% of nation's population (approximately 2 million of citizens) living in it. Belgrade represents absolutely the most developed area, and that fact could be observed in migration rate from other parts of the country to the capital, number and quality of technical and social infrastructure networks, level of average income and high prices, specially those of urban land and housing. The prices on Belgrade's housing market range from 1200€m<sup>2</sup> for flats in new construction, in the outer city area from, 2500€m<sup>2</sup> for flats in the central area to 4500€m<sup>2</sup> in prime residential area of Dedinje (example: the house dating back from 1930's, reconstruction needed, building 700m<sup>2</sup>, plot area 3000m<sup>2</sup>, sold in 2005. for 3 million €).

The prediction of the future development of gated communities in Belgrade is connected with the conditions achieved in the past. The socialism system, in the period from 1945 till late 1980's, did not produce extremely socially segregated neighborhoods (except for the exclusive residential area of Dedinje). The overall conditions led to the mixed settling. But the new market boom emphasized the desirable city locations and made a difference in the costs. The choice (based on supply and demand) provided the opportunity for moving and the light segregation started. Term segregation refers mostly to differentiation by income, because population is racially homogenous.

However, the most interesting area is still Dedinje located on the hill with an overview of the city, surrounded by greenery. Before the Second World War this was a city place of escape for the wealthy men, mostly consisting of weekend houses with gardens. After the end of the war and revolution it became restricted for ordinary citizens. New political establishment moved to the nationalized houses, and the rest was used (and still is) by foreign embassies. Soon, it became an enclosed neighborhood, with certain security measures. Some gates, ramps, high fences, traffic signs (speed reduction, forbidden stopping and parking, photographing, ...), trees and policemen protected parts of this area from entrance, even views. Natural and artificial isolation had one more aspect to it: the real and unreal. Besides some physical barriers, in the minds of the people this was a "forbidden city", far away from everyday life. No matter how intriguing this part of the city was, and what was a real level of entrance control, most of the others, the ordinary citizens did not feel comfortable to trespass. Even during the past regime in 1990's, the police did their best to prevent the students demonstrations from coming close to this restricted area and to disturb the peace of the presidential residence.



Figures 7 & 8: most usual traffic restrictions and police cordon during demonstrations



Figure 9: guarding house in front of property



In the course of the past 15 years, as a consequence of the overall political and economical uncertainty, so-called middle class almost vanished and a new social hierarchy was established overnight. By definition, gated communities are made as zones for /with crime prevention. But in the upside-down transitional situation, the opposite happened. Members of the organized crime groups made their own business and housing complexes, untouchable fortresses, with superior surveillance.



Figures 10 & 11: two most famous “crime fortresses” ( the one on the left was destroyed by police forces in 2003)

## 4 Conclusion

Today, Dedinje area remains the most exclusive one, specially the space between the two streets: Uzicka and Tolstojeva streets. This is more a type of an enclosed, existing neighborhood that has controlled access across the existing streets. The area is still inhabited by official state and embassy residents, but by the newcomers, too, mostly successful businessmen and pop stars, who can afford luxury housing. Gates, high walls and fences and security guards (official or private ones) are isolated on smaller complexes, mostly protecting one or few households in the neighborhood, owned or occupied by some public person. Every event is overviewed by police force, organizing traffic, parking and entrance in general. All the streets in the area were and still are treated as public property, so their maintenance as well as all infrastructures is within the responsibility of the specialized public services.

Apart from this, there are few new locations in this city area, advertising condominiums for sale or rent, emphasising gated and secured character of the complex. This has become a new trend, but still very shyly. The problem is in a very thin layer of population that can afford this kind of housing. On the other hand, crime fear is not so high and frantic, and the locations far away from the city core are not so popular (those near the city centre are already occupied, or too small, or too expensive for spacious complexes), no matter what qualities they offer. The area and accompanying facilities in these new settlements are not so wide in their range, especially in comparison to the examples from the USA. The most important is the luxury of flats/houses and restricted access, with basic landscaping and gardening provided.



Figure 12 : new “Panorama” community

The general plan of Belgrade till 2021 provides possible locations and some urban standards for new high quality settlements of high quality, but does not pay special significance to the type of gated neighborhoods. At this moment the urban competition for one of those locations (as preparation for detailed urban plan) is in progress, however, gating is not the topic.

What will happen in the future mostly depends on the demands of the market and upgrading of the standard of living. The best way would be to start on time by observing and studying this category of housing, by using examples from abroad and comparing them to the local requirements. Topics of interest comprise social and physical segregation, contact with neighbouring urban patterns, proportion between public and private, basic urban indicators and conditions of the development inside the walls (area, lot coverage in %, number of inhabitants,...), level of investment and market price, variety of facilities and utilities.

But still one question remains crucial: Do we really need gates and walls to feel secure, or is this just an irrational need for exclusive separation?

## 5 Final Remarks

Chances for early appearance of gated communities in Belgrade, in the way that we can observe in the cities of the USA, UK or South Africa, are very low. There are several reasons for this remark: segregation in the society is still at a low level as a consequence of no-class system in the past period, existing separation is related to the income and not to the ethnical, religious or racial questions, crime level is more or less unique for all parts of the city and it is still considered reasonably safe for ordinary living. The wish to be far away from the eyes of the others and to keep the property secured will probably stay on an individual level and end by a gating parcel. Creating new area like Dedinje will be very hard, because it is not possible to copy the exclusivity. This area will probably be used within its natural boundaries to its maximum to give the opportunity to all those interested in moving over. Extra gating, except individual parcels of this community is not expected, because there is no real need and in the public it would have a negative conotation. It is reasonable to expect more antiterrorist measures taken due to numerous embassies and residences located there.

It seems that this transitional society is still not ready for real gated communities, but anyway this type of settlements should be researched and observed on time, to prepare urban planners and developers for the possibility of their demand.

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