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Gating as exclusionary commoning in a post-socialist city – Evidence from Gdańsk, Poland

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Abstract. New-built gated condominiums in the suburbs of a post-socialist city are a well-studied phenomenon. However, in Poland, recent years have seen an expansion of residential gating into old inner-city neighbourhoods and socialist large housing estates. The resulting fragmentation and privatisation of public space have raised much controversy and debate on appropriation of urban common good. This paper presents outcomes of a research on the changing discourse of gating in Gdańsk, based on a discourse analysis of newspaper articles and interviews with key urban stakeholders. On the one hand, gating is seen as an anti-commoning practice criticised for its elitist character and undesirable socio-spatial consequences. On the other, a narrative of exclusionary commons has emerged to justify the need of gating in specific cases. Considering the varying motivations and types of gating in different urban areas, the authors have attempted a classification, relating gating practices to commoning strategies and their justification in localities typically characterised by atomistic individualism and social disintegration.

Key words: Gating, urban commons, common good, post-socialist city, Gdańsk

1 Introduction

Gating and commoning are two seemingly opposite, or alternative, phenomena taking place in contemporary cities around the world. The first term refers to the global trend of privatisation of public residential space through formation of enclosed housing developments with restricted access (Blakely, Snyder 1997), while the second consists in collective appropriation and regulation of shared concerns of the everyday beyond the state and the market (Kip et al. 2015). Even though both processes – albeit to varying degrees – involve exclusivity, the individualistic character of the former and the collectivist of the latter, render them “similar but disparate” This conflicting interrelation is pointed out by Harvey (2012) in his critique of appropriation of urban space through gating:

The rich these days have the habit, for example, of sealing themselves off in gated communities within which an *exclusionary commons* becomes defined. This is in principle no different than fifty users divvying up common water resources among themselves without regard for anyone else.

Harvey’s notion of gating as exclusionary commoning inspired the authors of this paper to apply this concept to analogous practices in a post-socialist city through a case study of Gdańsk – a Polish city, in which increased popularity of gating has been observed

since the early 1990s. Similarly to other Central and Eastern European countries, Poland after 1989 experienced a violent clash between the crisis-ridden socialist regime and the neoliberal doctrine. As a result, the concept of the ‘common good’ underwent a dramatic devaluation in favour of the increasing cult of private property (Czapiński 2013). At the beginning of the systemic transition especially, such a tendency, framed in the discourse of successful transformation to capitalism, was considered to be “natural” and “inevitable” (Koczanowicz 2011, Sagan 2017).

As underlined by Gądecki (2012, p. 109), “gated communities need to be analysed first of all in relation to their local contexts and purposes”. It is of particular significance in the case of European post-socialist gating, characterised by especially intensive and heterogeneous development – changing over time and dependent on location within the city – against the background of corresponding processes ongoing in the rest of the continent. Responding to the lack of studies on this specific topic, the main aim of the paper is to demonstrate the shifting discourse on the relation of gating and the common good in a neoliberal post-socialist city, based on the example of Gdańsk in Poland. Three research questions were of our particular interest: 1) how have processes of gating affected the city through time? 2) how has the perception of gating as exclusionary commoning evolved in different residential environments? 3) what conditions should be met for gating to be called commoning? The paper is organised in two principal parts: a theoretical part, which conceptualises gating and commoning with an emphasis on the post-socialist specifics, and an empirical part, featuring a qualitative study undertaken in Gdańsk based on print-media discourse analysis and individual in-depth interviews, which introduces a classification of exclusionary commoning practices and their rationalisations. These are followed by a discussion of the results and a final conclusion.

2 Theoretical background: the interrelation of gating and commoning in contemporary cities

Residential gating is regarded as the outcome of creating and supplying individual residential needs of selected interest groups, “reinforced by planning practices and policing, implemented by zoning laws and regulations and subsidized by businesses and banks” (Merry 1993 after Low 2001, p. 47). Research literature on gating may be grouped into two categories in terms of demand-led motivations and reasons behind origins and development of the process. It is either considered to be connected to the growing fear and lack of sense of security in the postmodern society or regarded as a result of class changes and the increasing need for demonstrating status and prestige in urban social space. As established by Atkinson, Flint (2004), a decision to live in a gated estate may follow from the need for privacy and anonymity or be dictated by fear of criminal behaviours, cultural fears and any other anxieties. Low (2001) labels the latter as discourse of fear and argues that the addition of walls, gates and guards produces a landscape which encodes class relations and residential segregation in the built environment. Accordingly, Blakely, Snyder (1997) distinguish three types of gated communities: lifestyle, prestige and security zones. Lifestyle communities attract those whose common activities and interests influence residential choices, prestige communities appeal to those to whom status and privacy are paramount concerns and security zones reflect the fear of neighbourhood violence and crime. While these motivations may be interdependent, it should also be noted that gating varies in terms of measures of control and architectural design¹. Regardless of the reasons behind the inclination for gating, the process itself is usually linked to socio-spatial segregation (Marcuse 1997, Caldeira 2000, Christopher 2001, Vesselinov 2008).

Residential gating is exclusionary by definition: it is an enclosed urban space for privileged social groups to share means while restricting the access for “others”. Thus, meeting the conditions of being excludable and non-rivalrous, gated estates fall under the

¹For instance, Grant, Mittelsteadt (2004) introduce a typology based on a continuum of enclosure – from ornamental gating with a marked entry way but no restriction of access to restricted entry roads with access-controlling guards, a full range of security measures and constant administrative surveillance. When only physical attributes are concerned, gated estates break up into two groups – enclosed apartment buildings (condominiums) and multi-building complexes, in reference to which the term “gated estates” was first used (Glasze 2001).

category of club goods (Manzi, Smith-Bowers 2005, Le Goix, Webster 2006). Maintenance costs of the collectively used elements – such as common infrastructure and facilities – are split between the users. Club membership eliminates the free-rider problem inherent to public goods. Moreover, the fact that “a club provision proffers an alternative to a central government provision of local public goods” (McNutt 1999, p. 946) may serve as justification of gating for the sake of the common (collective) good, wherever the government fails to do so sufficiently and/or effectively (Raposo, Cotta 2009, Warner 2011). According to Webster (2002, p. 397) “cities naturally fragment into many small publics, each of which may be thought of as a collective consumption club” and therefore gated communities should be regarded as urban consumption clubs in which “legal property rights over neighbourhood public goods are assigned by property-market institutions”.

In his cutting-edge paper, Buchanan (1965) situated club goods between the neo-classical private goods and Samuelson’s (1954) purely public ones. Given that consumption of any club good involves more than one person, but less than an infinite number of them, finding the “optimal sharing group” is key to the club’s effectiveness:

The central question in a theory of clubs is that of determining the membership margin, so to speak, the size of the most desirable cost and consumption sharing arrangement. (Buchanan 1965, p. 2).

Olson (1965) builds on this ground, maintaining that the smaller a group, the more likely it is to further its common interests and provide itself with a collective good. In addition, motivations for such clubs are not only economic. Smaller groups, whose members can be in close communication with another, are also prone to social pressure and social incentives. In an attempt to update Olson’s theory, Sandler (2015) mentions homeowner associations in gated communities and condominiums among institutions fostering effective collective action. This point brings us closer to the idea of gating as exclusionary commons, however it misses the essential aspect of cooperation, in terms of teamwork and shared accountability.

Authors of a paper on community gardens in Singapore (Neo, Chua 2017, p. 667) reject the “implicit assumption that a good community garden must necessarily be inclusive or that, conversely, community gardens that are exclusionary are bad”. At the same time, they introduce the argument of “responsibilization”, which rationalises exclusionary practices on the grounds of the community’s engagement not only in fulfilling “self-evident, mundane’ responsibilities towards individual gardens but also a responsibility towards ‘making the garden a space of community’” (p. 671). Our approach seeks to explore this paradox. While we do not reject the objective assumption that gated estates belong to the category of club goods, we focus on the subjective experience of their residents, to whom they are in fact collectively managed commons. To that end, we draw on the “commons on the inside/private property on the outside” conception proposed by Foster, Iaione (2016, p. 292):

Although certain forms of private property are held “in common” by a collection of individuals and may include shared common space for the collection of rights-holders (e.g. a gated community or a condominium complex), in most respects this property follows the logic of and operates like private property. These and other “limited-access” common interest communities may look like traditional “commons on the inside” for those who have access through ownership or usage rights in the community, but very much operate like “[private] property on the outside” in that these communities are endowed with the right to exclude non-owners from their shared spaces or resources.

Hence, investigating the discourse on gating, we rely on the insiders’ perspective and it is their narratives, based on perception and judgement ‘from the inside’, that we will examine in the Gdańsk case study. Our working definition of exclusionary commoning thus combines the interpretations of gating and commoning featured in the introduction: “collective appropriation and regulation of urban residential spaces beyond the state/market and behind closed gates”. It would be expected that the investigation of residential gating from this angle might reveal a hidden potential for cooperation and/or community-building missed by the mainstream research.

3 Gating and the common good after socialism

In Central and Eastern Europe, emergence of gated housing estates has been closely connected with post-1989 transitional effects: augmented societal uncertainty, commodification of housing and general privatisation of urban space (Gądecki, Smigiel 2009). The proliferation of gating in the region may have several overlapping causes. On the one hand, gated estates “reproduce patterns of voluntary isolation from the surroundings” which were characteristic of the former *nomenklatura*, on the other – they offer a possibility to make up for decades of limited or negated right to “demarcation of social boundaries and distances”, as well as repressed individualisation of lifestyle patterns and restricted consumer opportunities (Gašior-Niemiec et al. 2007, pp. 80–81). Likewise, as argued by Gądecki, Smigiel (2009, p. 200), contemporary gated communities are ‘promoted and presented as a post-modern lifestyle package’, which further enhances the longed-for sense of superiority and prestige. The security factor is also significant in explaining the prevalence of gating in Central and Eastern Europe, an issue particularly emphasised by Jałowiecki (2018), who calls it “obsessive” and “paranoid”. Thus, motivations for gating in post-socialist cities seem to be quite similar to those observed in old-democratic countries but deepened by the experience of socialism and the counterbalancing effect of transition to neoliberal capitalism (Szwarc 2014, Sagan 2016, Szymkowska 2017, Jałowiecki 2018).

Expansion of gated estates in the region relies on combination of interests of three main stakeholders: developers, local authorities and middle-class residents (Sagan 2016). *Developers* pursue maximisation of profits from building high-density residential housing equipped with privately provided goods and services for collective consumption, which significantly increases the real-estate prices. To reach this goal, they actively influence potential customers, luring them to live in offered projects through marketing and branding (Brabec, Machala 2015). The interest of *local authorities* lies in attracting affluent taxpayers, representatives of higher social classes, without having to increase expenditure for the local infrastructure and public goods and services. Privileged *residents* move to gated enclaves in search of specific qualities, such as aesthetics, privacy and exclusiveness – even if the everyday reality in a gated community may not live up to their expectations (Gądecki 2013) – but also in order to close themselves off from the outside. As a result, gating of urban spaces leads to a division into two social worlds – the internal and the external, “ours” and “theirs”, which resolves to growing spatial segregation and social disintegration (Marcinićzak et al. 2015).

The discourse of post-socialist gating in academic literature is rather negative and the issue is presented as one of the major challenges of European cities after socialism (Tobiasz-Lis 2011, Kovács, Hegedűs 2014, Krupickaitė et al. 2014, Ptak, Serafin 2017) – not only because gated estates are perceived as microscale enclaves of wealth in which public space is reduced to communication routes and green areas (Grzegorzczuk, Jaczewska 2018), but mainly because of the extent of the process of gating. In the view of Sagan (2016), the practice of gating leads to appropriation and privatisation of the common good of urban residents, namely urban public space in all its forms, on an unprecedented scale. Similarly, Jałowiecki (2010) acknowledges that gated and enclosed estates intersect existing streets, exclude vast urban areas from common use and significantly change daily routes, which in consequence decreases physical and temporal accessibility within the city.

Depletion of urban common good is particularly marked when gating concerns not the new greenfield residential developments but takes place inside older housing fabric. Enclosure of newly erected gated buildings or estates within existing urban structures in inner urban neighbourhoods, as well as raising fences around residential buildings which until now have not been gated, is referred to as secondary gating (Tobiasz-Lis 2010, Bierwiazonek 2016, Drozda 2017, Leśniak-Rychlak 2018). Its specifics contribute to conflicts between the “old” and “new” residents, typically concerning competition over parking space or restricting access to previously fully open spaces. Raising fences and other spatial barriers in large housing estates – the flagship housing developments of the socialist era – is characteristic of the latter phase of post-socialist gating. Considering the relatively high level of safety in this type of residential milieu, any security claims justifying the need for fences remain unfounded (Szafrńska 2017). Moreover, the rejection of modernist

guidelines for the open-space arrangement in such neighbourhoods contributes to spatial chaos, visual congestion and a decline in quality of life.

Since the mid-1990s, Poland has become the leader among European post-socialist countries in terms of the rapidly augmenting number of enclosed housing developments (Polanska 2014). Increased popularity of gating in Polish cities may be explained both by contemporary deficiencies in housing and spatial planning and by historical conditions. The stage for the provision of new housing in the form of gated communities has been set as a consequence of *laissez-faire* policies and reduced state intervention after 1989 (Tsenkova, Polanska 2014). Likewise, it should not be forgotten that gating in Poland culturally originates from rural areas – both peasant and gentry traditions significantly and persistently shaped territorial behaviour patterns of Poles, resonating in residential preferences of the emerging new middle class (Kubicki 2016, Bouloc 2018). The ongoing development of suburbs observed in the last few decades has introduced gating which not only serves to demarcate the property area, but also “reinforces specific patterns of suburban social behaviour: focus on the self and close family and detachment from the social fabric of the countryside” (Kajdanek 2014, p. 200). Thus, according to Polanska (2014, p. 417), “[g]ated communities are private places where individual interests in the closest group/family are cultivated at the expense of collective values”. It also needs to be underlined that despite idyllic names of the new gated estates – such as Green Retreat, Valley of Azure, Sunny Hillside – promising high-quality living in a close-knit community, the space inside of them is often mainly used for parking and neighbourly relations are practically non-existent (Zaborska 2007).

Commenting on the lack of shared spaces in suburban new housing developments, Szmytkowska (2014) speculates that it may be linked to the newcomers’ conscious withdrawal from social interactions at the place of residence, in favour of enjoying them in the inner city. This goes in line with findings of Szczepańska (2012), who maintains that relations between residents of gated and non-gated estates are more or less alike in terms of their superficiality and conventionality. The same author takes notice of a motivational contradiction which explains the unusually low level of engagement in housing associations operating in gated estates (Szczepańska 2014). On the one hand, the residents appear to value the possibility of co-governance, but on the other, they choose not to make use of it unless the value of the property is at risk. Investment viability seems to be their top priority and the only worthwhile reason for commoning. An anonymous notice posted in one of gated communities in Warsaw that went viral on the social media extends this principle to the absurd point. It reads as follows:

[Dear] Neighbour! Soon the value of your apartment will go down! Why? The sandpit in our backyard = noise [and] strangers outside the window. We chose a quiet, peaceful location, without people peeking into our windows and now others intend to disturb that harmony. Vote against! (Dziewit-Meller 2017)

This type of “commoning” hardly amounts to anything more than collective action for the sake of private interests. The reason behind it may lie in the insufficient recognition of the common good. As much as Poland – unlike old democratic European countries (Berge, McKean 2015) – has little tradition of urban commons, the discourse of urban common good has underwent multiple transformations in the last century. From a motivational slogan after the Second World War, during the country’s reconstruction, through a celebrated motto in the decades of intense industrialisation and urbanisation, to a compromised catchphrase towards the end of the socialist period, it became redundant with the wake of neoliberal capitalism. Only recently the notion of urban common good has re-entered the public debate, with gating being one of its prevalent themes (Grabkowska 2018). However, until recently there existed no laws concerning enclosure of residential buildings and estates. Partly due to the fact that during the first phase of transformation gated estates had been developed mostly in the suburbs (Kajdanek 2012), regulations were introduced only later, after the process had spilt over to inner city neighbourhoods and socialist high-rise estates. The so-called Landscape Act (Kancelaria Sejmu 2015) enabled local governments to pass resolutions protecting the urban landscape from visual chaos created by large outdoor advertisement, but also restricting the right

to excessive and tasteless gating. In any case, the anti-gating pressure, justified by the concern for the urban landscape as the common good, came from ‘the outside’ and so far, no studies have been conducted to evidence the insiders’ outlook on how enclosure may serve ‘the common’ in different housing environments of a post-socialist city.

4 Exclusionary gating in Gdańsk: case study

Gdańsk is an exemplary case for the study of post-socialist gating à la polonaise. The main urban centre in northern Poland, with population of around 465,000 in 2018, and heart of the Tricity agglomeration of a 1.2 million inhabitants, it experienced a rather chaotic greenfield development at its southern and western fringes after 1989. Since many of the new housing estates had been fenced, the city’s peripheries promptly became areas of considerable concentration of gating (Polanska 2010b,a). With time, the trend of enclosing residential spaces began to affect new estates in more central locations and to penetrate the existing housing structures. To some extent this redirection followed from the local government’s attempt to contain the galloping processes of suburbanisation and outmigration to adjoining communes, through a change in spatial planning priorities. The new policy of “inward urban development” turned out to be successful as it coincided with a partial retreat of disillusioned commuters who had previously fled to the suburbs – a change of residential preferences which was hastily picked up by developers.

Inner-city re-urbanisation brought new challenges connected to gating. For instance, in the historical centre of Gdańsk, the Main City, it has been adopted as the local residents’ response to pressures of ‘touristification’ and appropriation of space by other users. The specific arrangement of open-plan backyards rebuilt after the Second World War in a departure the original medieval layout – dense and inaccessible, as well as the dominating residential function in a typically tourist area, have contributed to numerous spatial conflicts (Szechlicka et al. 2016). In 2015, the Mayor’s Plenipotentiary for the City Centre (also called the Manager of the City Centre) was appointed to address these issues. Furthermore, in 2018 a local administrative body in charge of municipal property initiated a programme aimed at rearrangement of the backyards “in terms of spatial, functional and legal conditions by promoting civic engagement and responsibility” (Gdańskie Nieruchomości 2019). In essence, the Main City residents were encouraged to lease and manage the adjoining backyards, which would enable them to apply for funds assigned for renovation and fencing.

Other problems emerged in large housing estates, where open spaces between blocks of flats attracted developers willing to set up new investments irrespective of the local communities’ interests (Figure 1). For instance, in May 2017 a local e-news platform reported on the controversial enclosure of a new development inside one of the socialist residential neighbourhoods, where a wire fence had intersected daily routes of the long-standing inhabitants (Koprowski 2017). The article featured an online survey in which two thirds of 3051 respondents claimed to be against the construction of gated estates (55 percent on the grounds that ‘urban space should be open and not a collection of ghettos’ and 11 percent because of their conviction that gating ‘makes local residents’ life harder’). Only every fourth respondent supported gating, maintaining that ‘it is natural that communities prefer to keep the neighbourhood to themselves’, while every tenth conceded that ‘gating should just be allowed in peripheral urban areas’.

Another survey, conducted in 2014 among residents and district councillors in Gdańsk, confirms the overall negative perception of gating (Jaskulska 2014). Furthermore, according to its results, almost half of the respondents supported the local authorities’ right to interfere with the type, shape and colour of fences enclosing private properties. Inclusion of regulations concerning historical fencing indicates that gating has been recognised as a pressing issue in the peripheral and inner-city neighbourhoods alike. Conclusions of the study were applied in the first legal document aiming at regulation of the so-far uncontrolled gating in Gdańsk – the Landscape Resolution passed by the city council on 22nd February 2018 (Rada Miasta Gdańska 2018). Fences made of concrete, reinforced concrete, metal, plastic, textile or foil, as well as other, insufficiently open-work, were banned and their height was limited to 2.2 metres in single-family housing units. Enclosure



Source: Picture taken by Maja Grabkowska on April 30th, 2019

Figure 1: The divided landscape of exclusionary commoning after socialism: fencing between old and new residential developments in Przymorze Małe, Gdańsk

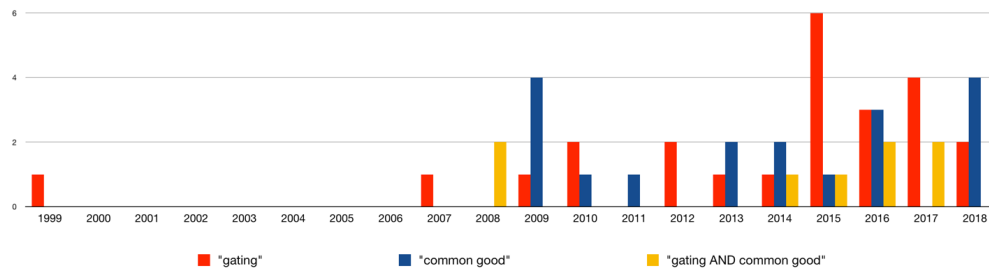
of multi-family buildings is no longer allowed, apart from the ground-floor private gardens (with maximum height established at 1.5 metres), dog parks and playgrounds. Some exceptions pertain to fences adjacent to historical buildings – they may correspond to the existing structures in terms of height and material used. As much as these regulations are a significant manifestation of the local authorities' increasing commitment in sorting out the issue of gating, at the same time they are nothing but technical adjustments, directed at the 'how to gate' rather than 'whether to gate at all' dilemma, nor do they endeavour to arbitrate the deadlock caused by the clashing visions of the common-good.

5 Research methods

The applied qualitative methodology consisted of a combination of two complementary research procedures – critical discourse analysis (CDA) of print media content, and individual in-depth interviews. Such approach was found to be to best suited for reaching the research aims. Even though critical discourse analysis originates in language studies, it focuses not as much on the language or narration per se, but on the assessment of social problems and issues in critical terms, based on the assumption that discourse is the key element in the construction of social life and relations of power (Fairclough, Duszak 2008). Print media content constitutes only a part of the public discourse, yet it plays a significant role in setting the agenda because of overall accessibility and high level of dissemination. While the analysis of press articles concerning gating in Gdańsk reveals general trends indicating how it has been represented and associated with the discourse of common good, outcomes of the conducted interviews complete the picture, enabling a detailed elaboration of the researched issues.

Applying the discourse analysis of print media content in research on gating in Poland has been successfully performed by other authors (see Gądecki 2009, Polanska 2010b). The primary aim of our research was to assess the prevalence of the notion of common good in reference to gating in Gdańsk over the last decades, as well as to identify concrete themes and narratives essentially related to different types of gating according to their location within the city. The body of texts was selected from the local pages of *Gazeta Wyborcza* – a liberal democratic journal established in 1989 and since then one of the most popular daily newspapers in Poland². *Gazeta Wyborcza Trójmiasto*, which covers

²Analysis of a sole press title may cause a bias in terms of the worldview presented. Nevertheless, since the aim of the study was to find out the logic behind the pro-gating attitudes of residents of gated



Source: own elaboration

Figure 2: Timeline of articles in Gazeta Wyborcza Trójmiasto containing the searched keywords, 1999-2018

news from the Tricity agglomeration, first came out in 1990 (as *Gazeta Morska*) and apart from the print edition has been available online since 1994 (although the content has been kept behind a paywall since 2014). The analysed articles were searched from the newspaper's online archive comprising electronic versions of all texts published from 1992 onwards. Three keywords were used for search: "gating", "(urban) common good" and "gating AND common good", returning 50 results altogether – 24 for "gating", 18 for "common good" and 8 for the combination of the two terms³.

The interviews took place in spring and summer of 2017 and involved 15 respondents who were selected by purposive sampling from 5 groups of urban stakeholders (3 per each group): activists, decision-makers, entrepreneurs, planners and residents⁴. The group included NGO representatives, city and district councillors, developer and local business representatives as well as inhabitants of different residential areas. Regardless of the sample's lack of representativeness in statistical terms, its diversity served to broaden the spectrum of subjective perspectives and opinions. Questions were formulated in a generalised manner, so that the interviewees had maximum liberty to discuss these issues, according to what they thought was key when applying the notion of common good to residential gating.

After all the research material had been collected, the electronic versions of selected articles and transcripts of interviews were coded with the use of MAXQDA, a qualitative data analysis software, and investigated in line with the CDA procedure. In the case of articles, general attitudes towards gating in and out of the context were identified, whereas the interview results were searched for specific rationalisations of gating by means of the exclusionary commons argument.

6 Results and discussion

6.1 Print media

The earliest of the 50 analysed articles dates from 1999; however, it is followed by an eight-year gap (Figure 2). Since 2007 there has been a clear growing trend in the total number of articles, which indicates the beginning of the debate on gating and the urban common good in the newspaper.

Until the early 2010s, articles featuring the issue of gating were neutral and mostly informational, simply stating whether the newly built or planned estates were (going to be) enclosed or not. Then, the discourse becomes more judgemental. In a text from 2012, a developer representative describing a future residential investment assures that it

estates, it seemed appropriate to focus on the daily newspaper whose readers originate mostly from the middle class. More importantly, apart from its widespread reach, GW is the only print medium in Poland which provides access to electronic versions of issues published as far back as in the 1990s.

³Articles containing the term "common good" in other contexts than the urban were excluded from the results.

⁴Anonymised quotations from the interviews are marked with corresponding letters: A, D, E, P and R.

would not be gated as ‘some sort of a closed ghetto’ (Sowula 2012). An urban planner interviewed a year later speaks of the importance of public space in order to prevent “creation of a new generation of projects, gated and concrete, where one cannot do much apart from sleeping” (Kozłowska 2013). From approximately 2015 onwards, the narrative focuses even more explicitly on the ills of gating, such as fragmentation of space or denying access to playgrounds to children from the neighbouring open estates. At around the same time the geographical focus of attention switches from peripheral districts in the upper terrace to inner city and concerns not only new developments but gating of existing properties and backyards as well. The notion of common good emerges specifically in reference to the latter.

Throughout the analysed period the total number of articles covering urban common good – under such diverse topics as spatial (dis)order, protection and management of industrial heritage, operation of public buildings, or urban space in general – amounted to 26. Almost a third of this collection involved gating and gated estates. In some of them only plain analogies to exclusionary commons are made, as in the case of a text reporting excessive use of beach windbreaks in summertime (“It doesn’t matter whether it is a house, desk at work or several square metres of sand. What is enclosed, is mine”; Kozłowska 2015b). Other examine the problem more closely, pinpointing its complexity. For instance, an article discussing the redevelopment of backyards in the Main City presents gating as one of the necessary conditions for the project to succeed. The enclosure is said to be postulated by the local residents who “want it to be public space, but accessible only to themselves” (Karendys 2016). According to one of the participants in the project, both academic and architect, the Main City’s open, modernist design and popularity among tourists are two factors legitimising the residents’ demand:

It was a huge mistake of modernism to efface the boundaries between public and private space. Until the tourists, restaurants and other attractions were few, fences, walls and gates weren’t necessary for people from the outside to respect the residents’ privacy. [Today] gating of the Main City backyards is the only chance to preserve it as a [city] centre with not only shops, restaurants, attractions, but its own residents as well.

Interviewed on the same issue, the Manager of the City Centre underlined the educational aspect of the project, namely building shared responsibility and integration among residents (Karendys 2017). Thus, apart from the overall change in the discourse the analysed articles also reveal an evolution of the stance taken by the local authorities – from “in Polish legislation there is no legal basis to ban gating” and “ban on gating strikes at property rights” (Kozłowska 2015b) in 2015, to treating gating as a necessary evil to safeguard the residents’ common good while they “learn to manage the space in a shared, and not individual manner” (Karendys 2017).

The analysis of the articles not only signalled the quintessential issues of the research problem, but also confirmed the existence of three main representations of gating in Gdańsk, depending on temporal and locational settings and spatial consequences: primary suburban gating, secondary inner-city gating and combined gating in large-scale housing estates. *Primary suburban gating* equates gating in its ‘classic’ form – fenced new-build condominiums with security surveillance. Due to weak social ties between neighbours, rather than qualifying as gated communities, they are considered to be ‘communities of anonymity’. However, peripheral location renders their enclosure relatively uncontroversial. Contrastingly, in the case of *secondary inner-city gating*, which concerns mostly multi-resident housing from before the Second World War and the decades shortly after, introduction of fences is often perceived as appropriation of common space. Gating of the existing residential buildings in a dense urban fabric results in cutting off long-established shortcuts, isolates neighbours and prevents their children from joint outdoor activities. On the other hand, the proponents of gating point to benefits following from the enclosure – most of all easier maintenance and control over immediate surroundings. Lastly, *combined gating in large housing estates* concerns both primary gating of new buildings erected in between the modernist tower-blocks from the socialist period and secondary gating of the latter, also in retaliation for limiting access to the previously shared space.

6.2 Interviews

As follows from the interviews, attitudes towards gating in general are mixed. Some respondents are decidedly against it for numerous reasons, while others try to be understanding, for instance by attributing it to the post-socialist legacy of the shortage economy:

I kind of understand it, because I spent my childhood in People's Republic of Poland, without a room of my own [...]. Perhaps people from these older generations of our parents and grandparents were traumatised by being deprived of their property, own space [...] and [now] only look as far as to the confines of their fence or gates (A_4).

The same interviewee introduces the term *microcommons* to label residential space enclosed out of the need for private possession and security. It assumes that gating, regardless of its form and location, may be explained by cultural or historical factors. Yet, the majority of respondents who refer to gating in the context of commoning tend to differentiate between its types in accordance with the classification proposed in the previous section.

One of the most exploited narratives grants the owners of the homes in newly built residential estates the right to fence their 'common' property. The *common private property* argument relies on the analogy with detached housing:

It is quite interesting that our culture takes it for granted that someone who owns a single-family house and a garden surrounds them with a fence [...], but in the case of multi-family buildings it is expected that they remain unfenced – it is a sort of inconsistency (E_7).

An interviewed planner insists that “the right to fencing” derives from the constitution and serves to protect interests of those who “spent a lot of money to have some greenery planted, a playground installed”, preventing all these costly amenities from the potentially destructive impact of outsiders, e.g. stray dogs or loitering youngsters (P_13). This standpoint is supported by a decision-maker's view on immediate residential surroundings as a historically acknowledged “private public space” (D_11). While usually applied to exonerate primary suburban gating, the same reasoning appears also with reference to gating in the inner city and large housing estates. For instance, the non-residents' need for crossing inner-city backyards is questioned and it is noted that while spaces between the blocks of flats used to be “no-one's” and thus could serve “everyone” under socialism, they now have proper owners and cannot be treated as a fully accessible public space.

Another, though similar, way to look at gating is seeing it as counteraction or a defensive response against abuse of the common good. Such may be the case of secondary inner-city gating:

It is generally a [result of] tourism and recreation pressures, all year round. I have always lived in the city centre and I have observed as year by year [...] the residents feel less and less at home, they feel pushed out. Therefore, [gating] is a counteraction, meaning that [...] they close this space, in a way reserving it for themselves (P_15).

Apart from accusing tourists and other non-residents who “ravage, park illegally [...], drop off their garbage, [...] relieve themselves” (A_6), some interviewees tend to blame the inappropriate urban design, which leaves residents with no other recourse than to install the fencing.

A contrasting approach highlights the notion of shared responsibility taking. Here gating is recognised as an act of commitment to taking care of the common good. The respondents apply this concept mostly to secondary inner-city gating, using it in praise of residents' readiness to getting involved in management of the dilapidated backyards. Instead of focusing on the residents' rights to gate their property, it underlines how their obligations towards the property generate the necessity of gating. In this sense, gating

is depicted as an almost altruistic enterprise. A related, but more elaborate attitude assumes that gating enables responsibility learning. One of the activists employs to that end a metaphor of a grave health condition of backyards in the Main City, incurable by natural methods, such as herbal teas and eating well, but requiring hard measures in the form of a shot of antibiotic, i.e. gating. The interviewee concludes that only then it is possible for the backyards to recover and for their guardians to start anew, gaining knowledge of how to take proper care of the backgrounds' well-being:

Gating [...] clearly specifies to whom the backyard space belongs and who is responsible for it. Once we [gate the backyards], once the residents get the sense that they are managers of this space, [...] once they reckon that these benches are for them to sit down [...], and that the toys their children have left in the sandpit won't disappear overnight, once they learn to tend the grass growing here, which they will have to mow by themselves, and once they transfer this awareness to the next generation, then in about 20-30 years these backyards might spontaneously open up to the city. Because it will finally enter our minds that these are in fact semiprivate spaces of residents living there (A_3).

In other words, gating as a shock therapy is applied to restore the lost balance before the treatment may be continued with the use of more gentle procedures. Another activist claims that, "for the time being", it is in fact "the only way to sort things out" (A_6). It seems interesting that respondents see the learning process as two-way. On the one hand it concerns residents, accused either of helplessness or being arrogant and used to having things done by 'someone else' (e.g. the state, the city authorities, the housing administration). On the other – it also holds for non-resident users of the contested space, such as tourists, suppliers of shops and restaurants, individual drivers seeking parking opportunities and standard trespassers (or 'shortcutters').

To a lesser extent and in a slightly different context responsibility learning is applicable to gating in large housing estates. For instance, one of the interviewed residents mentions how a housing cooperative in her neighbourhood fenced a car park just to teach its users proper handling of a shared facility. In the long run responsibility learning is expected to foster civic engagement not only at the level of neighbourhood but the whole city as well:

Local communities which [...] self-organise to manage their backyards, in a moment will do so also around the corner [...]. To me, it is the natural sequence – we first take action here and then move on to the next level (A_6).

The last strategy exposed in the interviews refers to *retaliation for anti-commoning* and is connected with combined gating in large housing estates. A singular reported case concerns a situation in which gating of new residential buildings implanted between the blocks of flats from the socialist period cut off an existing pedestrian route. In an act of 'revenge', seeking attention from the media and the local authorities, the outraged 'excluded' residents reciprocated and separated themselves as well.

What follows from the research results is that the narrative of gating as exclusionary commons has indeed emerged and persisted in Gdańsk throughout the last decade. Different rationales are used by the interviewees to justify gating in different types of residential neighbourhoods (Table 1). In the new housing estates in the suburbs, gating is considered to be 'naturally' following from exercising individual property rights by groups of residents who happen to live in the same estate. In the inner city the explanation is more about self-defence against appropriation of common good and self-organisation for protection of common interests. The issue of gating in large housing estates is relatively less pronounced in the interviewees' accounts and specifically involves a revanchist reaction to enclosure of infill residential development. On the whole, this diversity stems from dissimilarity of challenges and necessities typical of distinct urban built environments, but other factors may play an additional role.

All six arguments are arranged in the table in the order of increasing value of the responsabilization factor, forming a continuum of priorities: from collective private interests

Table 1: Rationalisation of exclusionary commoning in different types of gating

Exclusionary commons rationale	Type of gating			unspecified
	primary suburban	secondary inner-city	combined in large-scale housing estates	
establishing microcommons				+++
protecting common private property	+++	+	+	
counteraction against the abuse of the common good		+++		
taking responsibility for the common good		+++	+	
learning to share responsibility for the common good		+++	+	
retaliation for anti-commoning			++	

Source: own elaboration based on interview results.

to collective common interests. Perhaps the most striking result of the study is that while the principle of the sacred right to private property seems to apply in all three neighbourhood types, it is the only (and the most pronounced) rationale represented in the suburban estates. Conversely, the more ‘communal’ narratives, employing the notion of common good, are observed primarily in the inner city. This leads to two assumptions which would require further research to substantiate. Firstly, putting collective common interests before collective private interests may be easier in old neighbourhoods, where the existing local communities, consisting mainly of old-time neighbours, have a relatively greater capacity for collective action than their atomistic suburban counterparts. Secondly, the size of the gated residence probably matters. The estates in the suburbs, usually green-field developments, cover larger areas with adequately bigger numbers of residents, which goes against Olson’s rule for effective collective action. Old tenement houses in the inner city comprise housing associations which rarely exceed 10 homeowners, who may find it harder to evade common responsibilities or, contrarywise, may find it easier to cooperate with fellow residents.

Post-socialist specifics relate to all six strategies, hinging on aspirational consumerist culture and harsh neoliberal jungle-law conditions affecting every-day urban life, but the key to their understanding may be hidden in the two extremities – the perspectives of microcommons and retaliation. Even though 30 years passed since the systemic change, the majority of consumers in the Polish housing market still seek compensation for the constraints of the socialist period but also simply lack experience of cooperation at the neighbourhood level. The ongoing direction of changes is nonetheless somewhat promising. With time, as the question of common good increasingly appears in public discourse, what we take today for the fiasco of commoning may turn out to have been its difficult early beginnings.

Processes of gating in Gdańsk have been heterogeneous both in space and time. Just like in other Polish cities, at the beginning of the research period they were restricted to developer investments in the suburbs, as an outcome of utterly market-driven management of space. Delayed but reasonable attempts to prevent urban sprawl by means of the inward urban development policy all the same contributed to the spillover of the gating trend, not only in the inner city, but in the post-socialist block-of-flats settlements as well. Another initiative which legitimised enclosure of common space in Gdańsk, was the Main City backyards’ renovation programme. Its implementation endowed the process of gating with an upbeat narrative, according to which it served the common good of the local residents by weaving social ties and building a sense of community. Yet, this sort of reasoning has hardly been validated in reality. Thus far, exclusionary commoning initiatives – especially with regard to community-building through responsabilization – remain largely declaratory. Enclosed residential spaces, although increasingly functional and aesthetic, are still perceived through a prism of collective private interests, with

little social interaction between users. The residents' concern for these spaces usually resolves to paying contributions to the common renovation fund, which covers costs of their management by external companies. Interestingly, despite the change of social perception and evaluation of gating in Gdańsk – from full acceptance at the beginning to the mounting contestation in recent years – the exclusionary commoning rationale is not only still used to explain and justify gating but has become a ubiquitous excuse for residential enclosure. Nonetheless, the responsabilization thread which has appeared relatively recently in the public discourse and is present in our interviewees' accounts points toward a qualitative change worth additional investigation.

7 Conclusion

One of the most significant transformations ongoing in post-socialist cities is shrinkage of public space as a result of fierce privatisation of urban areas. Residential gating represents only one of its many variations. While it has been condemned for its detrimental effects on the urban common good – the undesired consequences of socio-spatial segregation and exclusion – some arguments speak against such unequivocal assessments. We find that residents of gated estates may rationalise their preference for enclosure with logic which diverges from the classical narrative focusing on individual needs in terms of security and prestige. Analysis of spatial distribution and motivations for residential gating in Gdańsk provides evidence of these practices being performed under the banner of the collective common interest by means of exclusionary commoning. For instance, the enclosure of backyards in the historical city centre, a popular tourist attraction, may be regarded from the outside as an example of transformation of public space, a commons, into a club good. However, from the residents' perspective, or an insider's point of view, it well as may be presented as a 'justified' regulation of a shared concern. In this specific case – a defensive reaction against appropriation of the common residential space by tourists. A more intricate justification of gating is based on the assumption that enclosure may prompt residents' concern for the shared space and motivate them to learn how to manage it collectively and effectively. While the proposition of looking at gated estates as actual platforms for building social relations and shared responsibility as of yet may be premature, we find that responsabilization does play a key role in rationalising exclusionary commoning and therefore it provides the answer to our third research question.

Considering the ongoing neoliberalisation of everyday life, the persistent 'sacredness' of right to individual property and the rather makeshift (re)actions of local authorities, the timing would not seem right for the gating trend to reverse. Then again, the discourse on gating and its socio-spatial consequences has been increasingly critical, accompanied by a growing awareness of the importance of cooperation and collective action – from the microlocal level upwards. This opens possibilities for a bottom-up evolution of informed involvement and concern for the common good in all spatial dimensions. After three decades of transformation in countries of Central and Eastern Europe, such a shift seems likely, even if social and mental changes usually take the longest to complete. On the one hand, certain traumas associated with the socialist period have already subsided, including the understandable reluctance towards the 'common' or 'collective'. On the other – the experience of neoliberal reality, with the imperative of acquiring private goods and demonstrating economic prestige in urban residential spaces, has instilled the counter-demand for cooperation, participation and implementation of common undertaking in local communities. It remains to be seen, whether the recent pandemic of COVID-19 completely overturns the current state of affairs in terms of social relations and urban commoning in residential contexts. A full range of reactions may be expected – from extreme social distancing, motivated by health and safety requirements, to a redefined social closeness, expressed in real cooperation, mutual care, solidarity and collective action. It is also possible that in the post-COVID-19 era the term 'exclusionary commoning' will take on new meanings.

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