

“Will of an Epoch Translated into Community Space” - Paradigm Shift of Community Housing

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Abstract—Though gated communities have become a defining characteristic of the landscape of many cities throughout India and the world, but there is virtually no guidance related to planning for gated communities. Although the academic literature has identified numerous impacts associated with gated communities, that literature only rarely includes specific recommendations for planning interventions that practicing planners could implement to mitigate these impacts. This research begins the process of examining possible interventions through a case study and interview method. Specifically, the impacts associated with gated communities are examined through an analysis of the literature and a case study is conducted of gated communities in Nagpur.

This study finds that gated communities frequently generate negative impacts on residents both within the gates and in adjacent neighborhoods. Moreover, interviews with local planners suggest that many of these impacts may be permanent. Considering the permanence of gated community design, planners require a variety of responses to gated communities and cannot simply rely on prohibitions on gated communities, particularly in areas that already have a significant number of gated communities. As a result, this paper attempts to provide practicing planners with a more robust perspective on gated communities by consolidating the findings on impacts presented in the literature and then suggesting guidance to address a wide range of planning issues related to gated communities. Potential planning interventions are outlined to address issues associated with transportation, crime rates, segregation, inequality, community character, sustainability, streetscape design, the planning process, and community governance. These recommendations offer a foundation for a more robust approach to planning for gated communities. Planning regulations implemented prior to the construction of gated communities will be the most effective at achieving substantial changes in gated community design.

Keywords: Community Space, Gated Community, Planning Interventions, Social Impact of Gated Community

1. INTRODUCTION

The remains of fortified walls surrounding ancient cities can be an awe inspiring sight and a tourist destination in their own right. However, modern walled and gated communities are more likely problematic than a source inspiration. Despite their widespread development, gated communities are one of the most contentious forms of current residential development. The walls, fences, and gates associated with these

developments are just as likely to be associated with concerns about security and crime rates as they are to inspire awe and respect.¹ As the popularity of gated communities in both urban and suburban settings has surged in recent years, this development form has resulted in significant changes in the social, political, and physical landscape of cities throughout the world.

²Despite their popularity and the impacts associated with gated communities, very little guidance exists for planners dealing with gated communities, prompting some to point to a need for “a clear and consistent approach by all planning authorities to the issue of gated communities, following a clear national policy”. This paper assembles potential guidance for planners to respond to the development of gated communities.

Beginning in the 1980s, the motivations for living in gated communities, and their physical design, began to take on several characteristics distinct from the historical walled cities and fortresses. Blakely and Snyder’s (1997) seminal book, *Fortress America*, documents several common motivations for moving to gated communities that include, to varying degrees, the desire for prestigious community design, private upscale amenities, and security. The desire for private upscale amenities is another central feature of many gated communities. This type of development is popular in retirement communities and capitalizes on leisure activities like golf, country club facilities, and recreational and social activities.

These communities are frequently advertised as comprehensive communities with, “an endless array of entertainment”, where the people are “upscale, but not pretentious”.³ In fact, more than just the allure of extensive and upscale amenities, gating also ensures amenities are both closed to the surrounding community and privately managed

¹ Grant, J., Greene, K., & Maxwell, K. (2004) The Planning Implications of Gated Communities. *Canadian Journal of Urban Research*, 13(1).

² Blandy, S., and Parsons, D. (2003). Gated Communities in England: Rules and Rhetoric of Urban Planning. *Geographica Helvetica*, 58(4).

³ Blakely, E. J., & Snyder, M. G. (1997). *Fortress America: Gated Communities in the United States*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press.

and maintained. In some cases, the desire to privatize community development has led some municipalities to require gating and homeowner association management for new development.

2. TRENDS

Understanding the history and current trends in gated community development is necessary to better understand how gated communities have changed the residential development landscape. Additionally, a detailed account of how gated communities have changed throughout history, where they are located, and who lives in them, may help to more clearly define what sets gated communities apart from other forms of development. To that end, this section will briefly describe the history and most common locations of gated communities as described in the literature. This section will also relay the population estimates and demographic data described by researchers. Finally, income and tenure of residents in gated communities are also discussed. By understanding development trends, planners will be able to more accurately assess the prevalence of gated communities and their locations and this information can then be used to inform how planners respond to the development of gated communities locally.

3. POPULATION

In their much earlier forms, gated communities were a popular method to protect the estates of landed Roman soldiers and the upper classes in Europe. Over the past century, the style and location of gated communities changed dramatically.⁴ Coinciding with the development of master planned retirement developments, shortly after the middle of the twentieth century, gated communities in their current form became available to more than just wealthy elites and began their spread to the suburbs. Now much more than the closing of existing public streets, gated communities have flourished as private residential enclaves both within urban areas and as "edge cities" in suburban and rural areas as well.

Recent literature suggests that gated communities are still a popular housing development; the absence of accurate and recent population studies is a hindrance to a complete understanding of the impact of gated communities in Nagpur.

4. SOCIO-ECONOMIC DATA

Initially gated communities had been theoretically identified as places where people of different socio-economic backgrounds converge and private urban areas have become "acutely homogenized places". This characterization of homogeneity has become ingrained in our understanding of what gated communities are and how they affect the surrounding community. Populations in individual gated communities tend to be homogeneous, however, across the

city, racial and ethnic backgrounds differ between enclaves. Given the variety of locations and motivations for developing or living in gated communities, this claim may require thorough evaluation across communities. Although the socio-economic characteristics of gated communities indicate they are more racially and ethnically homogeneous than non-gated communities. Finally, the likelihood of different races to live in gated communities becomes further complicated when incorporating income.

5. INCOME

⁵The connection between gated communities and income in general is one that has fascinated both researchers and the popular media, who frequently characterize gated communities as a method of escape for higher socio-economic classes. Indeed, the proximity of prestigious gated communities can and frequently does create a stark contrast with poor neighbors. This stark juxtaposition is especially true in international settings where gated communities have created islands of wealth amid nearby poor urban areas. At the same time, empirical studies have shown gated communities to include a wide range of income groups. In fact, some findings indicate that gated communities can be more socioeconomically diverse than non-gated communities. While the mean income of residents in gated communities is greater than that of non-gated areas, among residents of gated communities a significant difference exists in the comparison of mean incomes of homeowners.

6. TRANSPORTATION IMPACTS

"The impact of gated neighborhoods on metropolitan transportation patterns may be among the most important planning issues associated with gated neighborhoods" (Plaut, 2011, p. 773).

Physical enclosure is a fundamental characteristic of gated communities motivated by both fear of crime *and traffic*. The primary result of enclosure is the privatization of streets and restriction of access to through-traffic. Gating can take many forms and often includes a guard station with any of a number of potential methods for gaining access including security checkpoints, boom gates, key codes, or other means of surveillance, and guarded bridges. Another result of gating is the creation of long distances between public street intersections. With gated communities, the distribution of transit demand is less uniform as there is restricted access and fewer entry points. Therefore, pick-up and drop-off points are limited and cannot provide access directly to buildings. This makes efficient public transportation difficult and further encourages the use of private vehicles. For those living in gated communities, this impact may not be readily apparent.

⁴ Vesselinov, E., Cazessus, M. & Falk, W. (2007). Gated Communities and Spatial Inequality. *Journal of Urban Affairs*, 29(2).

⁵ Plaut, P. O. (2011). The Characteristics and tradeoffs of households choosing to live in gated communities. *Environment and Planning B: Planning and Design*, 38(5).

One study found that gated communities are better served by public transit and the percentage of households responding that neighborhood public transportation is adequate is higher for gated communities than non-gated communities.

⁶In this respect, gated communities have been found to reduce un-programmed activities in the street and impact the location of public facilities and generate inefficiencies in daily routines. While pedestrians are encouraged by transparency of boundaries, frequent interconnections, and short distances, gated communities are contrasted by disconnected streets, limited pedestrian access and intersections, and limited public space making them obstacles to pedestrian travel and to the creation of "great streets".

7. SOCIAL COHESION, COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND CIVIC RESPONSIBILITY

There is a significant divide in the literature regarding the effects of gated communities on social cohesion, community engagement, and civic responsibility. Some have argued that, “gated communities are designed to exclude others” or that the concept of gated communities is contrary to policies supporting a balanced society and the reduction of social exclusion. Yet others indicate that at conceptual level, gated communities represent a desire to engage in the community. Residents frequently believe they can control and shape the characteristics of their neighborhood through gating. Despite very low actual participation, resident interviews have also demonstrated that people are motivated by a desire to, "move into a community". It is important to note, however, that it has also been argued that while some internal community organizations may increase the feeling of belonging or community participation, they are actually designed as social, organizational, or political tools to further support the function of the community's walls, namely, to strengthen their ability to keep people out.

8. PROVISION OF PUBLIC FACILITIES, AMENITIES, AND PUBLIC SPACE

Since gated communities restrict the surrounding community's access, they may contribute to various forms of inequality related to the provision of public facilities, public services, and public space. ⁷Amenities within gated communities can include community recreation such as swimming pools, golf courses, tennis courts, or commercial development like movie theaters, or supermarkets. As the development of various types of commercial and recreational amenities grows within gated communities, this can also have the effect of reducing the pressure on local governments to build public spaces, but may also result of poorly planned public space. In fact, it has been

argued that the closure of public streets itself represents an assault on public life. For many, public streets are the primary location for urban public life providing open circulation, un-programmed congregation and interaction of pedestrians, and space political demonstration. The distribution of public space can be improved by providing additional public facilities where inequality between gated communities and non-gated areas is severe. Making boundaries permeable and orienting buildings along and facing the street can also improve the perception of public space and reinforce the public realm.

9. AESTHETIC AND DESIGN IMPACTS

Drawing on a number of planning and design movements such as the City Beautiful, the Garden City, New Urbanism, and modernist design, gated communities have created an entirely new style of urban development. Much of the scholarship that has addressed aesthetics and urban design within gated communities has occurred outside the city and focuses on the impact of walls, fences, and other security features on the surrounding community. Gated communities have been described as a pastiche of imported international architectural styles and architectural features which frequently stand in stark relief to their surroundings. However, the combination of unique architectural styles and security features may go beyond simply standing apart from their neighbors. In this way, the existence of a gate is not just a physical barrier, but also a semiotic device that suggests hostility, difference, and denial of access. More than direct hostility, gated communities "speak" to their neighbors and may create the perception of difference. It is not necessary to associate gated communities with negative aesthetic impacts. Good design can be used to minimize the negative impacts of gated communities at the development planning stage. Several design recommendations have been proposed at various times throughout literature. These recommendations include finding alternative ways to demonstrate boundaries and private areas like the use of signs, parking lots, traffic calming devices, water features, forests or other natural separations, or through buildings oriented to the street, rather than the construction of walls. Additionally, any physical boundaries should be permeable. Inside gated communities, multiple architectural styles should be used. Through techniques like these, planners can begin to reduce neighborhood impacts associated with the design and aesthetics of gated communities.

10. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

The development process used by gated communities includes many other planning and development processes which can contribute to environmental benefits or impacts even when gating is not proposed. Environmental impacts associated with gated communities due to the size of the development, the use of master planning or planned unit developments (PUDs), and the location may all be similar to the impacts of non-gated communities with similar characteristics. Recommendations for improvement of environmental impacts is limited in gated

⁶ Miao, P. (2003). Deserted Streets in a Jammed Town: The Gated Community in Chinese Cities and Its Solution. *Journal of Urban Design*, 8(1).

⁷ Sheinbaum, D. (2008). Gated Communities in Mexico City: An Historical Perspective. *Urban Design International*, 13(4).

community scholarship, however several potential improvements are suggested by the literature. Certainly, local community planning processes must be implemented to ensure public input and participation in the protection of important elements of the natural environment. The reduction or elimination of perimeter fences and walls may improve regional mobility of animals. Instead, designing communities around natural features like lakes and forests can provide similar functions as walls. Strict community rules and guidelines regarding pets, dumping of trash, landscaping, and planting may reduce the spread of non-native and nuisance exotic species. Finally, individual municipalities may require an analysis of existing development review and approval processes to ensure that existing procedures account for the potential impacts associated with gated communities, including impacts related to residential density in environmentally sensitive areas.

11. CONCLUSIONS

While guidelines may be drawn from the significant amount of research that has been performed over the past 20 years, there is still much that is only speculated about gated communities and their impacts on the surrounding community. To this point, much of the research surrounding gated communities has been theoretical and very few studies have used empirical research to validate the many theories that have been advanced. Moreover, early attempts at empirical gated community research demonstrated significant differences based on the location of the study, especially in the case of crime research. A more complete understanding of the benefits and impacts of gated communities requires more empirical research. Examining population and other development trends of gated communities has shown that they have been a significant development trend, but many estimates of their size and diffusion are inconsistent. Planners may need to rely on a local understanding of their development trends, but gated community scholarship must also continue to seek to better define where gated communities exist and whether their development continues to increase. Gated communities have also been popularly thought to decrease crime rates, but a review of the existing literature demonstrates that their impact is not quite so straightforward and planners should be prepared to adjust their expectations for gated communities in this regard. In particular, the emphasis on community management and engagement in the organization by residents presents the possibility of a new method for community engagement in surrounding areas. This also leads to a hybrid view of gated communities as both public and private agencies, a view contrary to the overwhelming characterization of gated communities as a method of advancing a neoliberal agenda of privatization.

Planning Recommendations for Gated Communities in Existing Research are as follows:

Aesthetics and Design:

- Orient buildings to the street with careful attention to building design.
- Make the boundaries of gated communities permeable to reinforce the perception of the public realm.
- Street pattern and grain of gated communities should conform to the surrounding street pattern.
- Use other types of boundaries like water features, forests, or other natural separations instead of walls.
- Limit fence height.

Public Space:

- Create a proactive and holistic plan for public spaces that are competitive with private spaces.
- Walls and fences should be made friendly to passersby through low height, transparent materials, sufficient lighting, greenery or other features.

Environmental Design:

- Use a strategic planning process to evaluate the sustainability of existing gated communities.
- Use other types of boundaries like water features, forests, or other natural separations instead of walls.

Inequality and Social Cohesion:

- Include a variety of housing types and prices within gated communities.
- Include the consideration of gated communities explicitly when studying the distribution and quality of public amenities and facilities throughout the community.
- Require functional integration between residential areas and homeowner associations for neighbouring residential developments, especially when income gaps are present.
- Require innovative, multifunctional, street layout and community design to facilitate inclusion and diversity.

Crime:

- Prioritize the management and maintenance of security features.
- Use false gates to maintain the appearance of active guards.

Governance:

- Consider the long-term impacts of gated communities during the approval process.
- Recommendations and approvals for gated communities should be specific to the type of gated community.

- Use a strategic planning process to evaluate the sustainability of existing gated communities.
- Make homeowners' association restrictions and covenants available to the public.

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