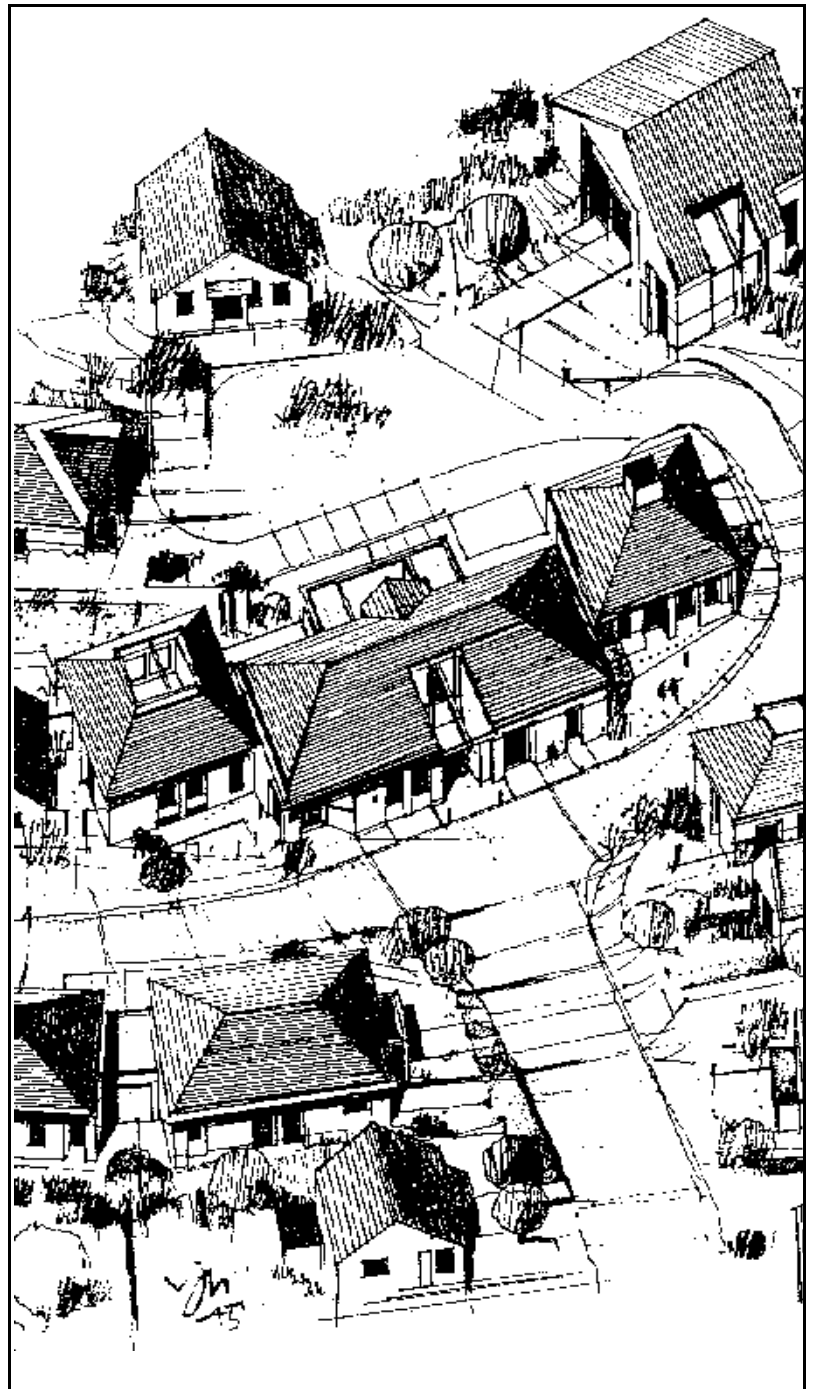

GATED COMMUNITIES: An international review





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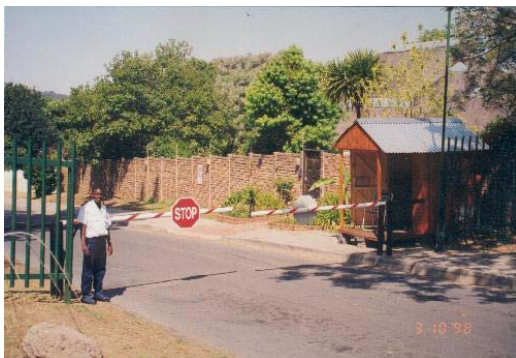
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Introduction: the need for a proper debate on enclosed neighbourhoods

The fear of crime is growing in South Africa. And the more the fear is growing, the greater the reaction to address this fear. Almost anything goes in the ongoing attempts to prevent crime. Those who can afford them, are prime proponents of the latest methods to keep criminals out. According to an article in the *Christian Science Monitor*, “many suburban whites live in jail-like homes guarded by vicious dogs, razor wire, and armed security guards summoned by panic buttons.” (Matloff 1995).

But even this does not seem to be enough to curb the growing perception of increased crime rates and the associated intense fear of crime. People are reaching out to find additional ways to prevent crime and one such a way is the enclosure of entire neighbourhoods. Driving through northern Johannesburg (particularly the Sandton area), you will find many neighbourhoods fenced off and patrolled by private security firms.



An enclosed neighbourhood in Johannesburg protected by a security guard controlling access to the area.

1.1 The South African context

Several municipalities and local authorities across South Africa are currently receiving proposals and requests from groups of residents to seal off their neighbourhoods or local roads, and to allow access only to residents. Some groups even close off roads without formal permission.

Few local authorities have a policy in place to address this issue.

In the meantime, the number of road and neighbourhood closures escalates daily and there is a great need for a proper debate around this issue.

1.2 International debate

Internationally, especially in the United States of America, enclosed neighbourhoods and security villages have raised several questions? These questions raise several issues such as:

- the legal implications regarding the enclosure of public space;
- the values of properties within the enclosed area;
- the fragmentation of urban areas, and the privatisation of public functions such as road maintenance and its implications for taxes;
- the loss of connection and social contact;
- the effectiveness of territorial control to establish a sense of community, and
- the perception of safety versus actual reports of crime decreasing in these areas.

Inevitably, the question also arises as to what the reasons are for the increase in gated communities. Is it primarily to enforce segregation or to

privatise space, or is it just another attempt alongside so many others to try and address the current high crime rate in our country. And, if so, is it really effective or does it only temporarily prevent crime or displace it to an adjacent area? And what about the long-term implications of enclosed neighbourhoods?

1.3 The need for an international literature review

In this light, it is important to review international literature on gated communities. This will not only establish a sound base for similar research in South Africa, but also assist in defining the thread of the international debate and the most important issues arising from it.

This document will attempt just that. The next section will focus on the origins and concept of gated communities, including their characteristics and different types that are occurring today. Section three will highlight different positions in the current thinking on gated communities and attempt to select and discuss the most important issues arising from the international debate. The final section will draw some conclusions: firstly in terms of the international experience and secondly regarding the relevance of these findings to South Africa.

around 300 B.C. in England. Roman soldiers were given land in tribal areas after their term of service, to maintain order in the countryside. Their families clustered near or within the manor, and erected walls and other defences. The walls around these settlements, however, were seldom to protect the occupants from external invaders. They were rather, to guard against local villagers who might turn on the lord of the manor at any moment.

This was at a time when tribes-people often rebelled against their masters. Later, fortresses also served to protect against invaders or internal warring factions (Blakely and Snyder 1997).

2.2 Medieval walled cities

The process of urbanisation, which had ceased after the fall of the Roman Empire, was revived in the tenth and eleventh centuries. The result was a haphazard growth of towns with tangles of streets. Today this appears unplanned today, although often a response to the form of high and defensible terrain can be detected (Goldsteen and Elliott 1994). The components of the medieval town were normally the wall, with towers and gates; streets and related circulation spaces; the market place; the church and the great mass of general town buildings and related private garden spaces (Morris 1994).

The wall

The defensive walls were usually built in a generally circular form, except where shorelines or rivers interfered and a semicircle might appear. The circular form also helped contain costs. The construction of city walls, their towers and their gates was always a matter of great expense, and a circular enclosure required the least wall construction to contain a given area of buildings and open spaces. During wars the walls around medieval

2

The origins of enclosed areas: a brief history

2.1 The earliest gated communities built by the Romans

The idea of gated or walled cities is not new. The earliest forms of gated communities were built by the Romans

towns fulfilled a defensive purpose and in peacetime they established a boundary, which allowed taxes to be charged at the tollgates.

Outside the walls, where traders waited until the gates were opened in the morning, open space was made available for trading. When these settlements outside the wall grew populous and prosperous, the city government was forced to consider the construction of an additional wall that would include them. Gates were also important and vulnerable elements in the fortifications of medieval cities, even when the opening was only to permit a river to pass through the city (Goldstein and Elliott 1994).

An important characteristic of these walled cities was that the wall enclosed the entire town or village and therefore served to enhance and emphasise a sense of unity.

System of walls in England

In the 1300s all but three of the forty largest towns and cities in England were defended (Morris 1994). Thus the system of walls and class division was deeply ingrained in England. Successive kings, Henry I, Richard II and Charles II, took up position in the Tower of London to protect themselves from rebellious nobles or dangerous villagers. London had no police force until the eighteenth century, so people fortified themselves for protection. This heritage can still be seen on the English landscape in the walled abbeys, manors and castles (Blakely and Snyder 1997).

2.3 Early American enclosed areas

Walled and gated communities were also built in the New World, with the earliest being the Spanish fortified towns in the Caribbean. However, not until the latter half of the nineteenth

century did the first purely residential gated communities appear (Blakely and Snyder 1997). These gated communities in the USA go back to the era of robber barons, when the very richest sealed themselves off from the *hoi polloi*. One of the earliest gated communities, was Tuxedo Park, built in 1885 behind gates and barbed wire, an hour by train from New York. Tuxedo Park was designed with wooded lake views, an “admirable entrance”, a community association, and a village outside the gates to house the servants and merchants who served it (Stern 1981, quoted in Blakely and Snyder 1997).

In the same period, private gated streets were built in St Louis and other cities for the rich. During the twentieth century, more gated compounds were built by members of the East Coast and Hollywood aristocracies. These gated areas were, however, very different from the gated subdivisions we see today (Blakely and Snyder 1998). They were special places for uncommon people, and mainly reserved for the very rich.

2.4 Late twentieth century gated communities

In general, gated communities in the United States remained rarities until the era of master-planned retirement developments of the late 1960s and 1970s. Communities like *Leisure World* were the first places where the average American could find seclusion and privacy behind gates. Gates soon spread to resorts and country club communities, and then to middle-class subdivisions. The 1980s saw the proliferation of gated communities around golf courses designed primarily for *exclusivity, prestige and leisure*. It also marked the emergence of gated communities built mainly out of *fear*, as the public became increasingly preoccupied with violent crime. Since the late 1980s, gates have become common in many areas of the country;

in the United States there are now entirely enclosed cities that feature guarded entrances (Blakely and Snyder 1997).

Gated communities are also increasing in other countries, for example in Canada. In an extreme form, many fortified enclaves can be found in countries such as Brazil (especially Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo), Chile and Russia (especially Moscow).

The increase in violence, insecurity and fear in Sao Paulo is changing the city's landscape and the patterns of daily life, people's movements and the use of public transport – as crime and violence discourage people from using the streets and public spaces. Streets where children used to play, where neighbours used to congregate, and where it was common for people to stroll are now less frequented. Increasingly, higher-income groups are living, working, shopping and taking their leisure in what are essentially fortified enclaves. They no longer make use of streets or public spaces, which are abandoned to the homeless and the street children (Habitat: Global report on Human Settlements 1996).

Similar developments are evident in many cities around the world as middle- and upper-income groups journey by private motor car between apartment complexes, shopping centres and office complexes each with sophisticated security systems and their own secure car parks, so there is little or no necessity to walk on streets or use open spaces (Ibid). Los Angeles is such a place, particularly the downtown and inner city areas.

The reasons for gating communities

As gated communities increase daily, it might be appropriate to consider the following:

- Why do people choose to live behind gates?
- Is it purely for security and protection against crime, or does it involve more than that?
- What about privacy and exclusion?
- Does it have anything to do with control and stability?

Gated communities address the very core of our way of living in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century and in the end may be more than just a tradition of fortified enclaves and an innocent reaction to the social problems of our time.

Blakely and Snyder (1998) argue that gated enclaves are descendents of decades of suburban design and public land-use policy. They claim that gates are firmly within the suburban tradition of street patterns and zoning designed to reduce the access of non-residents and increase homogeneity. Gates enhance and reinforce the suburban nature of the suburbs.

The authors go on to explain that, from the earliest examples, the suburbs aimed to create a new version of the country estate of the landed gentry: a healthy, beautiful, protected preserve, far from the noise and bustle of the crowded cities. However, today "suburban" no longer necessarily means safe and beautiful. **Many suburbs are encountering problems such as crime, vandalism and decay. Gated communities seek to counter these trends by maintaining the ambiance of exclusivity and safety that suburbs once promised.**

However, Blakely and Snyder maintain that the gating exists not just to wall out crime, traffic or strangers, but also to lock in economic position. The residents of gated communities hope that greater control over the neighbourhood will mean greater stability in property values for homeowners.

Generally, however, the most frequently given reason for the popularity of gated communities, according to the *Detroit News*, still remains security (Cantor 1998). Cantor quotes a resident: “My husband works bizarre hours, so it is nice to have an extra measure of security,” says Nina Cooper, who lives in a Las Vegas gated community. “Here you can go running at night and feel safe. Where else in the city can you do that?”

Security is, however, not only the concern of the wealthy, and gated communities are no longer reserved for the wealthy alone. Of all the gated communities in the United States, about one third are luxury communities, another third house retirees, and one third are middle- and working-class communities, where the fear of crime is the paramount reason for gating (Lagerfeld 1998). Similarly, Tijerino (1998) points out that the unique aspect of the increasingly popular application of gated environs is that, unlike previous walled areas, today’s secluded neighbourhoods are also within the economic reach of middle- and upper-middle-class citizens.

The places where gated communities are most popular are also places with the greatest influx of newcomers, with no roots of family or memory of the area (Cantor 1998).

The concept of gated communities

Whatever the reason, gated communities have become a living reality in many cities across the world and are seen by many as the only way to secure a reasonable way of living in an urban environment, whatever the term “urban” may mean to them. Gated communities have become for many the solution that they sought in order to live a safe, peaceful and controlled life. But what exactly is understood by the concept “gated

community”? Blakely and Snyder define gated communities as “residential areas with restricted access such that normally public spaces have been privatised” (1998:62). They go on to explain that access is controlled by physical barriers, in the form of walled or fenced perimeters and gated or guarded entrances. This can include new housing developments or older residential areas retrofitted with barricades and fences. In addition, gated communities prohibit public access to roads, sidewalks, parks, open space, playgrounds – all resources that in earlier eras would have been open and accessible to all citizens of a locality (Ibid).

Three types of gated communities

According to Blakely and Snyder (1998), gated communities can be divided into three major types: lifestyle communities such as country club and retirement developments, where extensive recreational amenities are key; prestige communities, which are otherwise standard subdivisions except for their gates; and security zone communities, where the residents themselves, rather than developers, have added gates and fences to their neighbourhoods to try to control crime and traffic.

They go on to say that in each of these general categories, elitism and exclusionary motivations are often active, although they are most prominent in the first two. However, not all gates mark elitist space; some are only attempts to control or ward off serious problems with crime. In others cases motivations are mixed.

Whatever the characteristics, gated communities have become a phenomenon to be taken seriously - not only for those who aspire to life in such an area, but also for those who are concerned with city planning and management, as well as the social trends that determine human relations and dynamics within urban areas worldwide.

Whatever the position, nobody can dispute the reality and presence of gated communities. Therefore, it is necessary to be aware of different positions on this subject, as well as some of the most pressing issues arising from a heated debate regarding gated communities worldwide.

3

The current international debate on gated communities

3.1 Different positions with regard to gated communities

Gated communities have aroused an active debate internationally over the last few years. The comments range from well-researched books on the subject to different role-players giving their opinions or taking up a specific position for or against gated communities in urban areas.

A balanced viewpoint

Three recent books articulate the two sides of the academic debate. "Fortress America", by Blakely and Snyder (1997), is a comprehensive survey of gated communities and their impact in the United States. The authors explore this phenomenon by looking at the characteristics and dynamics of several gated

communities in the United States, trying to understand the reasons behind its occurrence and the impact that the presence of such establishments can have on the larger community and urban environment as a whole. They do not, however, take a specific position for or against gates. They are sympathetic to those who wish to live behind walls and gates and highlight their preferences. On the other hand, they warn against the possible dangers of gated communities and end with several suggestions for building better communities and a harmonious and integrated society without erecting fortresses.

An anti-position

Mike Davis takes a more extreme position against gates in his book *City of Quartz* (1992). He addresses the issue from a social perspective, focussing on the harsh social realities that the poor are faced with in a city where the powerful rule and divide, resulting in the contemporary processes of spatial segregation in Los Angeles. Gated communities are viewed as just such a form of ultimate segregation and militarisation of public space. Or, in the words of Chris Webster (1999), who argues that the purpose of the book is "as much journalistic as intellectual – to publicise what Davis sees as the plight of those who are being marginalised by the privatisation of exclusive residential, retail and transportation space".

A pro-position

Fred Foldavry's book *Public goods private communities* (1997) takes an extreme position on the other side of the debate. It is an essay on the economics of private communities supported with empirical studies of actual communities. The focus is on justifying gated communities from micro-economic premises, launching

from a technical discussion of what economists term “public goods” (collectively consumed goods and services) (Webster 1999). “His main argument is that gated communities are a more efficient mode of urban development because they allow collectively consumed goods (civic in nature) to be supplied by the market” (Webster 1999:1). In other words, Foldavry argues that people have a right to obtain the best the market can offer (including civic services) and, in turn, offer the market the best from their side in terms of quality of life and value for money and investment. Gates, according to him, allow just that.

The state of the current debate

These books in many ways define the state of the current debate about gated communities. There are those who take an extreme pro-position (Foldavry) and those taking a very anti-position (Davis). However, the majority of role-players and writers, including Blakely and Snyder, are finding themselves somewhere in between: realistic in terms of the market and raging crime patterns, but also carefully aware of the impact on social and spatial exclusion and fragmentation.

Apart from the academics and writers, many local councils and communities have also begun to take part in the debate. They too have different positions regarding gated communities. Residents of gated communities eagerly point to the benefits that living in such a community can offer. They are firmly supported by many security firms, for example Master Security Distributors, which publicly announced its opposition to a possible ban on future gated communities by the City of Sacramento (1999) in the USA.

The drive to oppose and ban gates and fences is supported by many other

local councils and communities. One of them is the city of Santa Fé, where two years ago, the mayor has instructed her staff to find a way to stop community gates. Although Santa Fé has no law regarding gates, its general plan contains a policy discouraging them. In Fort Collins, Colorado, gated communities were also banned. In addition, four suburbs in Dallas have been prohibited from gating their areas, on the grounds that their residents would have security that is denied to others. The city of Portland has no formal policy, but its position is quite clear as Jerald Johnson explains: “A few popped up in the 1980s, and there are still a few at the highest end pieces of some subdivisions, but they are deemed anti-community and opposed here” (Cantor 1998).

It is, however, not only some of the local councils that take up position against gated communities. In some cases communities themselves have come together and launched action against this phenomenon. One such a community is from Worcester, Illinois. It strongly believes that gated communities are a threat to Worcester and has established an organisation called CHW (the Coalition for a Healthy Worcester) to promote its views and fight any attempts to gate communities.

Whatever the position, the fact remains that gated communities stir up a lot of debate and sometimes evoke passionate response.

In this respect, it is worthwhile to briefly discuss these important issues, not only to gain a better understanding of the nature and characteristics of gated communities internationally, but also to contemplate the possible impact such gated areas might have on the urban future.

3.2 Important issues arising from the debate

Gated communities generally evoke quite a response, whether from enthusiastic proponents or fired-up opponents. In the process many issues are addressed to support their views. From these wide-ranging issues, six main concerns can be distilled, namely:

- A sense of community
- Safety and security
- Social exclusion
- Urban segregation and fragmentation
- Urban planning and management
- Financial benefit.

These six will now be discussed in more detail to provide a broad overview of the most important issues arising from the international debate.

• A sense of community

In the often anonymous world of today many people hope that the closed, private streets behind gates will lead to a more open, friendly, and cohesive community within. Proponents of gated communities argue that by allowing residents of neighbourhoods to establish and protect their boundaries and to control access to their territory, these residents of gated communities will develop a sense of identity and security, which is vital to strong communities (Blakely and Snyder 1997). The perception is that people behind gates are part of the same socio-economic group, have similar interests, and even similar values.

This view is shared by many developers. One of the major developers of exclusive gated communities in the Dallas area remarked: "The number one issue as I see it is that people want a sense of community. I think that is more what the gate is about, more so than security. The security is part of it, but

the main thing is 'I want a small town atmosphere in my big city. I want to be part of a community where I can be friends with all these people who are similar to my background' " (Curt Wellwood quoted in Blakely and Snyder 1998:69).

In some communities gating the area does contribute to a sense of community. In a survey carried out by Blakely and Snyder across the United States, 64% reported that their developments or areas were "friendly", while 8% indicated that the feeling in their neighbourhoods was "neighbourly" (1997:130). The question then arises as to what degree sociability is necessary to create a sense of community. Is "friendly" enough, or must it be "neighbourly"?

Others expressed different views. Twenty eight per cent of the respondents said that their neighbourhoods were "distant and private", despite the presence of walls and gates (Ibid). Therefore, fences and gates would not automatically help to establish a strong sense of community. Evidently, "community" cannot be created by the physical alone. In some cases gates and fences can even discourage a sense of community. The city of Fort Collins in the USA banned gated communities as "disruptive to a sense of community" (Cantor 1998). Santa Fé also took a similar stance: "All subdivision developments must be oriented to community, not away from it. In order to maintain a community feeling and spirit, gated enclaves should not be permitted" (Weideman 1999).

In some communities, for example Hidden Hills in California, the residents themselves complained about "in-house" fighting and riots at community meetings, where the very rich threaten to sue for everything they can't have (Ciotti 1992). Councilman Collins of La Habra Heights, California, echoes these sentiments. The city council of

this small, hillside community has voted to forbid neighbourhoods from closing themselves off with gates because, as he puts it, gating communities “break up a community and divide the community” (Blume 1990:7). Movements to gate public streets in Los Angeles, Houston, Miami, Chicago and other large cities often lead to bitter battles within and between neighbourhoods (Blakely and Snyder 1997b). This could impair the sense of community and lead to increasing conflict and tension between residents.

It can therefore be debated whether gated communities in fact increase or decrease trust between neighbours living within them. Trust is seen by many sociologists as one of the main components to increasing a feeling of neighbourliness and caring; a feeling that will look out for one other. This also touches on factors like fear and the feeling of safety.

● **Safety and security**

Fear is an extremely powerful emotion. The fear of crime may prompt you to consider something you would never have thought necessary otherwise. Blakely and Snyder (1997) point out that the fear of becoming a victim of crime in the United States, even in one’s own neighbourhood or home, prompts ever more defensive measures.

The general perception is that crime has become more random, that all strangers are dangerous and that no place is safe. For many, gating the neighbourhood at least provides psychological relief from this fear (Ibid). Or, as a resident from one of America’s top enclosed neighbourhoods, Rosemont, said: “We live in our own little world. We don’t want to see all those kids around here, driving those cars, going where they shouldn’t. The gate makes us feel a lot safer” (Grunwald 1997:1).

But is this true? Is the claim that gates make people safer justified, or is it mere perception. People have different opinions. Residents of some gated communities firmly believe they are safer. Nobody, however, can state what types of crime decrease, or for what period of time. Blakely and Snyder (1997) maintain that in some cases the police in fact indicate the contrary. In an article by Scher Zachier, Mary Snyder said that, the perception that gates reduce crime is just a perception. She further stated that, at best, gates have a marginal effect. They are not hard to penetrate and they are not going to stop criminals (1998:1).

In a national study done by Blakely and Snyder in the United States, the authors found that some security zone communities do report a drop in crime after the streets are closed. Others, however, report only temporary drops, and some no change at all (Blakely and Snyder 1997b). They also state that gates and fences are not impenetrable to serious criminals and that these barriers do nothing to reduce crime. Gates and fences do not necessarily protect and they often cause dissension and controversy (Ibid).

A further study by the Fort Lauderdale Police Department showed that barricaded neighbourhoods in that Florida city were no safer than “open neighbourhoods”. Criminals easily eluded the security gates and the street blockades (Ibid). In some places, residents had even gone so far as to remove barricades as failures, such as in Sepulveda, California, where local gangs used the maze of blocked streets to evade police and control their turf (Blakely and Snyder 1997b).

Chris McGoey, a security expert, warns that gated communities give no promises. He agrees that gates and fences provide the perception of

security, safety, and privacy, but he is also quick to point out that the effectiveness of gates and fences depends on the nature of the property and the management controls in place. He also states that gated communities should not claim to be able to prevent all crimes. According to him, gates and fences are merely tools to help a property manager fight crime, but many more tools are required to do the complete job (McGoey 1999).

Whether crime is reduced or not, it does seem that in many cases gated communities do make residents feel safer. But is this always the case? Do gated communities always provide freedom from fear of crime? Blakely and Snyder (1997) point out that gated communities may reinforce people's fear. They quote Dennis Judd, who suggest that: "the trappings of security that impregnate the new walled communities must [remind] the inhabitants, constantly and repetitively, that the world beyond their walls is dangerous" (Blakely and Snyder 1997:150).

John Fischbach, city manager of Fort Collins, takes a similar stance. He says that statements of fear and of the unsafety of the world beyond gates turn into "*self-fulfilling prophecies. What you are saying, in effect, is that the world beyond gates is not safe. That is how communities become paralysed through fear and distrust. Soon you have a shattered sense of community that, indeed, is unsafe*" (Cantor 1998:1).

Gates can even send a strong message to potential homebuyers. Toni Alexander, president of InterCommunicationsInc, Newport Beach, California, maintains that, to homebuyers, a gate sends up a signal that the whole area is unsafe (Baron 1998).

Crime displacement

It is all good and well to enclose your own neighbourhood, but what happens to the surrounding area? Many people point out the negative effects of crime displacement on neighbouring areas. However, for many residents it simply does not matter that crime has been displaced, as long as their area is safe. In an interview with some of the residents of an upper-class gated area in Illinois, all agreed that the gate was a good way to "convince bad guys to go somewhere else" (Grunwald 1997:1). McGoey confirms this by pointing out that many criminals will bypass a gated community for one that is not gated, simply because of restricted access (1999). This is especially the case with many opportunistic criminals. In this sense, the objective of making the crime more risky for the potential criminal is achieved.

The action of one neighbourhood can, therefore, have implications far wider than the neighbourhood itself. Gating an area can influence the lifestyles of many neighbouring areas, as well as urban patterns in general.

● **Social exclusion**

Safety and security is not the only reason why people opt to live in a gated community. For many, gated communities also provide an illusion of stability and control. It allows those who can afford it to opt out of shared public services and public places. More broadly, residents of gated communities seek control. They want to control the crime and traffic. They want to be free from strangers, disruptions and intrusions (Blakely and Snyder 1997). In short, they want to protect their investments and their privacy. There is nothing wrong with the idea, of wanting to protect yourself. It is perfectly understandable. It does, however, raise a question about the impact on the surrounding communities and the broader social

dynamics of the town or city concerned.

Residents of some gated communities have pointed out that they still try to maintain links with the world outside their community. Others maintain that they do not intentionally attempt to exclude the poor. For example, McGee, president of Maximum Management resources in San Antonio, and contributor to a San Antonio study on gated communities, believes that gates are not an attempt by the rich to separate themselves from the poor. He argues that it is not a social issue and that there are relatively less expensive homes. According to him everyone wants to feel more secure in a home, and walls and gates appear to serve this purpose (Budd 1996).

In other cases, however, residents have openly proclaimed that they only wish to look after themselves and be part of their own community. To many, their homeowners association dues are like taxes and any responsibility ends at the gate. A city official in Plano, Texas, summed up his view of the attitude of the gated residents in his town: "I took care of my own responsibility. I'm safe in here, I've got my guard gate; I've paid my [homeowner's association] dues, and I'm responsible for my streets. Therefore, I have no responsibility for the commonweal, because you take care of your own." (Blakely and Snyder 1998:70). This reflects a mentality of taking care only of yourself and your immediate neighbours. It poses a stance of social seclusion and for that matter, social exclusion.

Neighbourhoods have always been able to exclude some potential residents through discrimination and housing costs. But now, as Blakely and Snyder (1998) point out, with gates and walls, they can exclude not only undesirable newcomers, but even casual passers-by and the people from the adjoining neighbourhood. This

seems to be part of the more general trend of fragmentation, and the resulting loss of connection and social contact. The benefit of the whole is no longer of primary importance, but rather the advantage of a small, carefully selected group. And as gated enclaves spread throughout a larger area or city, their implications to society become a valid subject of inquiry, as Tijerino (1998) points out, since walled communities result in increased social fragmentation.

Davis (1992) echoes these sentiments, but takes them a step further. He argues that fortified enclaves successfully wall themselves off from the rest of the city, excluding not only potential criminals, but also those general users of urban space. As he puts it: "...there is no doubt that they [gated communities with extensive security measures] are brilliantly successful in deterring unintentional trespassers and innocent pedestrians. Anyone who has tried to take a stroll at dusk through a neighbourhood patrolled by armed security guards and signposted with death threats quickly realizes how merely notional, if not utterly obsolete, is the old idea of freedom of the city." (Davis 1992:175). What happened to the idea of the free and socially integrated city? Many critics have seized on gated communities as symbols of social segregation (Baron 1998).

The matter of elitism

The idea of social exclusion and fragmentation brings up another important issue: the matter of elitism. Blakely and Snyder argue that a gated community, with its controlled entrance and secured perimeter, is the very image of elite space. A gate reflects exclusivity. Even if some gated communities are not populated by the economic and social elite, their developments are delimited to produce a signal of elitism. Councilman Collins

from La Habra Heights in California, USA also agrees: “There’s an elitist attitude that occurs behind a gated community. You end up with, ‘My area is better than your area.’ ” (Blume 1990). So, while gated communities have created a new living and housing option for some, they have also created a new social dilemma for all. The purpose of gates and walls, according to Blakely and Snyder (1997) is to limit social contact, and reduced social contact may weaken the ties that form social connections. They go on to quote a resident of California: “It is a form of elitism – so they [people within a gated community] don’t have to fraternize with folks from the city centre.” (Blakely and Snyder 1997:137)

In this sense, gated communities have the potential to represent the very essence of celebrated private space, or the privatisation of public space. The long-term impact or effects of this could be problematic for urban futures. This issue will, however, be discussed in more detail under *Urban planning and management* below.

Gated communities do, in effect, often succeed in empowering certain communities at the expense of other neighbouring areas or the larger city. In many cases gated communities exclude and separate the rest of society, notably minorities, as well as the poor and the disenfranchised (Weideman 1999).

Exclusion imposes social costs on those left outside. It reduces the number of public spaces that all can share, and therefore the contacts that people from diverse groups might otherwise have with each other. It also has other consequences. The growing divisions between city and suburb, as well as between rich and poor, create new patterns which reinforce the costs that isolation and exclusion impose on some at the same time as they are benefiting others. Even where the dividing lines are not clearly ones of

wealth, this pattern affects all those living in fragmented and divided urban environments (Blakely and Snyder 1997b).

Individual rights to public space

And in this sense it touches on the very issue of individual rights to public space and the fundamental principle of democracy. Or in the words of Steven Langerfeld, a major critic of gated communities and proponent of a more open and integrated urban environment and freely accessible public space: “Gates send a message that, repeated often enough, is inimical to the spirit of an open, democratic society.” (Langerfeld 1998:1) Gated communities do in fact reflect an image of exclusion, whether it may be from “the criminals out there” or just a different race or economic group. But what is the measure of society if the divisions between neighbourhoods require security patrols and fencing to keep out citizens? Blakely and Snyder (1997b) comment that when public services are privatised and when community responsibility stops at the gates, the function and very idea of democracy is threatened. Gates and barricades that separate people also reduce their potential to understand one another and commit to any common or collective purpose (Ibid). And is this not a very important aspect of crime prevention?

Many proponents of gated communities argue that they have the right to protect themselves from the dangers lurking in their surrounding urban environments. However, this raises questions about the total urban picture. Gated communities could prove to be detrimental in terms of social exclusion in the future. It could be that the measure that is implemented to address crime and instability after a while becomes a major source of conflict and disparity. A gated community may address some crime problems and offer a

quality of life to its residents, but ultimately these communities are still situated within a larger urban area and it is the impact on the broader urban environment that needs careful consideration.

- **Urban segregation and fragmentation**

The purpose of gated communities or enclosed neighbourhoods is to restrict or prohibit access to a particular demarcated area. Access is restricted through either fencing or walling off the specified area, or by placing booms/barricades across roads. This physically separates the specific area from its surrounding environment. It also creates zones or pockets of no/restricted access within the urban fabric, leading to a very coarse grain. In addition, it forces travellers, both motorists and pedestrians, to take an alternative route, which in many cases can prove to be much longer and more time-consuming. Gated communities, therefore, not only have an impact on the daily activity patterns of people, but also on the urban form and functioning.

In their study of gated communities in the United States, Blakely and Snyder (1997) found strong indications of fragmentation. According to them metropolitan areas become increasingly spatially fragmented and segregated by race, class and land values. It is an old pattern and tradition that is only being implemented in a new way. According to them, gated communities are also descendants of decades of suburban design and public land use policy. However, as the original suburbs become more dense and diverse, showing signs of crime, vandalism and decay, people look for a new model to address the ideal of a safe and beautiful preserve. Gated communities have become just that. They exist to wall out crime, give greater control over the neighbourhood and ensure stability in

property values. But they also give rise to social distance, as well as to physical separation and segregation. These patterns of suburbia reinforce the splintering of communities with social separation and physical walls. In the suburbs gates are the logical extension of the original “suburban” drive. In the city, gates and barricades are also sometimes called “cul-de-sac-ization” – a term that reflects the design goal to create out of the existing urban grid a street pattern as close to the suburbs as possible, with the added benefits of control and privacy as well (Blakely and Snyder 1998).

In short, gated communities are a microcosm of a larger spatial pattern of segmentation and separation (Blakely and Snyder 1997b). With suburbia already posing many problems in terms of the long-term sustainability of cities, the urban future with increasing numbers of gated communities might in itself pose a question or two.

- **Urban planning and management**

A few issues have already been discussed, but essentially all of them touch, in one way or another, on the impact that gated communities have on the larger urban environment. This is also apparent in terms of urban planning and management. It brings up issues of services, the nature of roads, general urban maintenance, the function of public safety and the role of private homeowners, associations.

The essence of gated communities lies in the fact that they control access through a form of physical barrier. This in itself can be problematic in terms of the response times of emergency and police vehicles. When asked about gated communities in La Habra Heights, Sheriff Block remarked that, while gated communities can improve security, they however, potentially slow down response calls when

officers have to negotiate gates (Blume 1990). Similarly, the council of Santa Fé indicated that the most obvious problem with a gate is the potential for delayed response time, which can mean the difference between life and death (Weideman 1999).

The maintenance of urban areas

Gated communities also touch on the issue of maintenance and that goes hand in hand with the whole issue of public versus private space. In normal circumstances the local authority or municipality is responsible for the maintenance and upgrading of roads, streetlights, etc, in urban areas. But what happens if an area is enclosed? If the enclosed streets remain public space, access to them may legally not be prohibited. And in these cases the municipality would still be responsible for their maintenance, etc. This could cause problems in terms of access to these areas, both for repair staff and repair vehicles.

But what if the streets and the whole area are privatised? Then the homeowners' association would, in effect be responsible for all the services. This is what is happening in Texas in the USA. In Texas, the public policy has been to allow neighbourhoods to gate themselves only if they are willing to privatise the streets, sidewalks and parks in the neighbourhood. Since the public council would no longer have public access, the neighbourhood would be responsible for all repairs, etc. In addition, the neighbourhood must have an active homeowners' association. This association then assumes ownership of the streets, etc. The main issue, that remains to be seen is how well neighbourhoods would be able to carry out these repairs, etc, over time. Gated communities are a relatively new phenomenon in Texas and it has only been over the last decade that the

widespread use of gates has increased. However, it remains to be seen what will happen when serious deterioration of facilities starts to occur and the cost of repairs escalates (Evans 2000)

The line between private and public is blurred and the legal implications are open for debate. In the United States dozens of cities where hard-pressed local governments have been overwhelmed by urban problems, privately-backed "Business-Improvement-Districts" (BIDs) have sprung up, assuming many of the functions of municipal government (Lagerfeld 1998). In terms of urban renewal and upgrading, this could be a positive step. But what will happen in the long term when these bodies begin to demand tax reductions, etc?

Gated communities physically restrict access so that, normal public spaces are in effect privatised. These communities differ from apartment buildings with guards or doormen, which exclude public access to the private space of lobbies. Instead, gated communities exclude people from traditionally public areas like sidewalks and streets (Blakely and Snyder 1997b). Gated communities seek to seclude themselves from the outside world and make private what is essentially a public entity (Tessler and Reyes 1999). In this sense, the phenomenon of gated communities contributes to the resurgence of the private-public realm debate. According to Webster (1999:1) this debate has resurfaced with a variety of emphases: "public provision versus private provision of civic goods and services; planning versus the market; efficiency versus equity in service delivery; private space versus shared space; local neighbourhood cohesion versus fragmented social cohesion; micro-level government versus municipal government; and government by consensus versus government by imposition".

In this context, the gated communities could become a mechanism to privatise public space and transfer the traditional role of local government to resident bodies.

The role of local government and residents associations

In many cases the traditional role of local governments is threatened by continuously growing forms of private micro-governments. Private residential communities, such as homeowners' associations, retail communities (including leisure complexes) and industrial communities (including industrial parks) are all forms of private municipal governance. They all supply civic goods (protection, cleanliness, environmental improvement, etc.) privately, through the levying of some form of payment. They represent private individuals opting for contractual arrangements that will ensure a supply of civic goods which are presumably better acquired there than elsewhere. In many cases residents buying into a gated community are expressing a preference for contracting with a private supplier of certain civic goods rather than contracting with the local government (Webster 1999).

The relationship between physical barriers and the governance that goes on within is very important and is at the heart of a fundamental debate about the evolving nature of the city (Webster 1999). But does this just imply a condonance of a laissez-faire attitude to urban development and should those who can afford it be allowed anything? Many critics of gated communities argue the contrary and warn against the long-term implications of such actions.

Gated communities carry with them the potential for withdrawal from large-scale public discussions (Tessler and Reyes 1999). Reville and Wilson (1999) point out that, in conventional

city neighbourhoods, more powerful, well-organised groups use their resources to improve city life for everyone. If crime is an issue, groups will bring their concerns to the police department, city officials, and public forums. Changes that arise benefit the entire community. However, according to them the privatisation of a neighbourhood that occurs in a gated community disrupts this ideal. From the residents' perspective, problems and issues exist either "in here" or "out there". In this way residents may become secluded and alienated from the rest of the city, worrying only about their own neighbourhood (Ibid).

Gated communities with strong residents' associations also carry the potential of creating powerful private governments that could threaten the existence of local government in the traditional sense. One of the most important features of the gated community is not the gate itself but the underlying governance system it requires. Gated communities are run by self-governing homeowner' associations (HOAs). In many of these developments common space is privatised. Each property owner shares legal ownership of the streets, sidewalks, and other common facilities, including gates, with their fellow homeowners. Elected boards control and maintain this common property, and each home comes bound with covenants, conditions and restrictions (Blakely and Snyder 1997).

Living in a community under the auspices of a private homeowner' association also entails additional costs. Residents must pay huge amounts as part of association dues, in addition to their local taxes. And they must sacrifice a fair amount of freedom, since these associations are intensive regulators (Lagerfeld 1998). The consequences could be problematic. The community could start to question the controlling body and either fire or sue them. They could also refuse to pay local taxes. Maybe it

boils down to the question that Blakely and Snyder so pertinently ask: “When public services and even local government are privatised, when the community of responsibility stops at the subdivision gates, what happens to the function and the very idea of a social and political democracy?” (1997:3).

- **Financial benefit**

Gated communities remain as an option to many people. For them, the benefits just seem to far outweigh any possible disadvantages. And one of these benefits that is mentioned regularly is the financial benefit.

Tax deductions or tax rebates

The first aspect that concerns the aspect of financial benefit to homeowners in gated communities relates to possible tax deductions or tax rebates. Many homeowners associations of gated communities are pushing for more favourable tax treatment of the association fees homeowners pay for trash collection, street maintenance, recreational facilities and other amenities. Some are also resisting local taxation and are lobbying for rebates from local taxes, arguing that their residents do not use all the local services and are paying for services themselves. Others seek to make fees deductible on state and federal income taxes, for much the same reason as in the case of local taxes (Lagerfeld 1998, Blakely and Snyder 1997). New Jersey, Texas, Maryland and Missouri, for example, already allow for adjustments in local taxes to reflect the self-provided services of homeowners' associations (Blakely and Snyder 1997).

Property values

A further aspect concerning financial benefit to residents of gated communities is the whole issue around property values. Some proponents strongly argue that enclosed areas preserve or even increase the value of properties in that area. It is, therefore, often one of the reasons, along with safety and privacy, offered for wanting to live in an enclosed neighbourhood. As a developer from Durham firmly puts it: “I don't think elitism has anything to do with a gate. It has to do with the price of the house” (Scher Zagier 1998).

Increased property values are part of the market appeal for gated communities. The marketing director of a security firm (Master's Security Distributors) in Sacramento firmly believes that gated communities provide residents with increased property values and so does Peter Halter, a market analyst, who states that gates add value to residential development (Baron 1998). Similarly, McGoey, a security consultant, argues that gated communities provide privacy and, in affluent residential neighbourhoods, privacy means exclusivity and therefore increased property values. Adding an attractive automatic entry gate system can easily add a substantial amount to home values within some communities, regardless of whether it has any effect on crime (McGoey 1999).

In contrast, others hold different views. Some developers maintain that houses in gated communities neither sell for any more than houses in other neighbourhoods nearby nor hold their value better during downturns (Lagerfeld 1998). Blakely and Snyder point out that greater control over the neighbourhood is presumed to mean greater stability in property values. In their study of gated communities in the United States, however, they found no evidence that gated communities

either command a price premium or maintain their values better than non-gated communities. Nonetheless, the perception that gates can increase or help maintain property values is very strong and many residents expect an increase in property values over time (Blakely and Snyder 1997).

However, in some extreme cases, gates can become a negative selling point. Strudler, the chairman of the Houston-based *Builder*, explains that in primary homes gates are a negative selling point because primary-home owners are concerned with additional monthly payments. According to him, once you gate you need an homeowners' association, different financing and different regulations (Baron 1998). Therefore, the debate remains open and the answer inconclusive. However, nobody can dispute the fact that a big part of the attraction of gated communities revolves around the potential financial benefits from increased property values within such an area.

A competitive advantage

It all boils down to a competitive advantage, regardless of the consequences. Or, as Reville and Wilson (1999) argue, the long term impact of such an advantage. According to them it is not about the right of people to live in gated communities or the existence of individual communities. The real danger is that gated communities will become common in cities and fragment those cities. As well-to-do families move into gated communities, traditional neighbourhoods weaken, and more affluent families feel that the only way to maintain their standard of living is to move into a gated community themselves. And so the phenomenon escalates. Even the presence of one gated community can make others feel that they are at a competitive disadvantage without a gate. This effect snowballs and the

impact on the city can be dramatic (Reville and Wilson 1999). Evidently, the image of gated communities is becoming a powerful force and the perception of a competitive advantage a temptation.



4

Conclusion

4.1 Gated communities: an important urban phenomenon

The international debate on gated communities is alive and well.

The richness of articles and documents on a fairly new subject is evidence of the great need to discuss the issue, as well as the wide range of different opinions existing on the subject. What the international literature clearly shows is that it is not a subject on which there is general agreement at present, and it is unlikely that there will be general agreement in the foreseeable future.

Gated communities have become a widespread phenomenon

From the review of the international literature a few aspects have become apparent. Gated communities have increased tremendously over the past decade and have become a widespread phenomenon, especially in the United States of America. They are also not only limited to the wealthy, but many middle class families are increasingly opting for this lifestyle. It appears that there are different types of gated communities that address a variety of needs, ranging from safety, privacy and stability to recreational needs such as golf courses, parks,

etc. In some respects the phenomenon may also include the need for better services and maintenance of the local area or neighbourhood in concern.

Gated communities will be playing an important role in terms of the urban future

It is evident that gated communities have become an important urban phenomenon that is and will continue to play an important role in terms of the urban future in general. It is not likely to disappear overnight and the long-term implications still remain to be seen. Certain implications of the existence of gated communities including an increased fear of crime; social exclusion; urban fragmentation and separation; problems in terms of urban management and financial benefit to a privileged minority; have the potential to influence and inform urban decision-making and design in a dramatic way.

4.2 The relevance of the findings to South Africa

South Africa is unique

This international review has established a sound base for similar research in South Africa and has assisted to define the most important issues that arise from such a debate. International lessons and assumptions should, however, not be transferred unconditionally from one country to another. South Africa is unique and hosts a different set of characteristics from elsewhere in the world. Some of these particular characteristics include:

- A unique diversity of urban residents living together in South African cities.

- A specific political and socio-economic environment present in urban environments.
- Particular crime patterns and a relatively high crime rate.
- Proportionately high levels of fear of crime.
- Low levels of trust in the police in many communities.
- A heritage of fragmented and separated urban environments, resulting from previous planning policies.
- Large differences in existing facilities and services accessible to particular sectors.
- A suspicion towards the capacity and delivery of local governments in South Africa, and their ability to deliver.
- Notorious extremes between the rich and the poor.

Given the fact that the fear of crime is growing in South Africa, and the number of gated communities or enclosed neighbourhoods is growing daily, calls for an in-depth study of this phenomenon in South Africa. The important issues arising from the international debate can act as a good guideline in terms of questions to ask and matters to look into in this country. Combined with an understanding of the characteristics identified above, a study of gated communities in South Africa can go a long way to assist role-players, especially local governments, to make more informed decisions. It will be important for future decision-making in South Africa to understand the impact that gated communities have on the urban environment and the implications for urban management and maintenance.

This report paves the way for future research in terms of gated communities in South Africa. Many local authorities and community groups are urgently looking for answers. Many residents are

increasingly moving towards neighbourhood enclosures to protect themselves, while urban planners are considering the consequences. This report has highlighted the issues internationally. It is now up to South Africans to interpret this information and investigate the local situation.



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