

# Gated Communities and Sense of Community: A Review on the Social Features of Gated Communities

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**Abstract**—Since the mid-1970s, gated communities distributed in Latin America. They are a kind of residential development where there are privatized public spaces, and access to the area is restricted. They have specific impacts on the neighborhoods that located outside their walls such as threatening security, limiting access, and spreading social inequality. This research mainly focused on social features of gated community as; segregation, fragmentation, exclusion, specifically on sense of community and typology of gated communities. The conclusion will clarify the pros and cons of gated communities and how it could be successful or not.

**Keywords**—Walled community, gated community, urban development, urban sociology, sense of community.

## I. INTRODUCTION

GATES and walls had vital roles in security of the old human urban settlements. The issue of gated community is one of the challenging subjects in recent urban studies. Increasing of the gated communities described as an indicator of changing in social and physical part of cities. Design and technological innovation make standard perceptions of gated communities which effects on increase of “privatism” and eradicate the traditional form of community ties in neighborhoods, community and unity [10].

The concept of gated communities has spread around the world with considerable amount of positive and negative implications. There are many physical and social aspects, which effects on rising of gated communities. For example, the issue of safety and security is mostly mentioned as an effective reason to live beyond the walls. Furthermore, creating the sense of community has known as capability of the gated communities. Urban fragmentation, segregation and separation are other critical issues arising from the gated community. Based on empirical studies in different scholars, this paper focuses on social perspectives of gated communities by specific focus on sense of communities, which is one of the major basic typology of gated communities by Blakely and Snyder [2].

## II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

### A. Gated Communities

Gated communities, as a global phenomenon, refer to a type

of housing development, which has strong access control. It means that, fences and gate close this community, in which mostly gates are controlled at least by one guard. In the big communities, controlling is down by patrol and CCTV as well.

Gated communities have been shaped in various forms around the world such as United States, United Kingdom, Argentina, Malaysia, Brazil, Spain, India and Saudi Arabia.

Blakely & Snyder defined gated communities as ‘one of the more dramatic forms of residential boundaries, have been springing up around the country since the early 1980s [2]. Millions of Americans have chosen to live in walled and fenced communal residential space that previously integrated with the larger shared civic space. Civic space is more than a political or jurisdictional construct. It is a manifestation of society, culture, and the shared polity’. Therefore exclusivity and privacy are the specific terms which made by gating. Manzi & Bowers [22] believed that; ‘the stereotypical view of gated communities is that they embody a form of dystopian living, behind which community ties are non-existent with neighbors discouraged from developing social interactions. In particular, they are seen to encourage affluent groups to increase their social distance from what is perceived as the other’. One of the main reasons which push upper classes people towards the living in form of central settlement which surrounded by the fences and walls is to avoid the violence [28].

Residential segregation is a visible issue taking place within the cities by development of gated communities. ‘Many approaches to the phenomenon of gating suggest that it is a response to increasing social inequalities, status-seeking behavior, and real or perceived fear of crime’. [22]

According to Sanchez et al. [25], gated communities characteristic is to make sense of community, feeling of high status, experience of direct contact with neighbors and high participation in the governance of their region.

### B. Diversity of Gated Communities

Gated communities are known as a part of urbanization process, which are based on the various communities by specific identities and typical patterns of fast developed private urban communities in 21<sup>st</sup> century [29]. In parallel by the increasing of diversity and plurality, gated communities have progressively turned into a housing market all around the world. They fundamentally changed urban environment with their diverse qualities which social segregation and identity elements have turned out to be more noticeable and strict than

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the past.

In the literature there is not any specific definition about gated communities, different scholars refer this phenomenon to 'gated communities' [2], [6], [17], [21], 'enclosed neighborhoods' [19] and 'gated enclaves'. [11] Modern patterns of gated communities have formed according to socio-economic changes, distribution of various types of lifestyles and architectural concept through international migration [29], [2]. Blakely and Snyder [2] as one of the first researchers about gated communities defined around 20,000 gated communities in the US but more recent evaluations by McGoey [23] increase the number around twice that. Gated community is an international phenomenon, which currently developed in many countries by different types and characteristics that are not bounded into USA. Moreover, the reasons of shaping of them are different from country to country, for example we can mention to ethnicity, security and prestige [14]. For example, in the US gated communities are the imperative kind of housing for American urban areas, primarily for urban elites [2]. Conversely, in countries of Latin American, the phenomenon firstly developed as a kind of summer resorts then turn into an answer for ethnicity [5]. In Europe, the seasonal use of housing in coastal area was the major reason of gated communities' development, moreover fashion attitude in some cities like London and Amsterdam have turned such communities as well. On the other side, these communities became a solution for daily problem such as ethnic differences and high rate of crime in Asia and Africa [20], [9], [16].

#### *C. Physical Features of Gated Communities*

According to reviewed literature, there are many different variables to explore gated communities from physical perspective. Blakely and Snyder defined four features in their classification, which are;

- 1) Functions of enclosure
- 2) Security features and barriers
- 3) Amenities and facilities included
- 4) Type of residents [2]

In addition, Grant and Mittelsteadt [12] suggested four more dimensions to evaluate the physical feature of diverse gated communities. Their suggestions are;

- 1) Tenure,
- 2) Location,
- 3) Size,
- 4) Policy context.

#### *D. Social Features of Gated Communities*

Social characteristics of gated communities are usually determined according to the resident life style and their social interaction together. This subject is an important factor to shaping of gated communities. In this regard, the essence of gated communities is significantly determinant of how associations between people and communities shaped and conserved in this area. In this case, the gap between the low level and high level income has always exist in gated communities from physical perspective (gated, wall, location

and etc.) and moreover it could be recognized as wide crack in social connectivity. This interpretation is strongly supported by Blakely and Snyder [2] who believed, 'with reference to the US experience, that while neighborhoods have always been able to exclude certain classes of residents through discrimination and cost of housing, with gates and walls, they can now exclude not only undesirable new residents, but even new passers-by and people from surrounding areas. This has the potential of triggering a harmful effect on urban sustainability'. Therefore, based on the literatures there are various factors which have effect on social interaction of residents inside the gate and people in outside. These factors make social features of gated communities. There is not any specific list of social feature of gated communities but this research will try to find the most important dimensions.

##### 1) Urban Regeneration

Webster argued that gated communities could be cause of urban regeneration by attracting high-income inhabitants into area, which there are not much relevant standards with their conventionally perceived [29].

##### 2) Social Segregation

Social segregation is the major features of gated communities, which had been caused by different process. Goix mentioned; private administration and the execution of restrictive agreements lead to a certain selection of the vendors through strategic rules, age limitations or a specific club enrolment, in order to guarantee the equality of the area [33]. Access control structure emphasizes the exclusion of the communities from inside to outside and conversely.

Two separate spatial part made by the gated communities are 'the territorial system of the gated community' and 'the urban space where it is located' [33].

##### 3) Social Exclusion and Polarization

The process of social segregation in gated communities has considerable effects on spatial and economic segregation of such communities as well. Gated communities exclude the residents from other neighborhoods and even from casual passers. This issue led to phenomenon of social exclusion that creates an enclosure of people interaction from different culture, race, class and economic status.

Although some scholars believe that, this system has strong effects on decreasing of the crime, there is no doubt in successful act of the walls and gate on inadvertent trespassers [20].

##### 4) Spatial Fragmentation and Separation

A number of scholars on gated communities argued that gated communities have much potential to the cause of spatial fragmentation. In addition, they believed that gated communities are the reason to increase in polarization, fragmentation and decreasing of the unity within urban society [20], [21], [24], [25], [27], [30], [31]. Moreover, it has effects on the characteristic of existing public spaces. Most of the people live inside the walled area by designed street, park and public spaces, which there is no longer use by all the city

residents. Such spaces are abounded to low class, poor, street children and homelessness outside the wall [20].

##### 5) Sense of Communities

'Sense of community is a relationship involving social interaction within a community resulting in a sense of belonging within the group and a perception of ownership through sharing of needs and requiring each other's commitment' [24].

According to Blanchard [3], satisfaction of living in residential district has been providing community relationships in a neighborhood. Also living as a community in a neighborhood increases the general quality of life and satisfaction in well-being [27].

Gated community is known as a physical element, which has influence on the sense of place and community in such areas [27]. Some researchers like Blandy and Lister [4] as well as Serife [8] believed that the sense of community in gated area is higher than non-gated. Furthermore, income levels and some interests between resident's factors have less influence on their interaction [3]. On the other hand, Georjeanna [30] argued that the income levels are known as one of the important factors of sense of community. He believed that higher income resident have low sense of community between the other levels.

'Sense of community is an important aspect in a neighborhood to enhance feelings of safety and eliminate the opportunities for crime.' [1]

##### *E. Typology of Gated Communities*

In the literature, there are different methods to classify the gated communities that each of this classification has been used for relevant case study.

At this section, the research will summarize major typologies of gated communities. According to Table I, there are four main typologies. Blakely and Snyder [2] defined their classification as the basic typology of gated communities in North America. As it is mentioned before gated communities shaped according to different reasons. Blakely and Snyder defined the development of gated communities according to making 'sense of community' within the walls. This typology includes three major categories [2]. The first is 'lifestyle community' that provides a secure and separate area for the leisure activities with high level of amenities within the walls. The second one is 'prestige communities' that growing very fast- between the other communities. This type offers a different typology of community with the lack of recreational amenities of the first type and creates a secure area based on social ladder. The third type is 'security-zone community' with relevance to existing developments.

Burke's typology is the second classification. His typology has five interrelated categories of American, Australian and British gated communities [31]. This typology depends on the physical and social feature of the varying communities, and additionally their geographic situation. These five types comprise both existing and recently constructed gated communities. They are categorized into; 'urban security zones,

secure apartment complexes, secure suburban estates, secure resort communities, secure rural-residential estates'.

Luymes have classified the third typology of gated communities [32]. Luymes has created an urban network and classified enclave residential area through access controlling, and the solidification of their border. His fundamental typology is according to access control and perimeter control. His typology includes 'typology of control' and 'retirement and resort communities'.

The last one is the typology of Grant and Mittelsteadt [12] which basically is based on Blakely and Snyder typology and more factors such as; 'the level of affluence, the type of security features and spatial patterns and the characteristics of amenities and facilities'. The main reason of developing of this typology was based on the necessity of elaborating and purifying the ordinary classification of present typologies of American example that had been developed in the past. They defined gated communities in eight types: Ornamental gating, walled subdivision, faux-gated entries, barricaded streets, partially gated roads, fully gated roads, restricted entry bounded areas and restricted entry, guarded areas. Security aspects are a common factor between these four typologies. In contrast, other factors such as location, social, and physical characteristics are not the main common focuses. For example, the factor of social characteristic has been focused by typology of Blakely and Snyder in terms of 'sense of community' (Table I). Therefore, this study focuses deeply on Blakely and Snyder typology as one of the preliminary typologies of gated communities, which consider the sense of community as the basic elements of their classification.

##### *a) Typology of Blakely and Snyder*

Blakely and Snyder [2] present one of the most complete researches in case of gated communities of US in their publication 'Fortress America: Gated Communities in the United States'.

As it is mentioned before, in their study on USA gated communities, they found around three million residential unit by the mid-1990s. Later on, density of these communities increased to four million in 2000 [25].

According to Table I, Blakely and Snyder classified gated communities in three major categories; 'lifestyle, prestige, and security zone communities'. Theoretically, categories demonstrate ideal types that have specific market services. On the other hand, they mentioned that communities could display groups of features of other types from practical perspective.

Lifestyle communities, which focus on the recreational convenience and leisure activities, include three sub categories of retirement villages, golf and leisure communities, and suburban new towns (Table II).

The main aim of such projects is to attract people who are looking for security, identity, and common lifestyle with others in community. They aimed to provide a sense of community by similar interests and activities. 'Several chains, such as 'Leisure World' and 'Sun City', develop gated retirement complexes across the USA. Similar projects, although often on a smaller scale, are appearing in other

western nations by affluent older populations” [12].

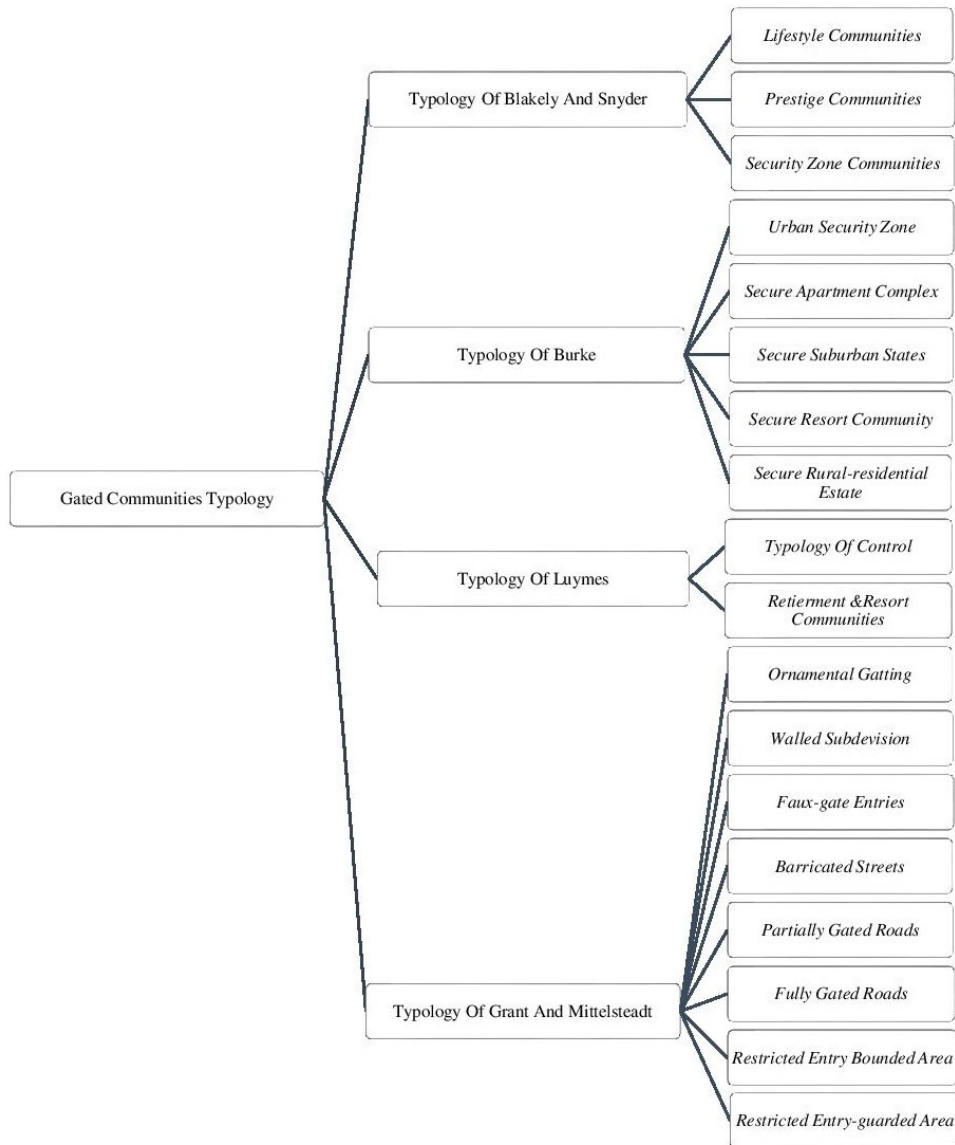


Fig. 1 Four Major Typology of Gated Communities, [31]

TABLE I  
THE MAIN INTERESTED AREAS OF DIFFERENT TYPOLOGIES OF GATED COMMUNITIES [14]

| Method of typology     | Security Reason | Security Level | Security Type | Location | Social characteristics (sense of community) | Physical Characteristics | Main Area of Interest                     |
|------------------------|-----------------|----------------|---------------|----------|---|--------------------------|---|
| Blackely and Snyder    | ✓               | ✓              | ✓             | ✓        | ✓   | ✓                        | Community                                 |
| Burke                  | ✓               | ✓              | ✓             | ✓        |   | ✓                        | Function                                  |
| Luymes                 | ✓               | ✓              | ✓             | ✓        |   |                          | Security level                            |
| Grant and Mittelsteadt | ✓               | ✓              | ✓             | ✓        | ✓   | ✓                        | All components mainly physical components |

Lifestyle communities are frequently shown as golf courses and country clubs. These types of communities mostly belong to the groups of people by high-level income, which has a considerable effect on the leisure marketing. “Buyers like

sharing interests with their neighbors and appreciate the privacy afforded by the gates. Security could be a secondary aim due to the amenities which offered in community” [12].

TABLE II  
BLAKELY AND SNYDER'S GENERAL TYPOLOGY OF GATED COMMUNITIES [12]

| Type          | Features  | Subtypes                    | Characteristics   |
|---------------|---|-----------------------------|---|
| Lifestyle     | These projects emphasize common amenities and cater to a leisure class with shared interests; may reflect small-town nostalgia; may be urban villages, luxury villages, or resort villages. | Retirement                  | age-related complexes with suite of amenities and activities  |
|               |   | Golf and leisure            | Shared access to amenities for an active lifestyle  |
|               |   | Suburban new town           | Master-planned project with suite of amenities and facilities; often in the Sunbelt                   |
| Prestige      | These projects reflect desire for image, privacy, and control; they focus on exclusivity over community; few shared facilities and amenities.   | Enclaves of rich and famous | secured and guarded privacy to restrict access for celebrities and very wealthy; attractive locations |
|               |   | Top-fifth developments      | Secured access for the nouveau riche; often have guards.  |
|               |   | Executive middle class      | Restricted access; usually without guards   |
| Security zone | These projects reflect fear; involve retrofitting fences and gates on public streets; controlling access  | City perch                  | restricted public access in inner city area to limit crime or traffic                                 |
|               |   | Suburban perch              | Restricted public access in inner city area to limit crime or traffic                                 |
|               |   | Barricade perch             | Closed access to some streets to limit through traffic  |

Suburban new towns in America frequently have an area with round thousands residential units by mix of land use such as commercial, institutional, retail and in some of them inbounds industrial facilities exist as well. Such communities may be developed as large master-planned projects, which can appear in multiple states. For instance, Green Valley, Nevada, is expected to host 60,000 people by 2005 [2]. These communities offer an independent security to residents who seek safe area from criminal neighborhoods of outside the walls.

As it is understandable from the name of prestige communities, they are present as the symbol of status and wealth, which appeared in the late of 19th century in many northern American cities. They belong to celebrities, professional athletes, and industrial managers. Blakely and Snyder consider three types of communities for prestige communities based on the level of prosperity of residents. The first one is gated area for rich and famous people that offer privacy and isolation for the wealthiest society. These enclave communities' specifications are well-designed gates and walls, and secured by security forces. They reflect a considerable fear of crime to resident's wealth and person, and their demand to avoid communication with the public. Such communities are mostly located near the large cities. Level of quality of life and security is the most important feature of them as well. Their residents are rarely interested to make communications with their neighbors and make a sense of community [12].

The third category is 'top-fifth' project, which provides a private and exclusive residential area for wealthy and business people. These communities have powerful gates and security

guard as well. Such areas work as symbol of prestige for their resident by almost equal income level and make them a comfort and enjoyable place [2]. Moreover, middle class communities are enclosed by walls and gate but there is no settled security guard at gate. These areas are known as lowest level of prestige categories but still are more expensive and secure than the open suburban residential area [12].

Security zone communities are different by the first two types. In both of them, developers make a secure area for who are interested of these communities according to their demands. However, in third typology, residents themselves create barriers to avoid the crime, traffic, and conserve their property value by closing the street, making an enclosed neighborhood [2]. The same as other categories, this classification has three different types. City perch is the first type with specific characters and exclusive residential area. For example, there are many neighborhoods in Los Angeles, which residents ask to authorities to close the street to public access to avoid the traffic problems. Suburban perch is the next one that reflects the needs of residents on the urban edges to limit access for non-residents. The main aim of this category is to avoid the outside's traffic and crime [2]. The last one, barricade perch, is a form which is growing quickly. These types could not be classified as fully gated communities, but residents asked to close the street as well. 'In poor neighborhoods barricading may reflect a desire to limit drive-by drug dealing or prostitution.' [26] The goal of the middle-class communities is to decrease the level of traffic in such areas.

### III. CONCLUSION: THE OVERALL OUTCOMES OF GATED COMMUNITIES

By the reviewing of various scholars, there are many different physical and social issues, which clearly play an important role to developing of urban enclosure or gated communities. Gated communities start in 19s and have a rapid growth during the period of fast urbanization and housing market boom in USA, UK, Europe, South America, and Africa and even in Asia.

Gated communities developed to fit the people's demand who are searching for high quality of life and better lifestyle. They are designed to avoid the existing criminal environments behind the walls, offer specific public service to their residents, and barricade the unwanted people by defining the walls and gates.

Such development has been known as introverted communities, because the walls and gate are built in parallel to street and the doors and windows openings are toward the central area between the walls. It caused negative effects on urban society. To support this issue Jacobs [15] specifically alludes to the danger of gated communities by discussing the practice of marking turf with respect to fences built to buffer both lower and higher income housing in New York City. Fences argued that fragment neighborhoods and "take eyes off streets" made more potential to crime [13].

Although one of the main reasons of gated communities was increasing the security of their residents but unfortunately

there are no studies that support this matter. However, Ft Lauderdale, Florida police department [7] found that closed-street neighborhoods did not have less crime than open street neighborhoods. Their conclusion was that gates and barricades had no significant effect on crime for inhabitants but did pose security and health threats by slowing emergency response time and inhibiting police patrols [13]. Moreover, by evaluating the typology of gated communities by Blakely and Snyder there are some pros and cons, which criticized the gated communities. Blakely and Snyder argued that, 'gated communities are criticized because they undercut community and public life as there can be, no social contract without social contact' [2]. They believed that the problem of crime could not be eliminated by introverting and high technologies. Therefore, there are many valuable evidences but it is not enough to make major and specific conclusions in order to influence of gated communities on urban society.

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