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Gated Communities

Increasingly rapid growth of urban sprawl has initiated the development of gated communities all over the United States, as well as other developing countries. Gated Communities do provide a better “sense” of security and desirable features for residents that can afford the extras, but ultimately reinforces urban inequality and residential segregation. The short term benefits, like financial profits for certain industries and upper-class needs, are controversially under-weighting the long term benefits that result in a higher quality of life for communities and the environment. Ironically, this defies the basic principles set forth in effective growth management and regional planning. Presented challenges are exposing new mechanisms of policies adopted by key players in the planning process, as well as municipality interests. In respect to present and future conflicts with gated communities and urban compaction, strategic progression is slowly evolving as gated-developmental land use dramatically multiplies. Gated communities can be viewed as a speculative scheme that reinforces urban sprawl, socio-economic segregation, and unsuitable environmental conditions.

Gated communities have become a popular phenomenon here in the United States as well as all over the globe. It's essential to examine how a rapidly developing nation evolves so a person can't misconceive the trends large nations' exhibit over time. According to the Journal of Planning Education and Research, “the transformation of the national economy was among the important causes of gated communities in developing countries,” (Nora, 2009, p. 312). Argentina, for example, is a globally influenced, industrialized, rapidly developing nation that “decreased its support of national industries and privatized many of their assets,” even though “the urban population continued to expand,” and “urban employment declined” (Nora, 2009, p. 311). Meanwhile, considering the transformation, “suburban localities changed their use of land from industrial to residential, hence facilitating the development of gated communities” (Nora, 2009, p. 311).

Historically, America drastically changed after the invention of the automobile and interstate highways. Not only did this initiate a new advanced national economy or change of industrialization, but also a motive for everyone to sprawl out of urban cities and into the countryside. Specifically, urban sprawl sparked suburbanization and “led to a marked differentiation between suburban and central city neighborhoods” (Vessoliov, 2012, p. 204). Statistically the U.S. census of 2001 reveals “7 million households in walled communities, and 4 million households in controlled access communities,” and

according to the building predecessors, “developers estimate that 8 out of 10 new residential projects in the U.S. involve gates, walls, or guards” (Grant, 2005, p. 273). If one looks at it from a much broader historical scale, cities prompted gated communities in the U.S. to create barriers or control access into cities. This trend eventually evolved into micro gated communities fragmented throughout municipalities. The argument can be made that “flight from blight can be regarded as the main motivation for living behind gates” (Cséfalvay, 2011, p. 750). “Flight from blight” can be defined as the movement out of cities to more desired living quarters, like greater acreage of land and larger households, due to social and fiscal problems. Though this may not be under the radar, America has a continuous habit of socially segregating communities based on preferences and class status.

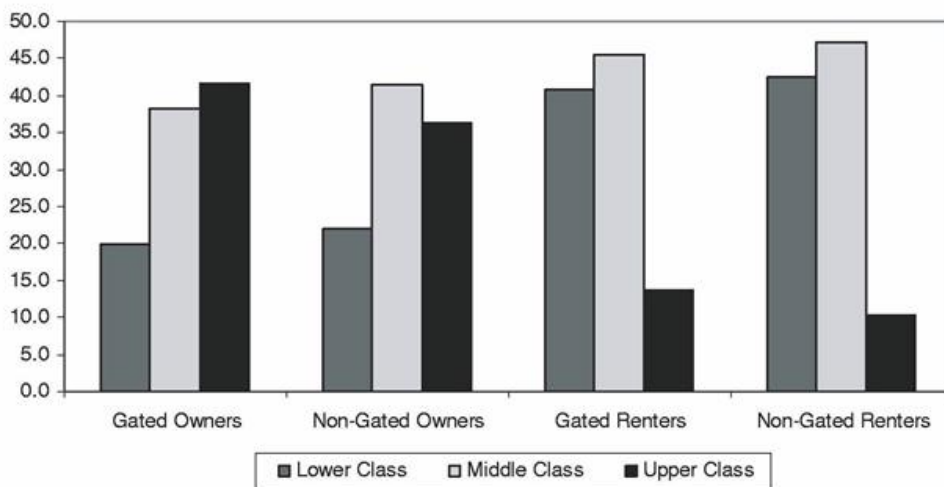


FIGURE 4

Social Class of Gated Community Residents versus Nongated Residents, by Tenure, US South and West, American Housing Survey, 2001

Figure 4 portrays the different classes associated with gated communities dating back to 2001. This graph also supports L. J. Morgan’s (2013) evidence, author of “Gated Communities: Institutionalizing Social Stratification,” where he explains, “while early gated communities were restricted to retirement villages and the compounds of the super-rich, the majority found today are middle to upper-middle class,” (p. 26).

Imagining this trend being reinforced throughout history helps one consider the impacts and consequences. The consequences that arise when more wealthy people move out of urban areas for more desired living circumstances, leaving behind the less wealthy or lower class citizens that can’t afford to relocate, results in a generation of less diversified urban and suburban communities. Classifying the market of gated communities has a direct impact on the diversity of citizens within that community. When you develop a community based on market values, in other words class-segregation, you are essentially giving people the incentive to separate themselves into categories. In the journal of *Housing*

Studies, the article “Gated communities: Sprawl and Social Segregation in Southern California” explains there are three general or major types of gated communities. They are 1.) “the elite”, or “golden-ghetto communities” which define themselves based on prestige, 2.) leisure “lifestyle communities”, “where gates assure the exclusive access to leisure facilities,” and 3.) the “security zone communities” where safety is the main concern of residents and now include low-end neighborhoods retrofitted with gates to promote their safety and control gang activities” (Goix, 2005, p. 325).

In order to determine the economic rationale behind gated communities one must look at the key players involved and associated with the development of gated communities. Cséfalvay (2011) states in his article, “Searching for Economic Rationale behind Gated Communities: A Public Choice Approach” that “developers want to produce housing developments of high density to make a profit” and “local governments aspire to attract affluent taxpayers,” while “homeowners want to live in a safe environment with exclusive access to a wide range of amenities” (p. 750). When you combine all these interests into one concept, it ultimately promotes a high demand for gated communities. Besides the concern of the “growing machine” of gated community development, the overall motto that club-like gated industries produce, essentially separates the “gated communities” from local taxes and services. Most gated communities provide goods and services as a monthly expense, which benefits the gated residents and organization that privatized the gated community. Whereas, the municipality suffers and lacks needed economical support. As Cséfalvay (2011) reported in the journal of *Urban Studies*,

the more gated communities provide special packages of fees and local public goods and services (in other words, the more room exists for the exit option), the more choices residents have to express their individual preferences. (p. 755)

This exit option/strategy does two things: raise the demand of gated communities as a residential alternative, as well as continuously socially segregate citizens within municipalities. The *Urban Studies* article explains that “residents have a strong incentive to move into gated communities if local municipalities are unable to meet a minimum level of fiscal exchange and benefit taxation in provision of public goods and services,” (Cséfalvay, 2011, p. 754). Economically this idea of excluding non-residents and including “members only” constitutes high expenses and “the strongest and most institutionalized and privatized forms on the control mechanisms continuum” (Cséfalvay, 2011, p. 757). This isn’t economically efficient for the community because

these control mechanisms, however, differ not only because of their capability to coerce behavior, but also because of the cost involved: walls, gates, and security guards are coupled with the highest costs, while spontaneous social arrangements are aligned with the lowest costs. (Cséfalvay, 2011, p. 757)

Therefore, if you consider all these economic aspects, rationally gated communities withhold long term, futuristic benefits essential to local municipalities and all the citizens within them.

Clearly this presents a challenge to control urban sprawl and promote smart growth throughout America. Not only does this include the public's preference and developers' greed for money, but also poor planners and community officials that write off these ideas without dealing with the conflicts of segregated urban compaction and appreciation for the environment around them as continuous spatially excluded sprawl communities expand outward and fragment the landscape. Stepping back a little and trying to imagine urban sprawl as a super-lake will environmentally bring the reader up to par. Imagine cities as a lake, then towns as a large pond, then gated communities fragmented throughout that town as smaller ponds or water holes. When one builds a dam for the resources and the needs those communities generate, as well as the town's needs, and on top of that the cities' needs. Inevitably the consequence is an overflowing super-lake that will eventually overrun the dams and flood the city, town, and gated communities in connection. This may, very possibly, be the vision of the future. Murray Bookchin, most famous for his theory of social ecology, "expounded the view that sound ecological practices in nature were not possible without having sound social practices in society," or in other words, "harmony in society required harmony with nature" (as cited in Young, 2011a, p. 215). Therefore, gated communities and their relationship to urban sprawl and social segregation directly impacts the environment around us. Another environmentalist, George Perkins Marsh explains human influence on the environment is often detrimental, as he believes that "man is a disturbing agent," and, "wherever he plants his foot, the harmonies of nature are turned into discords" (as cited in Young, 2011b, p. 1049). Marsh also wrote in his famous book *Man and Nature*, "the earth is fast becoming an unfit home' for its human inhabitants" (as cited in Young, 2011b, p. 1049).

Multiple environmental degrading issues are provoked when fortified gated communities continuously sprawl American landscapes. Not only does this increase the amount of land gutted for developmental use, but degradation of water quality threatens life in imaginable ways many people don't notice. Generally urbanization is one of the many influences and causes for this, but from a more focused point, the gated community phenomenon, a.k.a. "growing machine", sub-additionally contributes. Considering water is the most essential resource to all life on this planet, and whether or not the public addresses or understands the issue we face today, realistically the future entails horrifying consequences for all life if not effectively managed and planned. Basically, like Marsh and Bookchin explained throughout their scholarly work and accomplishments, harmony with the environment around us depends on how we interact and behave as a species socially. Human social interactions and decisions directly impact society's economy and the environment around us (all life and life's essential resources), or in other words and most importantly the overall highest-healthy/essential-necessary quality of lifestyle.

If most Americans can't imagine trend directions exhibited throughout history, one should look at other countries like China and India, two of the most populated nations on earth, have historically been around the block much longer than the U.S. and continuously experience overwhelming issues. Necessarily, whether it be environmental, economical, or social, these considerations all have a direct connection or correlation with one another. For instance in China, water quality assessments took place in the most rapidly urbanized areas that inevitably, over-lay essential watersheds. Not only did this study reveal dramatic increases of water quality degradation as a result of urbanization, but also exposes a main concern and key source of problematic mechanisms relatively associated with gated communities/growing machines. To be more specific, the article "Temporal and Spatial Variations in the Relationship Between Urbanization and Water Quality" from the journal of *Environmental Science and Pollution Research* explains, "environmental planners and policymakers should pay more attention to social issues before making urban policies and guidelines in those rapidly urbanizing areas," because based on the research and statistics generated in the article between 2001-2012's portrayal, "economic aspect presented a similar trend to the urbanization curve, which indicated that economic aspect had the biggest effect on urbanization," (Lijun Ren, 2014, p. 13665). In other words, even when the economy is not doing so well, urban development continues to dramatically increase. Also, already assuming and acknowledging the fact that freshwater river sources are key, the decade-long study claimed, "water was of high quality before it flowed through the rapidly urbanizing areas," and more specifically a result of deterioration happened when, "domestic wastewater was discharged," (Lijun Ren, 2014, p. 13651).

One can go on about environmental issues associated with development of gated communities and analyze every detail of water, energy, over-needed or under-preferred spatial development etc. Just as important, the relationships (not created) and roles future barriers serve needs to be understood and considered by planners. Truthfully, barriers/gates/walls represents and demonstrates exclusion, and are simply not an effective way to enhance community progression. One of the most effective/famous urban planners in American history was Jane Jacobs. Jacobs explained barriers excluded/segregated people and ultimately are one of the most ineffective qualities and contributors of dying American cities. Considering the U.S. is an overflowing melting pot, in respect to increasing population and sprawl that has efficiently disturbed or destroyed significant amounts of ecologically efficient land, logical approaches would demonstrate how suburban areas are evolving (trends) and what is transformed or altered in result. Is this beneficial for future generations? Is it sustainable? Reactions towards this might involve diversifying different buildings in connection with different communities, re-developing already existing infrastructure, but most definitely not clustered land-gutted development with increasing impervious surfaces and wasted land use. If this is the case, an effective planning strategy would be to treat increasing human-inhabited suburban areas much like Jane Jacobs ideas, considering she effectively

revitalized dying economically depressed cities. Yes, planners today still use Jacob's strategies, but why does history keep repeating itself? This approach contradicts everything present-day gated communities offer. Gated communities behave very anti-socially and resemble a trap that imprisons residents with desirable services and security at a price, intentionally hibernating the outside world's infinite qualities. Some may see it as boring, and others may enjoy the satisfaction of having invested features available to them at personal convenience. Either way it is safe to say, gated schemes lack variety, exciting, and exceptional lifestyles.

It seems everyone in today's society have been hypnotized by the speculative scheme of gated communities. Not only has this speculation trend dominated the mass majority of present-day society's way of thinking, but continuous reinforcement and fortification on the issue initiates trending declines of community embracement. Realistically in today's economy, many would say that the middle class has disappeared. This is not so outrageous if one merely glances at the wealth distribution charts/graphs of the U.S. where statistically the numbers are disgustingly disturbing, and in other cases even worse in other nations. The deterioration of wealth, or declining economy results in more rapid growth of gated communities because of the misconception that urbanization boosts the economy. One thing certain, social segregation correlates with the environment, which correlates with the economy and vice versa. Therefore, a good strategic approach for regional and environmental planners is to sufficiently focus more on socially integrating, as well as connecting multiple communities and local businesses with designated bike and walking lanes. This most likely entails less strict accessibility and multiple income housing within communities. Government or State agencies should also promote diversity with certain incentives, as well as provide public transportation to limit the amount of cars. Other agencies like the USBC, who intelligently created the competitive rating system called Leadership Energy Environmental Design (LEED), which rewards developers bragging rights based on how environmentally friendly/green buildings are. In this scenario, if there was a USCC (US Community Council), with a similar rating system possibly called Leadership Energy Environmental Socially Diversified Design (LEESDD), where competitive ratings based on community development concerns all correlations, as well as socially diverse environments. This will ultimately initiate the need for developers and planners to step up their game if they want to play the field. In addition, local residents should and need to be more involved with committee decisions. A balance based on everyone's input is very essential. Some people are just not aware of the consequences segregated private communities are associated with, while others don't care to consider them, understand the real purpose, or just have bigger things to worry about. The more involved and interacted members of the communities in municipalities/cities, the greater chance of achievements and progression toward issues in general.

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