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URBAN INNOVATION OR FORTIFICATION?

THE ARRIVAL OF GATED
COMMUNITIES IN NEW
ZEALAND - A RELATIVELY
NEW PHENOMENON - IS
LIKELY TO ENGENDER
POLARISED VIEWS WITH
SOME REGARDING THESE
COMMUNITIES AS A NEW
AND EXCITING USE OF
URBAN SPACE, WHILE
OTHERS WILL SEE THEM AS
A SOCIAL DISASTER



Above: A physical barrier

The exploding growth of gated communities worldwide has important local implications. While overseas the gated communities phenomenon has received increasing attention from such groups as housing consumers, property professionals, local and national governments and academics, to date there has been little debate in New Zealand.

Internationally, the development of privately managed residential communities has led to polarised views about whether these new forms of urban living should be encouraged. Do gated communities represent an exciting re-ordering of urban space or are they a social problem waiting to happen? At one extreme neo-classical economists such as Foldvary (1994) argue that gated communities are more efficient in that they allow collectively consumed goods to be supplied in optimal quantities by the market. The privatisation of local government is seen as a more efficient way to achieve urban development.

At the other extreme, critics such as Davis (1990) would see gated communities as a further example of urban fortification leading to greater social exclusion and segmentation. From this perspective, the creation of exclusive communities will lead to the fragmentation of urban space raising many issues for urban planning and management, including the future shape of cities.

Other positions see gated communities as an evolutionary step towards more efficient forms of urban social organisation, or a form of socialism by contract which may encourage grass-roots democracy.

WHAT IS A GATED COMMUNITY?

There are numerous definitions of gated communities. Perhaps the most frequently cited is that of Blakely and Snyder (1995:2) who see gated communities as the newest form of fortified community with security and protection as its primary feature. They define gated

communities as:

...intentionally designed security communities with designated and landscaped perimeters, usually walls or fences, that are designed to prevent penetration by non-residents. These developments are both new suburban developments and older inter city areas retrofitted to provide security...not apartment buildings with guards or doormen...nor...areas of cities or suburbs that are difficult to penetrate because of the street pattern.

In addition, Blandy, Lister, Atkinson and Flint (2003:2) in the first national study of United Kingdom gated communities draw attention to legal and governance issues in their definition:

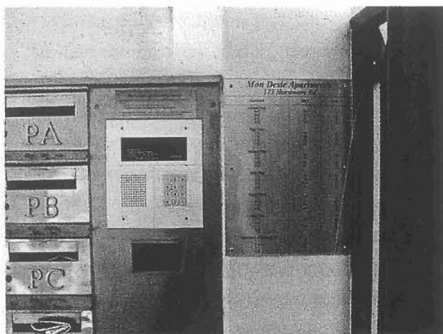
Walled or fenced housing developments to which public access is restricted, often guarded using CCTV and/or security personnel, and usually characterised by legal agreements (tenancy or leasehold) which tie the residents to a common code of conduct.

A further definition (Goobler 2002:321) highlights the role of gated communities in the creation of social divisions as:

...residential developments where access is restricted and public spaces are privatised. They have potential impacts on their surrounding neighbourhoods such as threatening safety, restricting access, and perpetuating social inequality.

THE INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

Gated communities can be found in most parts of the globe. These take a number of forms and have different drivers. They include, for example, security villages and neighbourhood enclosures in South Africa, common interest developments (CIDs) in the United States, state-led private neighbourhoods in China, low to middle income condominiums in Asian cities such as Bangkok, traditional gating in the Middle and Far East and enclaves for transnational elites in diverse countries. All



Above: A technological barrier

Middle: Signs used as a barrier

Right: Surveillance by residents acts as a form of gatedness

these forms of gated communities fall within the broader rubric of privately managed residential entities.

While the international literature on gated communities is relatively small, it is, nevertheless, dominated by the American experience of CIDs which covers single family homes, townhouses and condominiums. It was suggested by Blakely and Snyder in 1995 that about one fifth of the American CIDs were gated or walled. In 2003, an estimated 50 million Americans were living in 249,000 CIDs (CAI 2004). McKenzie (2003) argues that this creation of privately managed residential enclaves has had a dramatic effect on both the appearance and organisational structure of urban America. Furthermore, he contends that this trend is not a passing fashion, but rather an institutional transformation reflecting neoliberal views on privatisation and the role of the state.

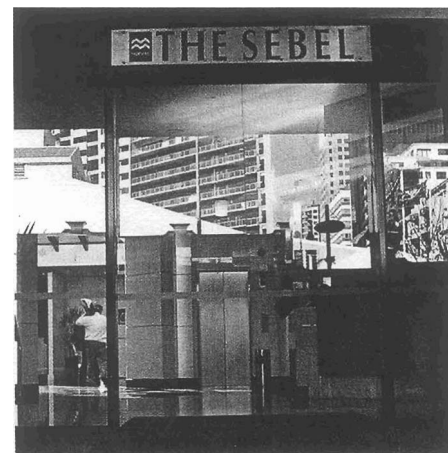
What has intrigued researchers is how the transnational phenomenon of gated communities can be explained. Two views have been put forward. The first is the diffusion argument which proposes that this model of urban development is driven by global property

markets and international travel. As it spreads, it adapts to the local conditions and context and is influenced by factors such as the role of the state, social values, local urban planning and housing markets. Webster (2003) argues that this model is more likely to be found in regions characterised by significant inequalities, inadequate provision of urban infrastructure, a lack of security and a weak regulatory regime.

The second explanation is the emergence of new forms of private urban governance replacing traditional civic government. These forms are perceived as superior to conventional local government in that there is greater choice of services, certainty of provision and better value for money. The inability of governments to meet the demands of modern society has resulted in new forms of collaborations amongst stakeholders such as public-private partnerships to address deficiencies in the efficient provision of infrastructure.

To further explore these issues, a small group of researchers on gated communities began meeting in 1999. The 2002 International Conference on Private Urban Governance, held in Mainz, Germany, concluded that there are several paradoxes relevant to gated communities, among which are that:

- they reflect manifestations of fear, but through the very nature of their marketing also cause and amplify fear;
- privately managed communities reflect a preference for less state regulation, yet owners end up with more private regulation;
- the provision of enclosure and exclusion is



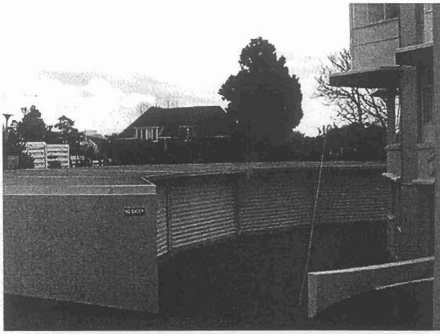
Above: "Manned" surveillance

enabled through voluntary, collective action. That is, people who buy into new forms of privately governed communities 'willingly' engage in a form of market socialism.

TYPES OF GATED COMMUNITIES AND GATEDNESS

Gated communities can be classified in the following way (Blakely and Snyder (1995:8):

- Lifestyle - Gates provide security and separation for the leisure activities and amenities within. Lifestyle gated communities include retirement communities, golf and leisure developments and suburban new towns.
- Elite - Gates symbolise distinction and



Top: The narrowing of the entrance gives the impression of gatedness

prestige, and create and protect a secure place on the social ladder. Elite gated communities include enclaves for the rich and famous, developments for the very affluent, and executive home developments for the middle class.

Security - Fear of crime and outsiders is the foremost motivation for defensive fortifications. Security gated communities include those where middle and working class groups have attempted to protect property and property values, often in deteriorating areas. They may also include areas of low-income housing, including public housing, where crime is acute.

Blakely and Snyder also suggest that, to varying degrees, these categories reflect:

- a sense of community, or the preservation and strengthening of neighbourhood bonds;
- exclusion, or separation from the rest of society;
- privatisation, or the desire to replace and internally control public services;
- stability, or the need for homogeneity, predictability, and similarity.

AN AUCKLAND TYPOLOGY

To some extent there has always been 'gatedness' in Auckland. Like other New Zealand cities, a feature of suburban design has been the fences that wall off one detached house from another and the gates that act as a

barrier between the footpath and the path or driveway that connects to the house. The gatedness that is becoming a feature of Living in medium and higher density developments is, however, a new phenomenon. Furthermore, it is different from the more extreme examples overseas referred to earlier in this paper. We suggest that a much more low key 'kiwi style' is emerging, in line with the diffusion hypothesis. In this section we distinguish between the form of 'gatedness', or intentionally designed and implemented features aimed at restricting access, that is emerging in intensified housing in Auckland and the phenomenon of 'gated communities' as articulated in the international literature.

A preliminary analysis of a range of intensive housing developments in the Auckland Region was the basis for our seven-fold classification of gatedness (Dixon and Dupuis, 2003). The classification was arrived at through identification of the following features:

1. **Physical barriers:** walls, gates, doors, trees/hedges/greenery, speed bumps;
2. **Technological barriers:** surveillance cameras and videos, security alarms, access via swipe card or the intercom;
3. **Manned surveillance:** e.g. security patrols and the 'front desk' barrier;
4. **Signs:** neighbourhood watch signs, 'private property', 'no trespassing', 'beware of dog', 'be respectful of private residence', 'no parking', 'tow-away', 'residents only' parking, road paint and road markings;
5. **Design features:** narrowing or partly obscured entrances, change in colour, texture of roading, walls, doors, gates with no handles or levers;
6. **Natural surveillance:** being observed by residents;
7. **Implicit signals:** closed, unmarked doors and gates.

The analysis also led us to make the following observations about gatedness in medium and higher density housing in Auckland.

- Many of the forms of gatedness observed could be described as 'symbolic' forms of gatedness in that they would act as a deterrent rather than a barrier to access. For example, for the developments enclosed in walls, the walls generally can be climbed, making illicit access to buildings or grounds a possibility.

- Forms of gatedness occur across a range of socioeconomic levels.

- Gatedness is generally more apparent when the enclosed housing is close to public streets or walkways. Gatedness in developments in suburban areas is less obvious.

- Gatedness in public areas appears to be aimed at restricting car access and car parking as much as it is aimed at deterring people.

- In some instances, by erecting fences, walls or barriers, it seems that residents are attempting to create privacy, rather than achieve safety or security.

- Design is an important feature of gatedness. For example, smooth surfaces where no visible handles or levers are apparent on doors, gates, garage doors etc. give a very 'inaccessible' message.

- Associated with the above is a 'sterile' type of look that denotes a sense of 'privateness' and has the effect of deterring outsiders. Conversely we also observed a 'rustic' look that has a 'natural' but 'solid' feel about the gates and walls.

WHITHER GATED COMMUNITIES?

The growing presence of gated-type developments in residential areas in New Zealand has, up until now, received little attention by central or local government. In our view, given intensification policies in Auckland at least and the rapid rate of growth, gated communities are likely to proliferate. In addition, the issue of out-moded forms of governance under the Unit Titles Act relevant to some gated communities suggests it is time the phenomenon of gatedness received some attention by local and central government. Recent initiatives by Christchurch City Council

to address the issue are to be commended.

Already in Auckland there are increasing signs of developer interest in 'gated communities'. This shows a diffusion of ideas as developers are drawing on overseas experiences for local marketing initiatives. However, we are yet to discern developers' views of 'gatedness' and 'gated communities'. We suspect that, as for the promotion of new urbanism by developers, use of the term 'gated communities' is designed to sell new housing developments profitably rather than any initiatives to create new forms of 'community' (Winstanley, Thorns and Perkins, 2003). To date, we would argue that, in the New Zealand context, the term 'gated developments' would be much more appropriate than 'gated communities'. Indeed, in our view, the term 'communities' is quite misleading.

To date in New Zealand, the trend towards gatedness is occurring by default and in an ad-hoc way. Thus the potential implications of gated developments have not been identified systematically by local government or perceived as a major issue by local communities. Instead, the attention of councils and local communities has been much more focused on issues such as the variable quality of new intensive housing developments.

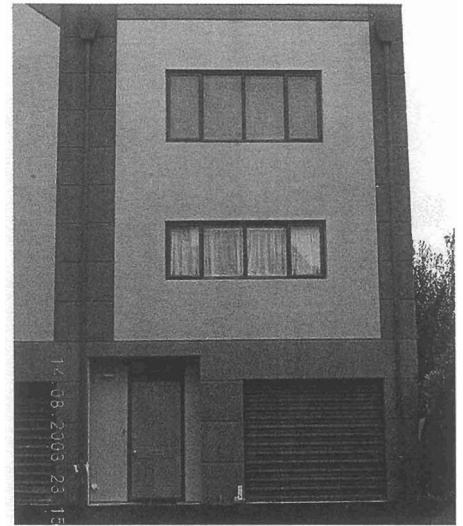
Overseas research (e.g., Low 2003) suggests that gated communities can generate a number of unintended consequences. These include: creating a false sense of security in that crime still occurs behind the gates; creating insecurity by suggesting that people are not secure unless their homes are fortified; lead to an increased fear of outsiders by those living inside the gates; and result in increased class-based segregation or social splitting. In addition, the rules governing gated communities (which buyers are often not aware of at the time of purchase) impose a form of social control on residents which leads to a relatively homogenous style of living. There is now growing resistance by some CID members in the United States to the rules governing their daily lives. The reliance too by local governments on the creation of these communities as 'cash cows' obscures fiscal

problems and creates difficulties for strategic planning.

While the expansion of gated communities and privately managed neighbourhoods seems unlikely to occur in New Zealand on the same scale it does in the United States, there are important issues for councils to be aware of when developing local policies in respect of planning and infrastructure, particularly in relation to the roles and responsibilities of the public sector in providing local services. For councils, this means addressing the consequences of gatedness in both strategic planning (such as whether it is an issue that requires attention, and if so, in what way) as well as operational terms (such as who is responsible for servicing of properties in gated developments). The phenomenon of gatedness is at an early enough stage in New Zealand cities that we can still be informed by overseas experiences and avoid some of the pitfalls.

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Above: What signal does this give?

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