

Sustainability of Gated Communities in Developing Countries

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Abstract

Gated communities, a recognizable form of housing developments in the Gulf region, have dramatic impact on neighborhoods and cities as well as on the quality of urban life of people. This paper attempts to understand the impact of this rapidly emerging housing typology on urban sustainability. It investigates the sustainability of gated communities and explores their perception by the society. Primary data was obtained through standardized questionnaire and personal interviews. Secondary data was obtained from publications, journals, and textbooks. The results indicated that the trend of living in gated communities is very low priority among Qataris. They do not consider gated communities suitable for their lifestyle, needs and wants. They prefer living in independent residential units which have no shared entries or staircases with others. The paper concludes that new legislation and guidelines are needed to make gated communities more socially and economically sustainable and attractive to residents and citizens.

Keywords: Gated communities, Sustainability, Housing, Qatar, Doha.

1. Introduction

Gated communities are one of the recognizable forms of housing developments in the Gulf region. Historical and cultural studies of gated communities indicate that the idea is by no means new, nor is it a product of universal principles or circumstances. Cities surrounded by walls for the purpose of safety, security and preventing the easy entry into the city existed throughout history. Gated communities are an internationally widespread phenomenon today, especially common in cities and their suburbs. Since 1990, in the course of the transition to the market economy, social and economic differences have increased immensely and the process of segregation of population groups within individual municipalities is also accelerating. During the eighties modern walled communities reemerged in many parts of the world as forms of residential accommodation. As Atkinson and Flint (2004) suggested, "There has been a considerable growth of interest in recent years surrounding the emergence of 'gated communities', 'fortified enclaves' and other forms of privatized public space." As a physically powerful urban typology, they have dramatic impact not only on the daily activities of people, but also on the urban form and function of neighborhoods and cities. As indicated by Ajibola et al (2010) "the rise of gated communities can lead to spatial fragmentation and separation in cities as a result of its security and financial implications. Gated communities give a sense of community, safety, security and social exclusion which lead to urban fragmentation and separation."

Researchers, governments and inhabitants who are interested in the future of cities and towns are posing questions concerning the sustainability of gated communities. With an increasing world concern of urban sustainability, it is necessary to understand the impact of this emerging housing typology on the growing cities' sustainability. Urban sustainability is a continuous goal for urban planning and management, hence all urban development forms must be considered in relation to the dimensions sustainability.

2. Literature review

Gated communities, scattered all around the world, differ from country to country, with respect to their characteristics and in particular with respect to different reasons for development in relation to security, ethnicity and prestige (Gulumser and Levent, 2007). For instance, gated communities emerged in the US mainly for urban elites (Blakely and Snyder, 1997). In contrast, in Latin American countries, the phenomenon first emerged as summer resorts then become a solution for ethnicity (Coy and Pöhler, 2002). In Europe the primary reason for gated communities is the seasonal use of houses in coastal zones, and a fashion trend. In Central-Eastern Europe, they first appeared after the collapse of state socialist systems (Lentz, S. 2006, Stoyanov, P. and Frantz, K. 2006). By contrast, in East Asia and in South Africa, these communities emerged as solutions for daily problems of high crime rate and ethnic conflicts (Landman and Schöntiech, 2002).

2.1 Gated Communities defined

There is no consensus regarding the definition of “gated communities.” Several terms are used to refer to this phenomenon including “gated communities”, “gated enclaves”, “enclosed neighborhoods”, and in real estate market they use the terms “residential compounds”, and “housing compound or complexes.” Blakely and Snyder, (1997), suggested a general definition of gated communities as “physical privatized areas with restricted entrance where outsiders and insiders exist.” However, Grant and Mittelsteadt (2004) defined gated communities as “a housing development on private roads closed to general traffic by a gate across the primary access. The developments may be surrounded by fences, walls, or other natural barriers that further limit public access.” In its modern form, a gated community is a form of residential community or housing estate containing strictly-controlled entrances for pedestrians, bicycles, and automobiles, and often characterized by a closed perimeter walls and fences. Gated communities usually consist of small residential streets and include various shared amenities. For smaller communities this may be only a park or other common areas whereas for larger communities, it may be possible for residents to stay within the community for most day-to-day activities.

There are many types of gated communities with differing degrees of amenities, exclusivity and security. Researchers have developed their own typologies on the basis of significant implications of gated communities. Blakely and Snyder (1997) identified three main types of gated communities as lifestyle communities which focus on leisure activities with recreational facilities, common amenities, and shared services at their core. Lifestyle enclaves may include retirement villages, golf communities, or suburban new towns. Prestige communities serve as symbols of wealth and status for image-conscious residents where gates prevented the masses from seeing how the wealthy lived and lastly, security zone communities close off public streets to nonresidents. They reflect a fear of outsiders who disrupt neighborhoods. Grant and Mittelsteadt (2004) identified eight factors that differentiate gated communities from their neighborhood to include functions of enclosure, security features and barriers, amenities and facilities included, type of residents, tenure, location, size and policy context.

2.2 Gated Communities in Doha and the Gulf Countries

In Middle East, especially Gulf region countries and more specifically Saudi Arabia, another type of gated communities could be found that aim to provide their inhabitants with the same life style of their homelands so that they can freely practice their daily activities. This life style prohibited outsiders from entering the gated communities because of their disagreement to the local traditions or laws. Beyond the gates, residents have to respect the country laws and traditions, which is very difficult for most of them or even impossible to follow.

Neither security nor lifestyle and prestige are the reasons behind propagation of gated communities in Qatar. It has been found that the first compound or gated residential developments found in Qatar were developed

by merchants' families like Darwish and Al Manna in early or mid of 1940s. In 1947, on the sea front, different compounds of the major merchants of Doha had established themselves near the shore of the Gulf where their goods were landed. Then from the sea shore the idea flourished towards the south east to develop more residential compound with developed walls in *freej* Al- Salata and *freej* Al- Hitmi and the construction of Sheikh Abdullah bin Jassim compound in *freej* Al- Salata. In 1950s, the concept of walls and gates surrounding the extended families' houses spread over other districts like Al-Rayyan and Alwakrah. At the end of 1950s, Qatar witnessed the arrival of international oil companies, and the migration of labor forces to Qatar. This opportunity was exploited by merchants to yield huge profits through supplying labor, water, and goods to the oil company. The accommodation of labor forces was provided in the form of housing compounds so they can practice their life style without any intrusion from outsiders. In other words, the exploitation of the merchants to make profit and expanding their work were the main reasons behind the flourishing of gated communities or, in residential market terminology, housing compounds. (Lockerbie, 2005) Housing compounds spread all over the districts of Doha after economic development of the state and increase of businesses that involved the migration of labor forces to Qatar. Moreover, real estate markets and construction companies had their own stamp in building and enlarged the numbers of these residential developments in order to make profit.

While there is much talk about the need to build more gated communities or housing compounds in Doha to meet the growing demand for housing, a statistics surprised the citizens and residents by announcing the vacancy of more than forty eight thousand housing units that represents 18% of the total buildings in the country (Khodr, 2011). Different views of professionals and people about the reason behind the existence of such a large number of vacant homes at the time when a pressing need for the construction of more housing reflect the lack of maturity among investors. However, many of the owners and investors in Qatar do not respect the idea of integrating different categories of people in the community. Citizens, on one hand, are not attracted to commercial residential units, as they prefer to own private property instead of leasing houses, and to live in independent villas instead of villas in complexes. On the other hand, foreigners tend to live in small and more affordable units, because of the high consumption electricity and water. Many reasons are contributing to the vacancy of many units in gated compounds including location in remote areas and lack of public services. Meanwhile, owners refuse to reduce the price of rent in order not to devalue their properties (Khodr, 2011).

3. Method

This paper investigates the sustainability of gated communities in Doha, Qatar. The paper examines the performance of gated communities and legislation that currently exist. Next, it explores the perception of gated communities by the society. Questions paused by this study include; are gated communities appropriate in Qatar seeking to enhance urban economy, integration and livability? Who are the targeted populations that use such developments? What is the local residents' view of this phenomenon? And what are the policies and regulations that control them? And, what are the implications of such phenomenon? Since no such research has been conducted previously regarding gated communities in Qatar, secondary official data was not available. Secondary data was obtained from earlier publications, newspapers books and Qatar Statistic Authority. Primary data was obtained through standardized questionnaire and personal interviews conducted with residents and non-residents of gated communities. A sample of 32 gated communities' residents and 34 non-residents was selected for the survey. Data was collected using online-questionnaire and in depth interviews of selected informants to follow up the questionnaires responses. The results of the questionnaire surveys are divided into two main parts; the first part focuses on the performance of gated communities through questionnaire distributed among the residents of gated communities within metropolitan city of Doha, and the second part focused on citizens' perception of this type of urban settlement in Doha, Qatar.

4. Results

The first questionnaire focused on the performance of gated communities and how they impact the urban development. Only 3% of the respondents who were residing in gated communities were Qataris while Arab and European nationalities have the higher percentage of 41% and 26 % respectively, and the rest were other nationalities. This is due to the fact that Qatari families prefer living in independent villas and not gated communities. About 20% of respondents were singles while 70% were married, and 68% with household size of less than five. This indicated that small families are more fitting to live in a compound due to the limited size of housing units. The household income and housing rent statistics indicated that gated communities are targeting medium-high to high income class of people. High income families comprised 64%, medium-to-high income 18% and 18% preferred not to disclose their income level. Income level might be related to education level as results showed that 97% of residents are highly educated, and 59% of them are private sector employees, while the rest working in governmental offices.

Regarding previous accommodation, 50% of surveyed residents were living in non-gated communities prior to moving to current compounds. The results showed that 100% of the units are rented and not owned. About 62% of the respondents have lived for less than 3 years in the current complex while only 38% have lived for more than 5 years. However, most of the respondents have lived long enough in the gated communities to have a reasonable opinion on the performance of their residence. Table 1 illustrates the satisfaction levels of respondents regarding the dwellings' characteristics. The performance percentages were divided as follows: 85% -100 % as excellent, 70% -84% as very good, 69% -55 % as good while below 55% as poor. The results indicated that none of characteristics was considered excellent while number of rooms and their sizes were considered very good and good respectively. The performance of gated communities' facilities proved to be insufficient for most residents. It illustrates that none of the gated communities' facilities achieved excellent or very good evaluations. Safety and security are considered by 71% of the occupants as sufficient, while cleanliness and quietness achieved 50% to 61% ratings respectively. Table 2 illustrates the results of gated communities social aspects assessments from the residents' point of view. These aspects include sense of belonging and interaction among the residents. The results indicate that quality of life in a gated community is poor and that residents are not recommending others to live in similar communities. About 90% of the respondents prefer living in public ordinary community than gated communities. This result confirms with Qatar Statistic Authority for housing in 2010, indicating that 96% of Qataris live in ordinary public villas (Elshamy, 2010). Only 9 % of the respondents of the 72% highly educated respondents prefer to live in gated communities. Permanent Population Committee studies noted that "70% of the Qatari families live in owned houses, with only 7.7% of them are using rented houses, and 2.7% are benefiting from government housing programs" (Elshamy, 2010).

Household size responses indicated that approximately 90% of the respondents have household with more than five members deducing that they need more rooms and larger house units. 60% of the 90 % have more than three members working with average of household monthly income varied from 20,000 to 90,000 QR; with 68% of those are government employees. This indicates that they need more facilities during evening time after the work hours. It can be concluded that the performance and quality of urban life of gated communities predicts the high risk constructing more gated communities. Gated communities have long term economic implications if they cannot function for a long time and return profit to the developers and owners.

The second part of the survey focused on the reasons behind citizens' unwelcoming attitude to live in gated communities. Almost all aspects of the survey received the same degree of importance, however, privacy, number of rooms and size of housing units were considered more important by 83-86 % of respondents. Table 3 illustrates the results of the survey. This result revealed dissatisfaction of Qataris regarding size of designed units in gated communities and lack of privacy than culturally required. On the other hand, the results showed that Qataris did not consider having diverse typology of housing as important as how houses reflect the Qatari culture values and norms. Approximately 76% of the respondents indicated that the number of parking places provided for each unit is unsatisfactory as each family owns a car.

The result indicated that 59% of respondents are not concerned regarding the diversity of nationalities in gated communities. This revealed that irrespective of being a multi-culture city, Doha's nationals do not prefer to be closed to other nationalities. However, 83% showed their concern regarding the provision of amenities and services; especially outdoor spaces for children and level of security provided inside the community. Most of the respondents believe that gated communities are safe places and provide security. Qataris are used to live in independent villas surrounded by walls and gardens that ensure their security and privacy, while gated communities are designed so that all villas are surrounded by a wall to secure the whole community and not independent villas.

The result indicated that Qataris do not consider gated communities a suitable housing form for their lifestyle, needs and aspirations. They prefer living in independent residential units and villas with no shared entries or staircases. Results also indicate that most of the residential units preferred by Qatari families include more rooms with larger size, more than two parking lots and spacious back and front yard. It could be concluded that the trend of living in gated communities is still very low among Qataris although it costs less, and this attitude impacts the profitability of gated communities in the future. In other words, when permanent residents or citizens chose to live in gated communities it would be more profitable for its owners; it will be more economically sustainable.

5. Conclusion

While many researchers are considering the short-term implications of gated communities, few are considering their long term implications. Recent examples of gated communities are shaped by global socio-economic changes, marketing strategies of developers (Webster, 2002) and the spreading of architectural concepts and lifestyles by international migration. Gated communities remained rare until the advance of the retirement developments of the late 1960s and 1970s which were centrally planned. Economic sustainability can be interpreted as how gated communities stay viable in the real estate market. It is clearly important to situate this argument within the general framework for sustainability. Sustainability is thought to have economic, environmental and socio-cultural components. All three components overlap and interact. This paper assumes that economic sustainability is integrally linked to the environmental and social in gated communities. While viable economic performance might mean that gated communities survive in the short-term, it does not necessarily secure a long-term economic future; nor does it guarantee positive environmental or social outcomes. Gated communities that can effectively manage their environment and social aspects should also achieve economically sustainable. Sustainable development of gated communities enables all people to realize their potential and to improve their quality of life in ways that simultaneously protect and enhance the urban life.

In Doha, most gated communities residence contracts is a part of the work package benefits. They are not considered as a solution to public housing demands nor urban problems due to the temporality nature of its residents. Gated communities affect the city's urban tissue by creating isolated urban islands surrounded by fences and walls preventing physical access and visual connectivity. The difficulty is to identify the required actions toward making the gated communities in the metropolitan city of Doha more economically and socially sustainable. Should they continue to be part of the growing urban metropolis? Or should they be used only in designated areas of the city? Lessons learned from residents' attitudes and perception of gated communities should be considered to improve the quality of urban life in Doha through the implementation of more viable urban planning strategies to face the rapid urban growth and upgrade the current standards of living.

The paper suggests the following actions to be adopted by both government agencies and real estate companies to improve the quality of urban life in gated communities through focusing on the planning legislation and policies while developing design guidelines that enhance the residence quality of life. From the developer's point of view, gating a neighborhood is instrumental in avoiding regulations on floor area ratio, streets setbacks and open areas to the public access. Although some developers are able to maintain profits while producing environmentally sustainable and affordable developments, the vast

majority perceive that planning regulations, such as requirements for open space, land dedications, and water systems layout, are excessive (McKenzie, 2003; Ben-Joseph, 2004).

In the case of Qatar, no regulations for the urban design of gated communities is developed, resulting by a total freedom of the urban design reducing common areas and increasing private lot number and units areas. Gated communities pose a number of challenges for governmental agencies in terms of directing spatial planning and development towards more sustainable settlements. Planners and policy formulators have an important role to develop a spatial development frameworks and implementing national development policies and legislation. Major research should be conducted by local governmental agencies to review the long-term implications of gated communities and their potential impact on integrated development.

In addition, a differentiation between types of gated communities is necessary. Planners must consider the overall impact of gated communities on the spatial form and functioning of municipal areas as a whole. Apart from local governments, provincial and national governments can also play an important role. A lack of consensus at provincial level and lack of proper guidance can often lead to chaotic planning. While it is true that local municipalities are not influenced by the growth of these developments in the same way, a uniform guideline document or provincial policy could assist towards coherent responses.

It should be emphasized that all levels of income classes should be considered when designing new gated communities. As shown in Table 4, creating special gated communities to be inhabited by Qatari residents only might help to attract Qataris toward living in gated communities. The impact of gated communities planning on urban pattern should be coordinated with the street system of the surrounding area. Streets in the proposed subdivision shall be connected to dedicated streets in adjacent areas where required to provide for proper traffic circulation. Gated communities' connectivity with public services, amenities and city centre should be considered in order to provide services that could be accessed by its residents. The paper concludes that new legislation and design guidelines are needed to make gated communities more socially and economically sustainable by attracting more residents as well as citizens to select gated communities as their place of residence.

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Figure 1. Picture of an entrance of a gated community.



Figure 2. Picture inside a gated community.

Table 1. Residents satisfaction of facilities and environment of gated communities

Facilities & Environment	Sufficiency
Roads (carriage way)	10%
Side walks	2%
Community playground	4%
Community sports facilities	15%
Community maintenance	28%
Cleanliness	50%
Quietness	61%
Security/safety	71%
Accessibility by public transportation	0%

Table 2. Residents' opinion on sufficiency of social aspects of gated communities

Social Aspects	Sufficiency
Sense of Belonging	10%
Getting enough support from neighbors.	0%
Responsibility of Neighbors	11%
Integrity of community as a place to live in	16%
Essences of peace and order.	62%
People here are active in community activities.	3%
Need to spend lots of money to be socially accepted here.	8%
Opportunity for closer family relation.	7%
Suggestion of living in this community to relatives and friends.	22%
Affordability of enough security to feel comfortable.	70%
Residents action in making the community a better place to live in.	0%
Permanent living in the community	16%
Safety of outside area for children to play	21%
Residents here don't trust other members in the community.	54%
The people here as a whole mind their own business.	57%
Interactions & friendships among the insider residents	11%
Interactions between the insiders and the outsiders	9%
Control and/or management of the community	40%

Table 3. Reasons behind rejecting to live in gated communities.

Reasons	Percentage of Respondents
Geographic location of Gated Communities	66%
Target specific Class of Residents (Income)	62%
Privacy	86%
Size of house unit	83%
Size of rooms	86%
No. of rooms	86%
Area for back and front yard	66%
No. of provided parking lots for each unit	76%
Architectural Style	62%
Reflection on Qatari culture, values, and norms	72%
Provided services and amenities	83%
Diversity of Housing typology	59%
Inhabitation with diverse nationalities, cultures and backgrounds	59%
Getting enough support from neighbors	59%
Security provided inside the Community	83%
Safety of outside area for children to play	83%
Reliance and trust among members in the community	69%
Lack of interaction among the neighbors	59%
Control and/or management of the community	66%

Table 4. Actions to be taken to make gated communities more appealing to Qataris

Actions	Practicality
Community to be located close to city's public services and facilities	79%
Specify communities to be inhabited only by Qataris	64%
Mixture of Income Classes(High- Medium- Low)	49%
Develop variety of housing typology (Single-detached, Duplex, Apartment)	78%
Enlarge the unit Area to vary from (500-2500 sq. m)	78%
Increase the distance between the units to be (3-4m)	84%
Increase the setbacks f (2- 3 m) where the façade are opposite of the main or secondary streets	72%
Design the landscape to act as a buffer zone providing more privacy	90%
Provide each unit with an close outdoor area for male guest (Majlis)	89%
Enlarge the room areas to minimum 12 sq. m	86%
Enlarge the front and backyard area	82%
Increase number of provided parking lots and develop park house inside the community	89%
Provide services that satisfy both genders within different ages	97%
Provide a safe open outside area for children to play	97%
Provide a safe closed area for children to play (in summer)	97%
Community to be controlled by residents and supervised by governmental agencies	62%

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