Satisfaction Level of Gated and Guarded Community Residents 
(Case Study: Meru Hills, Ipoh)

Thuraiya Mohd*1, Noraini Johari, Rohaya Abdul Ghani

Department of Estate Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA (Perak), 32610, Seri Iskandar, Malaysia

Abstract

Emphasis of this study is assessing the satisfaction level of residents in Gated and Guarded Community (GACOS) housing on 4 main characteristics: security and safety; social and the environment; status; and exclusivity; and recommending ways of improving them. The study presents data collected through a survey conducted on the GACOS residents as respondents in the form of descriptive statistic comprising frequency and percentage analyses. Findings are that majority of respondents are satisfied with overall levels of the 3 main characteristics; social and environment, image and exclusivity but were dissatisfied with the security and safety provided in the case study area.

Keywords: Gated and guarded; residential satisfaction; security and safety; social and the environment

1. Introduction

This study is an expansion of an empirical study conducted earlier on factors influencing residents’ decision to reside in GACOS areas in the case study area of Meru Hills, Ipoh, Perak. Findings of the study indicated five (5) factors influencing residents' choice to stay in GACOS areas namely security; improved environmental control and

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* Corresponding author. Tel.: 05-3742811; fax: 05-3742222.
E-mail address: thura231@perak.uitm.edu.my
maintenance; privacy; exclusive lifestyle; and community ties (Thuraiya, Noraini, Rohaya, 2014). The future of GACOS developments depends among others on residents’ satisfaction with GACOS (Mayra C., Valky. R., Kathryn. H., 1997). If residents are satisfied with GACOS, this trend is likely to continue. This study emphasizes on assessing the satisfaction level of Gated and Guarded residents on four (4) characteristics, namely security and safety; social and environment; status; and exclusivity. Results of these studies will be used to enhance the quality of features provided in GACOS and its environment; promote the housing market; improve the quality of life; and provide suggestions to policy makers (Song, Yan; 2006). In addition, this study also helps in addressing and proposing appropriate ways to improve the features offered at the GACOS area itself.

2. Literature review

2.1. Gated and guarded community concept development

Gated and guarded communities (GACOS) may be defined as residential areas for upper-class families looking for security; comfort; a better quality of life; and social homogeneity. They consist of neighborhoods closed by walls, barriers, fences and gates (Roitman, 2003). The concept includes residential areas with restricted access and defines a self-sufficient environment with swimming pools, private bars, children’s play areas and a full accompaniment of care-taking staff and security forces (Landman, 2000). GACOS was first introduced in the United States in the 1960s aimed at protecting pensioner house residents from violence and crime (Nicholls, 2006). GACOS lifestyle is mainly inspired by the historical golden-ghettos found in industrial-era cities in New York, London and Paris. Those enclaves are now mainly suburban neighborhoods emphasizing on “community lifestyles” and security features (Le Goix, 2003). Within private neighborhoods, there is a difference between the type of access restrictions: defensible and defended (Sanchez and Lang, 2002). Defensible space has spatial barriers (simple walled, gated, fenced) surrounding the community. Defended space (guarded entrances) is a defensible space that includes an active neighborhood access control system. GACOS have greatly developed since the 1970s, thus becoming one of the symbols of the metropolitan fragmentation and increasing social segregation (Blakely and Snyder, 1997). Different causes signal the arrival of gated communities which can be divided into two groups: structural and subjective ones. Most important within the first group are rising insecurity and fear of crime; failure of the state to provide basic services to citizens; increasing social inequalities; an advancing process of social polarization and international trends encouraged by developers (Roitman, 2003, Xavier, 2008). Urban violence and fear of crime are mentioned as the main reasons for moving to a gated community (Blakely and Snyder, 1997; Caldeira et al., 2000). Salleh Buang (2004) reported that privacy is one of the factors supporting GACOS developments as well as buyers’ demand for security control; landscaped grounds and various facilities (Clarke, 2004).

2.2. Residential satisfaction in housing area

The main purpose of this study is to determine the satisfaction level of residents living in Gated and Guarded Communities. User satisfaction has been discussed in various empirical studies which examine personal characteristics (cognitive, affective or behavioural); or physical and social features of residential environments (Amerigo, 2002). In the definitions underlining effective component, user satisfaction in housing means reflecting the sentiments of satisfaction and happiness on the housing which also creates these feelings (Gold, 1980; Weidemann and Anderson, 1985). The future of GACOS developments will be determined by a number of factors: the political and economic situations; urbanization; social and cultural practices; and satisfaction with GACOS (Mayra C., Valky. R., Kathryn. H., 1997). Housing satisfaction is recognized as an important component of home owners’ general quality of life (Adam 1984). The degree to which home owners’ needs and aspirations are met by their housing conditions is a concern for housing developers. Measures of housing satisfaction provide necessary information
to evaluate the performance and success of the current and future housing projects (Preiser 1989, Natham 1995). Studies about residential satisfaction have been conducted for multifamily housing (Anderson and Weidemann, 1980; Bellalta Moriatry, 1988; Chin, 1995); suburban housing (Cutter, 1982); neighbourhoods nationwide (Davis and Davis, 1981; Lee and Guest, 1983); inner city neighbourhoods (Bonnes, Bonaiuto and Ercolani, 1991; Levy Leboyer and Ratiu, 1993); neighbourhoods state-wide (Ha and Weber, 1994); single parents housing (Anthony, Weidemann and Chin, 1990); student housing (Anthony, 1981; Chin, 1987); and master plan communities (Edwards, 1993). However, research on residential satisfaction in GACOS is limited to that done by Mayra C., Valky. R., Kathyrn. H. (1997) which emphasizes on gauging satisfaction levels of GACOS residents. The result shows that the majority of exclusive condominium residents in Sao Paulo, Brazil were not satisfied with the features provided; especially safety and security.

3. Research methodology

3.1. Data collection

This study applies the case study approach in order to gauge the level of satisfaction of the GACOS residents towards security and safety; social and environment; status; and exclusivity. According to Zainal (2007), the case study approach allows the researcher to examine data needed for a specific context or area and provides a method of selecting a small geographical area or a limited number of individuals as the subject for a study. Hence, the case study approach refers to a study done in a selected area or group of respondents by means of gathering and examining all information required to fulfil the study objectives. In this study, in-depth analysis was conducted on the GACOS residents of Meru Hills, Ipoh in which perception survey through structured questionnaires was implemented. Questionnaire forms were distributed to residents of this GACOS housing scheme to obtain their perceptions on satisfaction levels on the said criteria. The questionnaire survey was done on a face-to-face approach with the respondents to enable the researcher to explain the research objectives and guide them in answering the questionnaires.

3.2. Sampling methods

The choice of respondents for the study involves selection using the Simple Random Sampling technique which refers to the sampling procedure whereby a group of subjects is randomly selected from a population to be the study respondents. A group of these subjects is selected based on certain characteristics to represent the entire population being studied (Marican, 2005). Currently, there are three types of houses constructed within Meru Hills, Ipoh. The units are double-storey terrace houses, double storey semi-detached houses and bungalow houses. Based on information provided by the Residents Association (RA) of Meru Hills, Ipoh and observation carried out, the distribution of houses within the perimeter area are 34 units for double-storey semi-detached houses; 88 units of double-storey terrace houses; and 2 units of bungalow houses; totalling 125 units and becoming the indicator for the home owners within the area. However, Phase 3 of the enclave area comprising 34 units of double-storey semi-detached houses is still under construction making it inappropriate to be included in the study. Thus, the total number of houses within Meru Hills is actually 90 units involving only Phases 1 and 2. The respondent sample was selected according to the number of houses in the scheme whereby only one respondent is selected from each house (N=90). Only 79 completed questionnaires were returned out of 90 questionnaires distributed (88%); highlighting the importance of questionnaire response analysis in demonstrating the valid number of return questionnaires for systematic analysis.
3.3. Data analysis

In analyzing and evaluating the results of this study, quantitative approaches were used involving data and information analyzed through perception survey method. Quantitative data obtained through structural questions involving Likert scale type questions contained in structured questionnaire forms were analyzed by using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics involving frequency distribution and percentages and presented in the form of tables. Neuman (1994) proposed that descriptive statistics provides a method to reduce large matrix data into suitable summaries to facilitate the understanding and interpretation of the data which is later tabulated into percentages and frequency distribution forms for univariate analysis.

4. Findings and discussion

The satisfaction levels of residents living within the GACOS area of Meru Hills, Ipoh were assessed based on the following characteristics: security and safety; social and the environment; status; and exclusivity; which are further broken down into several elements constituting each of the GACOS characteristics. The findings on satisfaction level analyses of residents living in GACOS areas are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Satisfaction level of residents in Meru Hills, Ipoh GACOS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elements</th>
<th>Satisfaction Level: (frequency and percentage)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Very Dissatisfied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1) Security and Safety Level</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1a) Secure Perimeter Fencing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(6.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1b) Proper guard house provided at entry and exit points</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(10%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1c) Effective Boom Gates</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(16.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1d) Adequate number of security guards</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(46.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1e) Allocation of CCTV</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(26.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Social and Environment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2a) Good relationship between residents in the area</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2b) Attractive Landscaping</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2c) Peaceful Environment</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3.3%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Secure perimeter fencing was one of the elements in security and safety components at Meru Hills, Ipoh. Findings indicate that the majority of residents are satisfied with the secure perimeter fencing provided as reflected in majority scores of 49% (46.8% (n=37) satisfied, and 2.5% (n=2) very satisfied); and only 19% of respondents are dissatisfied (6.3% very dissatisfied and 12.7% dissatisfied). This may be due to the condition of Meru Hills’ perimeter fencing itself; which, from the researchers’ observation, did not cover the whole of Meru Hills. Based on conversations with the respondents in the survey, Meru Hills is not completely enclosed by the perimeter fencing. Areas with slightly hilly or sloping terrain were not provided with solid brick wall to prevent intruders from entering the area, depending instead on the natural hilly area and vegetation as defence mechanisms.

As has been shown in the table, most of the respondents in the survey felt satisfied with the construction of the guard house provided at the entry and exit points of their residential area. A majority of 60% (n=47) respondents are satisfied (46.7% satisfied and 13.3% very satisfied) indicating that despite the physically poorly maintained guard house, it somehow signifies protection to the area from external elements.

Boom gates or automatic gates were found to be installed at the main entrance and exit points of Meru Hills, elements intended to provide security and safety to the residents inside the area. Paradoxically, as interpreted from Table 1, only 16.7% (n=14) respondents were satisfied with this feature while the majority of respondents at 50% (n=39) felt dissatisfied with the boom gates or automatic gates. Based on observation and conversations with respondents in the survey, one of the automatic gates located at the exit point was not functioning properly; only boom gates at the main entrance was functioning. Some respondents expressed their dissatisfaction regarding the improper maintenance of the boom gates since they were required to pay the monthly service charge of RM50 which is used by the RA to maintain and manage the area including maintaining the boom gates. The current poor condition of the boom gates has given rise to queries whether the money is being spent where it should have been.

Based on information provided by the RA of Meru Hills, a number of 4 security personnel were appointed to monitor and patrol the area; working in shifts to provide 24-hour security. Findings show a majority of 46.7% respondents (n=37) being dissatisfied and 23.3% (n=16) respondents feeling satisfied with the current number of security personnel appointed to guard the area.

Another element of security provided in GACOS area is CCTV. Overall 37% of the respondents are not satisfied (26.7%; n=21 very dissatisfied and 20%; n=16 dissatisfied) with the allocation of CCTV at their neighborhood area and only 10% (n=8) felt satisfied. The main grouse was that no CCTV was installed within the area of Meru Hills, only a few units are installed at the guard house at the front entrance. Observation on site indicated that apart from the front entrance, no CCTV was seen within the area; clearly illustrating the lack of one of the important tools to monitor the area as well as to provide safer environment to residents.

Finding shows that satisfaction towards social and environment elements overall is higher. The majority of respondents were satisfied with three (3) social and environment elements at the case study area: relationship among residents; landscaping; and peaceful environment. A majority of 51.9% (n=41) respondents were satisfied (32.9% satisfied and 19% very satisfied) with bonding among residents in the same area. A total of 63.3% respondents were satisfied with the landscaping at Meru Hills constituted by 55% (n=43) satisfied and 8.3% (n=7) very satisfied respectively. In terms of the environment, overall 63.4% (n=50) respondents were satisfied with the peaceful environment at Meru Hills which is surrounded with natural landscape including hills and trees, making the area peaceful and harmonious.
The element of prestige is also important in measuring the satisfaction level of residents towards the features provided in GACOS area. Findings indicate that the majority of respondents 73.3% (n=58) (63.3%; n=50 satisfied and 10%; n=8 very satisfied) with the prestige of residing in Meru Hills.

On a final note, it can be seen that residents are also satisfied on the exclusivity presented by Meru Hills. The percentage of satisfied respondents is 63.3% (n=50) and 36.7% (n=29) very satisfied with exclusivity of residing inside the enclosed area. Thus, it can be concluded that a total 100% of the respondents were satisfied with an exclusive lifestyle offered in the GACOS housing concept. This is supported by statements made by a few respondents indicating they were happy to live in Meru Hills as Gated and Guarded Community where they were not disturbed by the noise of passing vehicles and strangers cannot freely enter the area.

*Overall satisfaction level of residents at Meru Hills, Ipoh*

The above table is a summary of the residents’ satisfaction levels on four (4) main characteristics offered at GACOS area of Meru Hills, Ipoh. From the above table, majority of respondents were satisfied with three (3) main characteristics: social and environment; image; and exclusivity; and dissatisfied with the security and safety provided in the area. Majority respondents desire more security personnel and CCTVs to be installed at Meru Hills. These findings indicated loopholes in Meru Hills in terms of its security and safety. As a conclusion, overall residents at Meru Hills are pleased with the current condition of features at their residential area.

*Recommendations on Ways to Improve the Level of Security and Safety, Social and Environment, Status and Exclusivity at Gated and Guarded Community (Meru Hills, Ipoh).*

The above findings show that residents of Meru Hills are satisfied with the features offered in the case study area. However, there are a few respondents who were dissatisfied with some of the features and elements provided; indicating the need on the RA as the management body to improve on the facilities in ensuring higher level of satisfaction among residents in Meru Hills. In addressing this, several suggestions have thus been compiled to improve the effectiveness of elements provided in Meru Hills in terms of security and safety; social and environment; status; and exclusivity:

1. Employing more numbers of security guards as well as adding more CCTVs to ensure optimum safety and security levels;
2. Conducting more recreational and leisure activities to enhance interaction among residents;
3. Adopting new concepts such as eco garden concept, in order to increase the exclusivity of the area;
4. Limiting the entry of outsiders into the GACOS area in order to increase the privacy of the area.
This recommendation aims at ensuring that strangers or non-residents of Meru Hills cannot freely enter the area. Through this approach, the privacy of residents living at Meru Hills will be enhanced; simultaneously addressing the need for better security and safety control at their living area.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the majority of residents in Meru Hills were satisfied with the main elements provided at the case study of Meru Hills, Ipoh, Perak. 100% of the residents were satisfied with the exclusivity and 73.3% were satisfied with the symbol of prestige presented by the GACOS living. The majority of residents were also satisfied with the social and the environment characteristic of the GACOS area. These satisfaction levels resonate with the GACOS area definition as residential areas for upper-class families looking for security; comfort; a better quality of life; and social homogeneity.

However, Table 1 indicates low levels of resident satisfaction towards the characteristics under the Security and Safety Level cluster. The main bone of contention was the lack of effective boom gates to control access and egress. Residents alleged that this is due to poor maintenance and have thus questioned the management of their RM50 monthly service charge. Residents were also dissatisfied with the sparse allocation of CCTV within the GACOS area where only a few units were installed near the guard house at the front entrance. Perimeter fencing around the GACOS area was also not satisfactory whereby the hilly and sloping areas were not secured with solid brick wall but the GACOS area relied on the slopes and natural vegetation for security cover. The only security and safety level characteristic that the residents were satisfied with was the provision of proper guard house at the entry and exit points.

GACOS areas are developed and marketed as areas affording protection from violence and crime. It is thus only natural that residents expect high levels of security and safety in GACOS areas. The presence of a few respondents dissatisfied with the main elements in the area indicates the need on the RA as the management body to implement various improvements in garnering increased satisfaction levels regarding the overall condition and features at their living area; indirectly ensuring investment committed by the residents is worthwhile.

6. Further research

In completing this study, there were still gaps in the study which may be subjects of future research such as an investigation on how far GACOS developments comply with the guidelines set up by the related parties particularly the Local Authorities. It is very important to ascertain and identify the extent to which developers are following the guidelines as stipulated by the regulatory bodies in the development of the relatively new concept of GACOS. This approach is essential as it helps to identify the exact cause of deficiencies occurring at any closed community areas.

Acknowledgement

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References


