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GATED LIVING IN THE USA AND EUROPE

A Product of Globalization or a local Phenomenon?

Abstract (English)

Gated communities are not a product of the 21st century. In South America, the United States and South Africa but also in Asia gated living is established already. During the last decades however, there has been a surge in popularity and this movement does not stop at the borders of Europe. In the following paper the relevance Disneyfication has, concerning social segregation is investigated as a first step. Part two gives an introduction into gated communities in America, their residents and the reasons they have for living in one. The third part illuminates gated communities in Europe with regards to differences as well as similarities, also referring to American gated communities. The focus lies on local distinctions, which are based on the respective history of a country, and residents' motivation for moving into a gated community. The main source of information is literature as well as already conducted interviews with residents of gated communities.

Abstract (German)

Gated Communities sind keine Neuerscheinung des 21. Jahrhunderts. In Südamerika sowie in den Vereinigten Staaten und Südafrika aber auch in Asien sind die eingezäunten und bewachten Lebensräume längst etabliert. In den letzten Jahrzehnten erfreuen sie sich allerdings immer größer werdender Beliebtheit und auch vor Europa macht diese Bewegung nicht halt. In der vorliegenden Arbeit wird in einem ersten Teil erläutert, welche Rolle die Disneyfizierung in Betracht auf soziale Segregation spielt. Der zweite Teil bietet einen Einblick in Gated Communities in Amerika, ihre Bewohner sowie die Gründe für die Präferenz einer Gated Community. In Teil drei werden Gated Communities in Europa in Hinsicht auf ihre Unterschiede und Gemeinsamkeiten, auch in Bezug auf amerikanische Gated Communities, beleuchtet. Hervorgehoben werden hier vor allem Lokale unterschiede, welche auf der Geschichte des jeweiligen Landes beruhen, und die Motivation der Bewohner, in eine Gated Community zu ziehen. Als Informationsquelle werden Literatur sowie bereits durchgeführte Interviews mit Bewohnern von Gated Communities herbeigezogen.

Contents

1 Introduction

Gated living is a worldwide phenomenon. There is a broad variation from idyllic towns like Celebration, Florida, to the walled off apartment complexes in South Africa and completely fenced in single family homes in Bulgaria. This paper offers an introduction into the different types of gated housing in the USA and Europe, with focus points on how gating became so popular, why people choose gated housing and whether or not it has a future.

This papers main part is split up into four parts: chapters two to five.

The second chapter – Disneyfication – deals with the change in economic conditions in the past decades, the New Urbanism movement, the development of Disney's own town Celebration and how they have affected and still affect society.

The third chapter is dedicated to gated communities in America in general. It provides an overview of the main types of gated communities in the USA and why so many Americans choose to live in Gated communities.

The fourth chapter explores different forms of gating in European countries, how they came to be and what they have in common with or what sets them apart from gated communities in the USA.

The fifth chapter is a short conclusion with a peak into the future of gated living with its possible consequences.

2 Disneyfication – how the Entertainment Sector and the Service Sector influence Society

Disneyfication is a term commonly used to describe the growing entertainment industry developments in inner cities as well as the evolution of new urbanism, which propagates a romanticized and almost utopian idea of the historic small town. (cf. Roost, 2000: 11) Within this definition we find an astonishing range of influences on the economy, (city) planning and, in a broader sense, society as a whole.

It is common knowledge that urban outmigration is an omnipresent phenomenon. The middle and upper class move away from the cities to escape crime and the unsightly yet hard to overlook signs of poverty and even homelessness. This results in the segregation of society, by income as well as by ethnicity. Consequently we end up with homogenous social structures and decreasing diversity which the economic developments of the past decades are reinforcing. There has been a transition to leisure and service economy in the western world, which, especially in the USA, has had and still has a big impact on urban development. (cf. Roost, 2000: 15)

Spreading social problems, following the immense income differences in the service sector, increase the eagerness of the wealthy to move away and separate themselves from the less fortunate. Through this, it is ensured that there is always a market for a closed off, artificial idyll as a contrast to the city and its *urban problems*. This term, used frequently in the media, links everything to do with the city automatically with a negative phrase, ergo the word *urban* gets an unfavorable connotation. For many Americans the city and its urban city center are the portrayal of everything they do not want for their homes. (cf. Roost, 2000: 15-16) It is not surprising then, that gating is also a reality in cities. Especially in the so-called *central business districts* with their office towers and shopping malls one can observe the contrast between executives and the homeless people who often live there. To avoid this sight of poverty, cities like Atlanta have installed private passages and underground corridors for businessmen and shoppers which enables them to walk through the city center without ever having to set foot on the sidewalk. (cf. Roost, 2000: 18)

New Urbanism and Disney's Town: Celebration

New Urbanism is an architectural movement, deliberately similar to CIAM (Congrès Internationaux pour l'Architecture Moderne) which even has its own Charter of New Urbanism just as CIAM had the Athens Charter in 1933. Its goal is to build towns inspired by concepts of the garden city movement from the 1920s but with a focus on building settlements that resemble organically grown towns and foot traffic as opposed to the car oriented suburbs which are conventional today. The second important aspect is the historicized architecture used. In these so-called *neotraditional developments* historically typical, romanticized appearances are highly valued. (cf. Roost, 2000: 28-29)

The charter of New Urbanism begins with this statement:

"The Congress for the New Urbanism views disinvestment in central cities, the spread of placeless sprawl, increasing separation by race and income, environmental deterioration, loss of agricultural lands and wilderness, and the erosion of society's built heritage as one interrelated community-building challenge." (Congress of New Urbanism, 2001)

However, it was New Urbanists Robert Stern and Jaquelin T. Robertson who planned the town of Celebration and comparing reality to the intents listed in the Charter of New Urbanism, one has to realize that they have not been put into practice successfully.

To understand how Celebration came to be, first of all, one has to know that Walt Disney was already planning a model city called EPCOT (Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow) back in 1965, which he described as follows:

"It's like the city of tomorrow ought to be, a city that caters to the people as a service function. It will be a planned, controlled community, a showcase for American industry and research, schools, cultural and educational opportunities. In EPCOT there will be no slum areas because we won't let them develop. There will be no landowners and therefore no voting control. People will rent houses instead of buying them, and at modest rentals. There will be no retirees. Everyone must be employed. One of our requirements is that the people who live in EPCOT must help to keep it alive." (cf. Roost, 2000: 77, Walt Disney, cited after: Thomas, 1976: 349)

Owing to Walt Disney's early death, EPCOT was only ever realized as a theme park with a few hotels. (cf. Roost, 200: 76) Although this particular project was not put into practice, the real estate developer Arvida was part of the Disney Corporation during the eighties. It was one of the biggest developers of gated communities in Florida and many were built while the company was part of Disney. They sold the company after a few years however and shortly thereafter began developing plans for finally realizing Disney's plans for a model-city: Celebration.

Celebration itself does not have any gates, yet qualifies as gated communities for numerous reasons. There is a golf club, a lake and a nature reserve separating the community from the rest of the world, which are only discontinued at two points for the access road, so even without fences and a guard, accessibility is pretty low. (cf. Roost, 2000: 81-82) The historical design of the city is also a big factor when it comes to how celebration is aiding the segregation of society. A lot of effort was put into making the town look authentic which resulted in parts of Celebration looking exactly like the former slave market in Florida's oldest town. It can hardly be surprising therefore, that the African-American community is not taking too well to the city's design and that there are barely any minorities living in Celebration. (cf Roost, 2000: 118-119)

Even if we do not assume that the architecture was chosen purposely to drive away certain groups of people, using historical elements with this alarming lack of consideration for history must not be praised under any circumstances. Celebration is the perfect example for why the New Urbanism movement is controversial, for as long as there are architects trampling on a regions history whilst referring to it as New Urbanism, there will always be sceptics remaining.

3 Gated Communities in the USA

3.1 Different Forms of Gated Housing

To better understand and analyze gated communities this paper uses the categorization Edward J. Blakely and Mary Gail Snyder have developed which proposes three different types of gated community: The lifestyle community, the prestige community and the security zone community. Whilst lifestyle and prestige communities differ from each other mainly in what they offer to the residents, security zone communities set themselves apart because it is the residents who build various barricades, not a real estate developer.

Lifestyle communities encompass three different types of communities: the retirement community, the leisure and golf community and the suburban new town. Retirement communities supply their members with structure and different services, e.g. landscaping, which are designed to make retirement life as comfortable as possible. The leisure and golf community is focused on a certain social lifestyle and usually provides a golf course or a tennis court, a pool, and a club house (amongst other things). New towns differ from both of the above as they are much larger, sometimes including several thousand housing units, and they do not only consist of residential buildings but also commercial and industrial zones. New towns are not actually new, they are much rather already developed areas, newly fenced off.

Prestige communities are moved into because they secure a certain place on the social ladder. The gates divide the wealthy upper and upper-middle-class from the rest. They do not have recreational facilities which often means that there is no actual community developed between the residents as there are no reasons to socialize. Prestige communities are only distinguished from each other by housing prices. In the U.S. they are divided into the rich and famous communities, the top fifth developments and the executive communities for the middle-class.

In security zone communities the common factor is the growing fear of crime and outsiders. There are three types: the city perch, the suburban perch and the barricade perch. In his case it is not the developers but the residents themselves who build gates or other barricades to seal off their neighborhood. The perches have in common that they are not completely walled of. Instead they use barricades to seal off some streets to reduce traffic and restrict access to spaces that would otherwise be public. It turns entire neighborhoods into cul-de-sacs, which is a very effective way to seal off a part of town without being able to completely fence it in. (cf. Blakely and Snyder, 1999: 38-44)

3.2 Residents of Gated Communities and their Motivations for moving there

Although there are of course differences between these developments and their residents, when it comes to reasons for wanting to live in a gated community, their thought processes seem quite similar and their motivations can be narrowed down without having to differentiate between the three community types completely.

Reoccurring motives for living in gated communities have come up in conversations with residents all across the country. These are

- Fear of Crime
- Financial stability
- Community

3.2.1 Fear of Crime

The fear of crime and Violence has increased in the past decades, although crime rates have been dropping since the mid-1980s. Due to better media coverage crimes happening on the other side of the country are perceived as much closer and result in heightened concern. (cf. Low, 2004: 112-113) Many residents, though often stating that they had been skeptical towards gated communities at first, decided to move to one after having children, to make sure they would grow up in a safe and protected environment.

"You know, we've got workers out here, and we still think "Oh, they're so safe out here," but you know, children get grabbed anywhere. Not only in nongated communities. We just get a little bit lax. In the other neighborhood where we lived, I never let them out of my sight for a minute. Of course they were a bit younger, too, but I just would never, you know, think of letting them go to the next street over. It would have scared me to death, because there was so much traffic coming in and out, you never knew who was cruising the street and how fast they can grab a child. And I don't feel that way in our area at all, ever." (Interviewee cited after: Low, 2004: 97)

Others are downright scared of the world outside their gates.

"I don't like going to San Francisco. I don't feel comfortable in San Francisco. I don't leave my building when I get there, except to come home." (Interviewee cited after: Blakely and Snyder, 2000: 61)

Some, on the other hand, understand that gates do not equal security, and, as studies have shown, crime rates are not lower in gated communities than in the immediate surroundings. (cf. Low, 2004: 10)

"The gate is something of a fallacy. You can always penetrate these communities from a number of other locations, across the golf course, with a boat. It doesn't take a mental genius. These communities are not being very well guarded other than the guard gate. […] Anyone who's done their homework can penetrate one of these communities. I think that guard gates are dangerous to the extent that they create a false sense of security. […] People have this perception that it's keeping the outside world from coming in." (Interviewee cited after: Blakely and Snyder, 2000: 87)

3.2.2 Financial Stability

Many residents of gated communities believe, that living in a gated community has financial advantages, although there is no evidence to support this theory. Generally only small differences in resale prices were found and developers are still arguing whether gates help to uphold property values. (cf. Blakely and Snyder, 2000: 16-17)

"I thought that this would be a very good financial investment, because there are very few—no, let me take it back there—there are no communities like this on Long Island." (Interviewee cited after: Low, 2004: 158)

One of the reasons why people readily believe so is due to all the rules, the so called CC&Rs (Covenants, Conditions and Restrictions) put in place in a gated community. They concern almost all aesthetics, like the color of the façade or the front garden, when the trash can be put on the street, where to park a car and sometimes even if one may own a pet or not.

"When questioned about any disadvantages of living on their desert resort, the group falls uncharacteristically silent. Hesitantly, someone mentions that the CC&Rs mean that you give up a certain amount of privacy and control. The rest second this, but the discussion quickly turns to what is good about the CC&Rs, […]" (cf. Blakely and Snyder, 2000: 52)

A thorough inquiry by Renaud Le Goix shows that wealthy gated communities do have a financial advantage over non gated communities for the manage to keep their property values high. Middle class

gated communities however, face the problem of sinking property values while operating costs sky-rocket. (Le Goix, 2005)
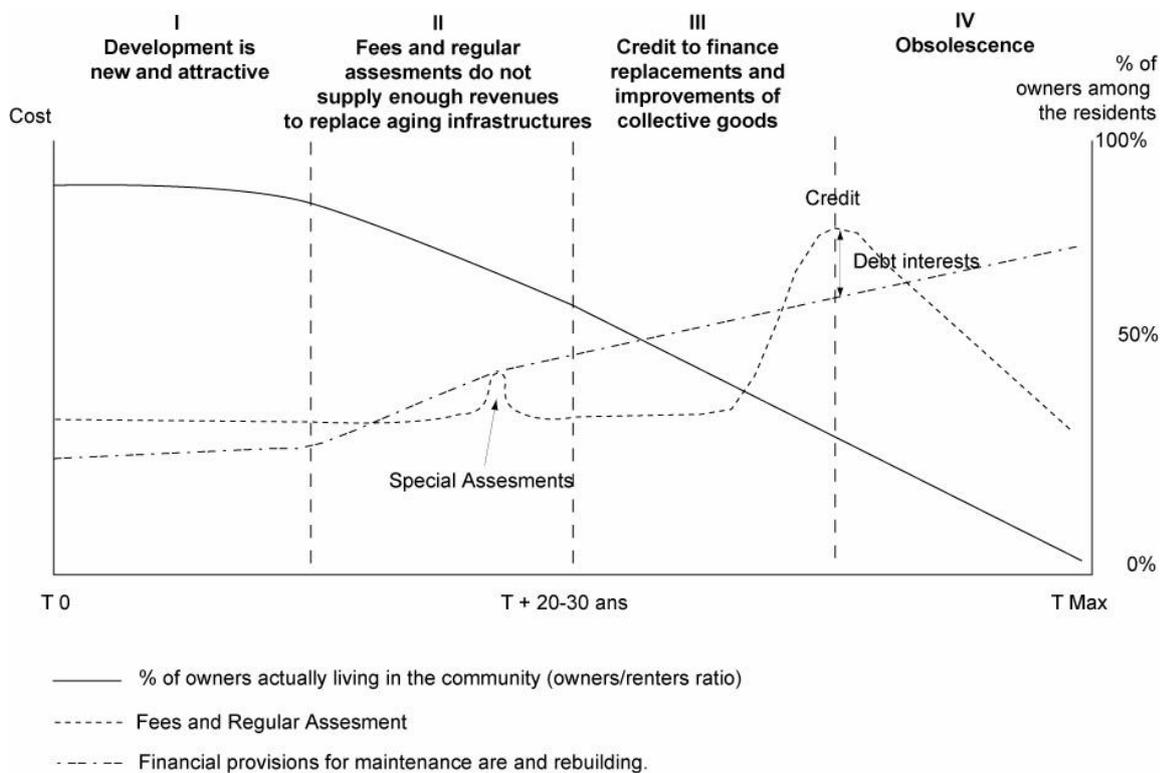

Figure 1

3.2.3 Community

Firstly, it has to be acknowledged that there are two forms of community. Community in the sense of belonging to a certain place and certain people, having social ties and giving mutual support. This is defined as the "private" aspect of community. The "public" aspect relates to shared objectives or duties and the realization of how important our surroundings and the people in it are for our quality of life. Grasping community as a whole is a big undertaking which is not part of this paper, so the following table sheds some light on the basic elements of community. (cf. Blakely and Snyder, 2000: 34)

Element	Function	Examples
Shared territory	Defining the boundaries of the community	Historical names; housing type; subdivision name; walls; gates
Shared values	Defining identity and commonality	Racial/ethnic background; income level/class; religion; history and traditional celebrations
Shared public realm	Common ground for interaction	Public parks; open space; streets and sidewalks: private subdivision facilities
Shared support structures	Mutual aid and association	Voluntary community organizations, charitable and recreational; churches; professional management
Shared destiny	Mechanisms to protect or guide the future	Civic associations; voluntary neighborhood groups; rules and CC&Rs; homeowner associations

Figure 2

8

This table shows clearly that gated living provides many elements that are associated with important elements of community. Nevertheless, only few residents of gated communities state getting a real sense of community in their neighborhoods, also depending very much on what kind of community they live in. Lifestyle communities tend to have more social interaction due to all the recreational activities the residents participate in together.

"You live with the people you play [golf or tennis] with, so you do have that sense of community. […] We've become friends with people from all over the community because we are in Blackhawk, and I don't know if we would have met as many people and become friends with as many people [if we lived elsewhere]." (Interviewee cited after: Blakely and Snyder, 2000: 59)

Prestige communities lack this particular reason for people to get together. Some try to create a sense of community by planning holiday parties or similar social activities but those are a minority.

"Most people I have met already lived in Florida and have most of their friendships and associations outside. We have made friends with our immediate neighbors." (Interviewee cited after: Blakely and Snyder, 2000: 85)

In the survey designed by Blakely and Snyder to better understand how residents of gated communities feel about their community, most residents described their development as "friendly". However, 28 percent perceived their community as "distant" and only 8 percent felt it to be "neighborly". (cf. Blakely and Snyder, 2000: 130-131) This result may seem to contradict the content of the table above, stating that gated communities provide ideal conditions for a flourishing community. Yet in reality it has to be taken into consideration that people who choose to wall themselves off from the rest of society, for whatever reason, might not be partial to grand social engagements of any kind.

In conclusion it has to be said that almost all the reasons given why people prefer living in gated communities are based on false perception. Residents feel like they are better off than the rest of society but aside from a few exceptions that is just an imagination. What they can be summarized to is that people who choose to live in a gated community want control of their environment. Through rules about the aesthetics of the community, the gates and the somewhat selected group of members, residents try to overcome uncertainties by controlling their surroundings as much as possible.

4 Gated Living in Europe

Owing to differences between the USA and Europe, they are not easily compared. Although they often seem rather alike, their societies are entirely dissimilar. This chapter scrutinizes the different forms of gating in Europe, contemplating the contrasts between Western and Eastern Europe in this aspect as well as links to the idea of the typical American gated communities. Its focus lies on Eastern Europe, since gated communities are infinitely more popular there. Warsaw alone had 200 gated communities in 2004, whereas all of France had only 72 at the time. (Johnsson, 2013)

4.1 Eastern Europe

Talking about gating in Eastern Europe it is of the utmost importance to mention that although there are gated communities which are obviously strongly influenced by American gated communities and are also advertised thus – "an oasis of luxury and a slice of America" (Johnsson, 2013) – there are underlying reasons why gating is as popular as it is that have little to do with the American dream.

4.1.1 A Mistrusting Society

The fall of the socialist regimes in East European countries from 1989-1991 and the establishment of democracies resulted in a lot of changes concerning the city building process. Due to the extensive privatization that followed, public obligation and responsibility was transferred to private parties which results in a weakened civil society as the border between state powers and private interests hardens. (Hirt, 2012: 43) A second consequence of these political changes is that they left behind an insecure and mistrusting society. Taking Poland as an example, there are several studies which show a low trust in authorities as well as little trust in fellow citizens. This means that unlike in countries with high trust like Norway, Sweden or Germany, in Poland people act according to the belief that everyone is a possible threat unless there is evidence to the contrary. There is a pattern to this, the underlying factor being how well established democracy is in the country concerned. (Johnsson, 2013)

Relationship between political trust[a] and trust in other people[b] (in scores 0-10)
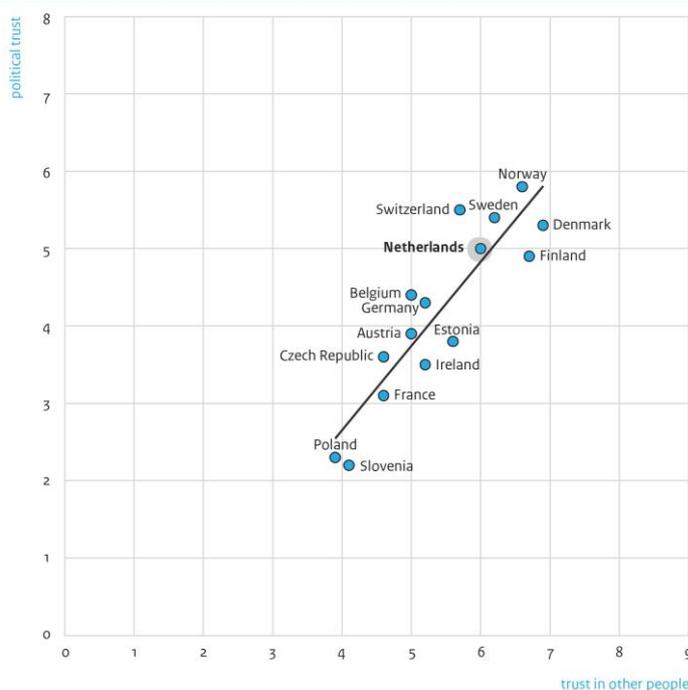

Figure 3

The visual manifestation of this mistrust can be found in many villages in Poland, but also in Bulgaria and other former socialist countries.

"If one were to set off on a journey through Polish terrain, visiting small towns and villages, it would be hard to avoid noticing that virtually every house and its plot of land are surrounded by a high fence or wall with a gate that can be locked." (Johnsson, 2013)

"I see it [a process of border-setting and fragmentation of urban space] in dilapidated housing towers left over from socialism, where even urban residents of the most modest means have collected sufficient funds to install new locks and hire security guards […] And I see it in the new architecture – a generation of triumphantly individualistic buildings, whose stylistic purpose is to stand apart, shine alone, disconnect themselves from the street, or, in the words of one Bulgarian culture critic declare 'war' on their neighbors (Dandlova 2002). I call it the architecture of disunity." (Hirt, 2012: 3)

4.1.2 Globalization in Post-Socialist Countries

Cities transform into metropolises, social contrasts are increasing and globalization is likely the reason for transitioning into what sociologist Zygmunt Baumann calls "liquid modernity". This term encompasses the constant changes that have become part of our life nowadays, switching jobs, partners, places of residence. This brings about a great uncertainty and with that one of the big paradoxes of our time:

"[…] people in the west are living in the safest, most comfortable and benign world that any human has ever experienced, yet feel more threatened, unsafe, and afraid that people have in most historic societies." (Johnsson, 2013)

This uncertainty is part of one of the main factors when talking about gated communities anywhere: fear and safety. Focusing on gated housing in Poland, Jacek Gądecki, a sociologist and ethnographer, adds prestige, aesthetics and class identity as three more important segments. (Johnsson 2013) To understand why these play such important rules in Poland one has to remember once again that gating may be a global phenomenon but, more importantly, it is very closely linked to local issues. Aesthetics is only a major factor because of the chaotic surroundings post-socialism has created. Gated communities gain exclusiveness and prestige through their architecture in contrast to the structures that surround them. (Gądecki, 2012: 125) Class identity is a keyword, since the immense growth of gated communities in Poland is related to the new middle class which has sprouted since the fall of the socialist regime. This new middle class is very mobile, as it is born into the liquid modern era and thus tries to find identity through separating and enclosing one constant: their home. (Johnsson, 2013)

"Under circumstances in which identity is strongly associated with ownership of products and consumption, the visualized landscape becomes a way to express personal identity; the kinship with a concrete visualized landscape may thus become one of the most important markers of class identity." (Gadeki, 2009: 171-172, cited in Johnsson, 2013)

Gating in East European countries is evidently not only present in gated communities but high fences and gates are typical installations for traditional single family homes as well. Wanting an Americanized lifestyle does not seem to be part of the motivation for residents of either type of gated home, the reason for wanting fences, gates and other means of private security lies in the deep mistrust of their fellow human beings and society as a whole.

4.2 Western Europe

In comparison to Eastern Europe, West-European countries have only few gated communities. The trend is most developed in the Mediterranean region. Spain and Portugal are great examples for how differently gated communities have developed in Western Europe depending on local conditions.

4.2.1 Spain

The first gated communities in Spain were built on the outskirts of Madrid in the late 1950s and functioned solely as holiday or weekend resorts. In the mid-1980s three processes concerning gated housing started. Firstly, gated communities with single family homes, which had been intended as weekend and holiday only residences, were transformed into full-time residences. Using Blakely and Snyder's classification of gated communities, these would fall under the term prestige communities. This happened mostly in the 1980s coinciding with the economic boom which brought an immense rise of construction activity that affected gated communities as well as the urban periphery. Secondly, single family estates with some form of private security were developed. These so called pseudo-gated communities have gates and security personnel and although streets and greenspaces are not private in these areas, signs, barricades and other private security measures suggest otherwise to the public, so they show similarities to the American security zone communities. Thirdly, condominium type gated communities were built. They have only little common infrastructure, normally a pool and a playground. Contrary to this type of housing in America, in Madrid, condominium type gated communities are home to all socio-economic classes. Still, most residents belong to the middle class. (Werhan/Raposo, 2006: 176-179)

There are different motivations for people moving to either gated communities or pseudo-gated communities. Prestige is always a factor, but it is slightly more important to people who chose a community with a high social status and an effective security system. The importance of security is also higher in strictly gated communities which makes sense. Rather interesting are the findings that to the residents of Spanish gated communities, the social factor of community, often mentioned by people living in gated communities in the U.S., is of no relevance at all. There is little interest in private governance and the community as an association, which means that in this case, controlling the environment is not such a fundamental need. (Werhan/Raposo, 2006: 180-181)

4.2.2 Portugal

Gated communities became fashionable in Portugal under the term *condomínios fechados* in 1988, which was also the time of Lisbon's real estate boom and the first positive phase for gated housing there. They were introduced to Portugal from the supply side of the real estate market and possibly through firms with origin in Brazil, where gated communities have been well established since the beginning of the 1980s. Ever since, gated communities have been a considerable part of the housing market for middle and upper-middle class. The second wave of popularity lasted from 2000 through 2001 but construction activity was reduced, not only concerning Gated Communities, due to the economic downturn that followed. (Werhan/Raposo, 2006: 170)

In the Lisbon Metropolitan Area, three distinctive types of gated communities can be identified. The first type consists of Apartment complexes, the estate covering less or equal to five hectares and no golf or tennis court or similar amenities. The second type is a development of less than 50 units of detached or semi-detached houses and no amenities as well. The third type stands out because of its wide range of amenities which the other two lack and also because a much higher percentage of communities is only pseudo-gated. (Werhan/Raposo, 2006: 172)

Despite their proximity, Portugal and Spain show considerable differences in their development of gated communities. They were established in different times for different reasons, yet the consequence is always social segregation. Most interesting is the disinterest in a community feeling inside the gates, which seems to be true for all the examined gated communities in Europe. Lastly it should be mentioned that gated communities are met with a very favorable attitude in Portugal and in Spain. They are seen as quality projects and if all technical and legal requirements are fulfilled, there is no debate on whether there might be a social impact as a result.

5 Conclusion

It is a fact that gated communities are nowadays popular all over the globe. Contrary to common belief however, they are not solely the result of an exported American dream. Whilst globalization plays, without doubt, an important role when it comes to social segregation and social exclusion which is not to be underestimated, the distinct development of gated housing depends greatly on local history, politics, urban development and the society that comes from it. No matter where gated housing has been thoroughly researched however, it always leads to social segregation and the exclusion of members of certain social classes which increases tension within society. These effects may be more or less pronounced in different cities but they are, in any case, negative effects.

The future of gated communities appears to be rosy. Gates have not yet ceased to be popular and with regards to the insecurity of society, even though most fears may be irrational, evidence suggests that this will not change over the next decades. A discourse on whether or not gated communities and gated housing in general is in society's best interest may have been initiated in some areas but in a world as obsessed with profits, consumption and control, neither real estate developers nor residents will readily give up gated communities because of socio-economic issues.

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7 List of Illustrations and Tables