

The Emergence of Gated Communities in Ghana and their Implications on Urban Planning and Management

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ABSTRACT

Over the past few decades, gated communities have emerged as global commodity increasingly gaining patronage. In Sub-Sahara Africa, the city of Accra is fast recording the emergence of these communities. The research therefore examined the implications of the rising phenomenon in urban planning and management. By adopting a mixture of snow ball, simple random and purposive sampling and a face to face interview technique, the research accessed empirical data from planning institutions and households selected from three gated communities in the capital city of Accra. It was found that, gated communities in the capital have relatively good infrastructural facilities and services, the provision of which the real estate developers played a major role. However, a spatial policy gap on gated communities was identified in addition to missing legislative framework and low level of awareness on the part of planning institutions regarding the existence of some gated communities in the capital. In ensuring effective planning and management of gated communities in the urban arena as well as situating their occurrence within a broader spatial and socio-economic development of the country, the research concludes that, formulation of spatial policy and legislative framework and strengthening of planning institutions are requisite.

Keywords: gated communities, urban planning, urban management

Introduction

Over the past few decades, there has been growing evidence to suggest a speedy global upsurge of gated communities. Indeed, the commodity of gate communities appears to be the new deal in urban real estate and housing development as there has been rising patronage by especially the high end income group (Genis, 2007). This world-wide trend is perhaps attributable to the path of neo-liberalism embraced by most governments from across the world (Rosen and Razin, 2009; Borsdorf and Hidalgo, 2008; Almatarneh, 2013). In spite of the wide range of studies (Blakely and Snyder, 1997; Leisch, 2002; Aalbers, 2003; Hook and Vrdoljak, 2002; Goix, 2006; Blandy and Lister, 2005; Atkinson and Blandy, 2005) undertaken in relation to the rise of the concept, little evidence exists in international housing literature regarding the emergence of gated communities in sub-sahara Africa. Many of the studies in the field (Lang and Danielsen, 1997; Blandy and Lister, 2005; Goix, 2006) examine the socio-cultural and economic variables relating the trend. A gap still exists in literature concerning the impact and implication of the rising phenomenon in urban planning and management. For instance, clarity is required in relation to whether urban planning and management policies should catalyze, regulate or slow down the growth of gated communities especially in sub-sahara Africa.

In consonance, this research extracts evidence from a developing city, Accra (one of the cities in sub-sahara Africa fast recording the emergence of gated communities) and examines the implications of the rising concept in urban planning and urban management. The real estate market for gated residential neighbourhoods seems to be buoyant in Ghana's capital observing from a trend of an increasing demand and supply.

Following the above, the research deems it important to examine the following the questions: What factors inform the demand for gated communities; How do gated communities affect urban planning and management; and What urban planning and management policies and interventions regarding gated communities should be developed in Ghana?

Theoretical framework for the study

What are Gated Communities?

The definition of gated communities in literature is far from absolute. Various terms such as city of walls, edge cities, enclosed neighbourhoods (for more, see Almatarneh, 2013) have been synonymously used to describe the concept. Blakely & Snyder (1997) define gated community as a walled or bounded residential area with a constrained access where public spaces are generally privatized. Landman & Schönteich (2002) assert that Gated communities are a generic term that includes enclosed neighbourhoods that have controlled access through gates or booms across existing roads, and security villages and complexes, including lifestyle communities which

provide their enclosed residents with a range of non-residential amenities such as schools, offices, shops and golf courses.

Grant & Mittelsteadt (2004) also see gated community as housing development on private roads closed to general traffic by a gate across the primary access. Grant & Mittelsteadt further stress the developments may be surrounded by fences, walls, or other natural barriers that further limit public access. A gated community according to Abdelhamid (2006) is an urban settlement surrounded by walls with several entrances which are controlled by gates and security guards. Gruszczak (2010) advances that gated community in its original spatial-residential meaning, is a residential development established on a dense territorial area surrounded by walls, fences or natural barriers, with restricted access through a secured entrance, guarded by professional private security personnel taking advantage of sophisticated technologies and devices of surveillance and control.

Notwithstanding the lack of a single conclusive definition, there appear to be a general consensus on some major features of the concept. It could be extracted from the above definitions that gated communities have generally tend to have walled boundaries; regulated or limited public access; privatized public spaces and sophisticated security.

Types of Gated Communities

Blakely and Snyder (1997) based on a close examination of four factors namely privatization, stability, exclusion and sense of community, distinguished three types of gated community in the United States: 'lifestyle', 'prestige', and 'security-zone' communities. In lifestyle communities, privatization of public spaces is predominant owing to social demand rather than safety. Prestige communities which are characterized by images of luxury and ostentation are based on the desire for affirming social status in society. The quest for safety and security premised the formation of the security zone communities according to the co-authors. Grant & Mittelsteadt (2004) also identifies the three types of gated communities in North America.

Aalbers (2003) in addition to the four factors examined by Blakely and Snyder (1997) studied the structure of housing market and identified three types of gated communities in Europe (Netherlands): elite, recreational and urban security zone. Whereas privatization was identified as prime in the case of the elite, structure of the housing market and an extent, sense of community were the prime elements in the recreational gated communities. The element of exclusion was identified by Aalbers (2003) as a primary social value in the urban security zone. Leisch (2002) on the other hand, found evidence of a mixture rather than distinct types of gated communities in South East Asia especially Jakarta (Indonesia). Hishiyama (2010) also drew evidence from South East Asia, Bali (Indonesia) and concluded on three types of gated communities: recreational 'Terrace Ayung', security zone 1 and security zone 2. The Terrace Ayung which was identified as a relatively luxurious community exhibited characteristics akin to those in the US and Europe. However, the security zone 1 exhibited unclear characteristics comparable to any of the previous examples. The security zone 2 according to Hishiyama (2010) demonstrated some characteristics of 'informal violence' in Bali.

Location of Gated Communities

Over the years, gating of communities has occurred in both inner cities and as a form of suburban developments (Blakely and Snyder, 1997). That notwithstanding, the latter has been predominant in the United States and Southern America especially Argentina (Goix, 2006; MCKenzie, 2004; Thuillier, 2005). Similar to the United States, most of the gated communities in Asia especially China, have emerged along with suburban developments (Wu, 2010). This could be rationalized from the point that old central cities are no more the preferred places in the metropolitan hierarchy for residency, industry, commerce, and retail but the suburbs (Blakely and Snyder, 1997).

Factors Influencing the Rise of Gated Communities

At the global level, the proliferation of gated communities is attributable to the shift in governments' policies towards neo-liberal path (Rosen, 2009). Thus the rise of gated neighbourhoods can be seen as a product of privatization and withdrawal of the state in the provision of housing (Almatarneh, 2012). Globalization has also been cited by many (Leisch, 2002; Wu and Webber, 2004; Borsdorf and Hidalgo, 2008) as having fueled the rise of gated communities in some countries. For example its emergence in China and South East is linked to the influence of North American style of living owing to globalization (Leisch, 2002).

At the micro level, the issue of safety and security is often referred as fundamental to the preference for gated communities (Atkinson et al, 2004). Abdelhamid (2006) relates the demand for walled neighborhoods to rising crime rates. However, there are differing opinions on whether or not gated communities do actually reduce crime. For instance, Sakip et al (2012) upon examining evidence from Malaysia argue that, contrary to the perception of safety in gated neighborhoods most residents in the walls exhibit higher tendency of fear. Although response to fear emerge as common reason underpinning the rise of gated communities across United States,

Europe, Asia and Africa, other factors also appear important depending on the type of gated enclave (Atkinson et al, 2004).

According to Blakely and Snyder (1997), the drive for separation, distinction, exclusion, and protection in society fueled in part by dramatic demographic and socio-economic change in many metropolitan areas have occasioned the rise of gated neighbourhoods. The UN HABITAT (2010), has cited the ever-widening gap between the rich and poor as having reflected in contrasting urban forms where one finds exclusive gated communities developing beside rundown neighbourhoods and slums.

Differences in international life style and culture seem to have influenced the preference for gated neighbourhoods in certain countries. Abdelhamid (2005) for instance, accounts the situation in Saudi Arabia where access to certain life style and culture of expatriates are restricted to gated neighbourhoods. As a result, demand for a particular lifestyle triggers demand for gated community.

Research Approach and Methods

The study adopted the case study approach which allowed an empirical inquiry that investigated the phenomenon of gated communities within its real-life context and was based on an in-depth investigation of how the phenomenon affects urban planning and management. Stemming from the fact that most of the existing gated communities in Ghana are currently located in Accra, the study selected the country's capital as the case. The research settled on three gated communities namely: Redrow Estates; J. Kwate Estates; and Trassaco Valley. The snowball sampling method was employed in the selection of these gated estates as the Ghana Real Estate Developers Association (GREDA) lacked detailed information on gated communities built by its members.

The GREDA, real estate developers, planning institutions, service providers, and households formed the primary unit of observation of the study. The research adopted the simple random method to sample 122 households (which had been determined with 9 percent margin of error) from the three gated communities whilst the purposive sampling method was used to sample various planning institutions.

Through face to face interviews and questionnaire administration by the use of interview guides, structured and semi structured questionnaires, the research interviewed households, planners from the Accra Metropolitan Assembly, The Town and Country Planning Department, the Lands Commission, Lands Valuation Board, Stool Lands, Survey Department, Department of Urban Roads, key informants from GREDA, and service providers such as Ghana Water Company Limited, Electricity Company of Ghana and the Ghana Police Service. Relevant information was also extracted from already existing data (publications from government and non-government sources) on gated communities.

The research recorded response rate of 93 percent in relation to the households. The data collected from both the primary and secondary sources captured variables such as land, housing, water supply, sanitation, energy and electricity, security, and other facilities and services including education, health, playground and telecommunication in the sampled gated communities.

Results and Discussion

Features of Gated Communities in Ghana

Gated communities have emerged as part of suburbanization occurring in Accra as most of the communities are found at the outskirts of the city. The types of homes found in most gated communities included detached, semi-detached and flats. However, most respondent lived in detached homes. The study uncovered that, slightly more than half (51 percent) occupied detached homes. Although flats were the least type of housing found in the gated communities, it inhabited approximately one-fifth of the residents.

Regarding housing tenure, the research also found that, majority (90 percent) of residents had bought their homes hence were owner occupiers whilst the remaining tenth rented homes. A check with the real estate developers also revealed that the latter were rented out by residents who had bought homes from the developers. The products of real estate developers were exclusively for sale and not for rent. However, the developers assisted the home owners in terms of locating potential renters.

Contrary to the predominant asbestos and corrugated iron sheets' roofing found in the city, majority of houses in gated communities were roofed with tiles, shingles and aluminium roofing sheets. Similarly, unlike the plywood used extensively in Accra and other parts of the country for ceiling of houses, it was discovered that about 53 percent of houses in the gated communities were ceiled with plastic T&J, close to a third (30 percent) had Plaster of Paris (POP) whereas the remaining 17 percent used plastic boards for ceiling. It was further identified that, cement blocks and floor tiles were common materials used in the walling and floor finishing of houses in the communities.

In terms of security, it was uncovered that, all the gated communities were walled and had security gates which were manned by security guards. The gates and security guards regulated and in some cases, restricted public

entry into the community. It emerged through the interviews that none of the communities had a CCTV camera at the gates for monitoring public entry. Still regarding security, the communities had periodical police patrols to prevent possible crimes.

Why People Choose to Live in Gated Communities in Ghana

In unraveling the factors that inform preferences for gated communities in Ghana, several reasons cropped up. These reasons as indicated by Table 1 included class of residents, safety and security, peace and calm environment, aesthetics and organized environment, ease in acquiring home, services provided, buffer from extended family and proximity to work. The survey found that, most residents (80 percent) lived in gated communities partly owing to preference for high quality homes perceived to be available within the gates. Also, the quest for safety and security came out as one of the major reasons which informed people’s decision for living in gated communities as over 70 percent of residents indicated this. Prestige emerged as the third most cited factor which accounted residents preference for gated communities.

It was evident from the survey that the kind of services provided within the gated communities counts a lot for most residents. For instance, perceived reliable access to potable water was a motivating factor for about two-thirds of residents. Peculiar to the research, it was also discovered that some residents lived in gated communities as part of seeking for protection against external pressure from extended family.

Table 1: Reasons for living in Gated Communities

Quality homes	91	80.5
Safety and Security	84	74.3
Class of residents/ Prestige	75	66.3
Services provided in the community	72	63.7
Beautiful and Organized environment	57	50.4
Sense of community	31	27.4
Ease in acquiring home	9	8.0
Buffer from extended family system/ peace of mind	6	5.3
Proximity to work	5	4.4

Source: Author’s Field Survey, 2012.

Facilities and Infrastructure Situation in Gated Communities

A number of facilities were identified as common to the selected gated communities in Accra. These included playgrounds and community open spaces, health facility, security post, and shops. However, the research observed that educational facility such as school or library was absent in the communities. That notwithstanding, residents within the enclosed neighbourhoods accessed basic schools within thirty minutes walking distance on the average. Accessibility to the facilities was restricted to residents of the communities except during events such as funerals or social gathering where non-resident participants or attendants had temporal access.

Regarding energy, electricity served as the common source of lighting for residents. It was also identified that about 75 percent of residents had a power back up plan in the form generators and solar energy at additional cost. It should however, be mentioned that the latter constituted small proportion (7 percent) of residents. The dominance of generators as a backup measure had environmentally harmful effects as the machines generated noise and also ran on fossil fuel which emitted carbon monoxide. As of the time of compiling this write-up, the research uncovered no environmental mitigation measures regarding the negative externalities of power consumption within the gated communities.

In relation to accessibility to water, residents in the gated communities were served by the Ghana Water Company Ltd (GWCL). However in situations of water supply problem from the main source, residents resorted to other commercial water suppliers who supplied using water tankers. It was also found that, none of the communities exclusively had a water reservoir. As a precautionary measure, households acquired their private water reservoirs in the form of overhead tanks. These were connected to the Ghana Water Company water lines for storage of water domestically. In terms of the reliability of water supply, majority (81 percent) of residents claimed regular flow of water for an average of five days in a week. The remaining residents (approximately

one-fifth) indicated constant flow of water for an average of four days a week. Relating residents claim of the flow of water in the gated communities to the general flow of water in the city of Accra, it could be inferred that these communities are prime customers of the Ghana Water Company since they have relatively good accessibility to water.

Concerning waste, private door-to-door services which were paid by the residents, operated within the gated neighborhoods. Refuse containers were placed at various points for depositing of waste and collection. In addition, as part of the paid waste management services, residents were provided with waste bins for immediate depositing of domestic waste.

The study was observed that, most of the access roads leading to the gated communities were tarred and were in good condition relative to the conditions of similar class of roads in the capital city. Stemming from that, most residents (70 percent) were satisfied with the state of roads. Likewise the external access roads, a greater length of the roads within the communities were tarred and easily accessible. More than 90 percent of the residents were satisfied with the condition of the internal roads of the gated communities.

Alertness of Institutions and their Role in the Planning and Management of Gated Communities

Accra Metropolitan Assembly (AMA)

The research uncovered that some of the gated communities in Accra emerged at the blind side of the Accra Metropolitan Assembly. The AMA highlighted the absence of policy and by-law on gated communities. That notwithstanding, the AMA still performed its traditional regulatory functions in the gated communities as for instance ground inspectors in various units of the assembly checked for development conformities and deviations. In managing waste, the Assembly assigned private waste management companies to noted gated communities.

The Town and Country Planning Department (TCPD)

It also emerged from the research that was the TCPD did not have any database on all gated communities in Accra. It was asserted that the various Municipal and Metropolitan Assembly offices may have some data of the communities within their jurisdiction. It was again uncovered that, some real estate developers developed without planning authorization. Some of the gated communities in Accra contrasted the land use zoning of their geographical locations.

Ghana Water Company (GWCL)

It became evident from the interview with the GWCL that the company was unaware of the existence of some gated communities in the capital. The GWCL which is the major supplier of water to residents of gated communities indicated the absence of any plan tailored to suit the needs of gated communities. The company dealt with residents of the gated communities as individual clients and responded to their various water demands. It also emerged that, payment for water was not a problem in the gated communities notwithstanding the fact that most homes were connected to post paid meters. Despite the general water supply problems in Accra, the company further asserted that the supply of water to residents of gated communities did not in any way undermine the services rendered to surrounding communities.

The Electricity Company of Ghana (ECG)

Similar to the AMA, TCPD and GWCL, the ECG was oblivious of the existence of some of the gated communities in Accra. It was also identified that there was no policy or plan on connecting such urban settlements to the national grid. Prior to the completion of homes in gated communities, some real estate developers apply and are allocated electricity transformers and meters. According to the ECG, the supply of electricity to gated communities does not affect the supply to surrounding and neighbouring communities.

The Ghana Police Service

The Ghana Police Service (GPS) appeared to have more information about the gated communities in Accra. That notwithstanding, most gated communities were protected by private security companies which were officially licensed by the GPS. Some of the gated communities had also built private police post for the prevention and handling of crime. Despite the private security arrangements within the gated communities, the services of the GPS for instance patrolling of communities were not suspended. The GPS also indicated that crime levels were relatively low in gated communities.

Real Estate Developers

The study observed that all the real estate developers of the gated communities erected walls around their communities and also provided the communities with security gates. However, in terms of technological security sophistication, none provided CCTV cameras. In addition to the gates, the estate developers provided their

communities with playgrounds and community parks, clinics and pharmacies, security post and shops in a bid to ensuring residents' comfort and improving the marketability of the communities.

The developers through acquisition of transformers and installation of electric poles and street lights also played a role in the provision of electricity to the communities. The developers had a minimal role in the management of waste in gated communities. Waste management services were provided by private waste management companies. Predominant amongst them was the Zoomlion Company. Residents usually pay to the agents of the waste management companies for waste collection. Concerning aesthetics, initial landscaping in the communities was done by the real estate agencies but the maintenance of lawns and gardens was the responsibility of various households. The research identified that none of the real estate agencies had provided a black water treatment plant for their community. They all depended on the public system for such services. On the issue of accessibility, real estate developers constructed and maintained the internal roads, streets and drains in the gated communities whilst the Department of Urban Roads handled external access roads that connected the communities.

Summary of key findings

The study has uncovered that gated communities in Accra emerge as part of suburban development occurring in the city. It can further be inferred from the discussions that the emergence of gated communities affect urban planning and management in the area of infrastructure and services provision such as water, electricity, roads, education, health, telecommunication.

In general, there is no policy, legal or regulatory framework governing the establishment of gated communities in Ghana. This could be attributed to the fact that such urban forms are still new in the country and have not yet posed any serious spatial development challenge to planners in general and also, there seem to be very little collaboration between the various planning institutions. Quite striking, the study found that, critical planning institutions such as the TCPD and AMA were unaware of the existence of some gated communities in the capital.

The various real estate developers played immense role in the provision of infrastructural facilities and services such as roads/streets, drains, water and electricity during the construction phase of the gated communities. The study further revealed that the housing and infrastructure provided by the developers were mostly of good quality. However, accessibility to the facilities was restricted to residents of the community, confirming the literature about gated communities on restricted public access and privatized spaces. However, upon moving in, residents assume responsibility of managing the community. Resident/community management boards are instituted to handle the process. The availability of quality homes which incorporates good facilities emerged as the most common factor which informs the preference of people for gated communities. The developers also played significant role in the provision of security through the construction of gates and huge walls.

Conclusions

The study has examined the urban planning and management implications of the increasingly emerging gated communities in Ghana. Having analyzed facilities and infrastructure situation in addition to alertness of institutions and their role in the growing concept, the research has raised a number of deep seated issues which require policy response. It has been identified that, from the status-quo, the emergence of gated communities has posed less challenges to urban planning and management in Ghana particularly regarding infrastructure and service provision. The developers of the communities have contributed immensely in this regard. The less severity of the urban planning and management issues is attributed to the fact that the concept is still emerging in Ghana. That notwithstanding, it also a threat to urban planning that critical institutions such as AMA, TCPD are oblivious of the emergence and existence of some gated communities in Accra. The lack of spatial policies, plans and legislative frameworks on gated communities in Ghana posits severe questions about the future efficient and effective management and sustainability of the rising phenomenon. In situating gated communities within the broader spatial and socio-economic development of the country, the formulation of a national or regional spatial policy and legislative framework on gated communities is requisite. The research further recommends the strengthening of and collaboration among the institutions connected with urban planning and management in the country in overcoming the problem of information asymmetry on gated communities.

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