Review of Physical Planning Aspect of Gated Community Developments

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Abstract. The Gated Community housing concept has enjoyed increasing popularity in recent years in Malaysia, especially in urban areas. This has, however, given rise to various contentious issues relating to the physical planning of gated community housing where such development has not been properly controlled, and where designated standards of planning are not observed. This study is a review based on case studies aimed at examining significant issues that arise in the physical planning of gated community housing. The findings identify such issues as facilities, accessibility, townscape changes and permeability to non-residents. Other problems that arise include conflicts with local authorities, compatibility of guardhouses and physical barriers with existing guidelines, and friction between residents of the community with those from adjacent areas. This study examines how applying the theories of Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) in the orderly development of gated communities might achieve a high level of physical security and better understanding among residents in the community.

1. Introduction

The need for a better security has prompted many people to opt for housing schemes in gated communities (Atkinson et al., 2003). Landed residential developments which incorporate the concept of gated community have become popular in recent years. The Strata Titles Amendment Act (2007) allows freehold landed residential schemes to be split into land parcels with strata titles, with each parcel being managed by the owner, and the entire common property being fenced. Rapid urban developments have increased the need for accommodation and related facilities. Owing to the scarcity of land available for property development, more developers have opted to build high-rise apartments and condominiums. At the same time more buyers prefer high-rise living because of the amenities and security (Low, 2003). As such, in recent years there have been an increase of such developments incorporating the concept of gated communities, which also involve the issuance of strata titles.

The gated community scheme is not a new concept in residential developments in Malaysia and many developed countries. It is a direct result of the need for a comfortable life
with increased safety and welfare. Those who choose to live in gated communities not only wish to enjoy more amenities but are also concerned with their safety. The increase in crime rate has led to a higher demand for housing in gated communities (Zurinah & Jalaluddin, 2018).

2. Literature review

2.1. Gated Community Development

Most of the developments of gated community in Malaysia have grown rapidly in largest city like Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Johor Bahru and other location that have higher land values. In Malaysia, the gated community concept was incorporated in landed residential developments in the 1980s. Originally, the development of the gated community was more focused on the development of apartments, condominiums, and flats. However, recent developments of the gated community are no longer confined to the development of high-rise residential units but have been extended to landed properties like terraced houses.

The popularity of the concept of a gated community has risen in tandem with the increasing crime rates in recent years. They choose to do so as they are worried about crimes such as burglaries and robberies. This phenomenon is similar to that prevailing in other countries (Grant, 2005).

2.2. Definition of Gated Community

A community can be defined geographically with reference to a neighbourhood unit, or socially in terms of social relations (Fischer et al., 1977). When used in the context of community purposes, it refers to social relations. According to Thomas and Cresswell (1999), the community, as an explanation for human habitation, may comprise units of neighborhoods, towns, cities, regions and territories, or any combination of resources and a population capable of forming a unit. Communities are also related to the friendship that exists among the communities living in the same area, where the level of intimacy can be seen in terms of frequency, and strength of everyday people and the relationships of existing local institutions.

According to Department of Town and Country Planning, Peninsular Malaysia, Ministry of Housing and Local Government, 2010, a Gated Community is defined as a group of people or communities who live in the same high-rise property which is gated and guarded, such as apartments, condominiums and ‘town-houses, or a cluster of landed properties in an area which is gated and guarded, such as terraced and detached houses. However, the understanding of the gated community in Malaysia is focused on population groups or communities who live in landed residential strata titled. Gated Community development is consistent with the provisions of section 6 (1A) of the Strata Titles Act 1985 (Act 318).

In a Gated Community, the neighbourhood is fenced or walled and has security features. Security control is carried out by guards who operate 24 hours a day. There are guard booths at the main entrance and along the borders of the Gated Community. The Gated Community in a housing development has restricted access and public spaces in its vicinity are privatised (Juliet et al., 2016: 96).

The Gated Community (GC) is a cluster of residential properties that may be fenced or walled, and public access is restricted. Gated Community (GC) is also known as guarded community. According to Azimuddin (2007), a Gated Community refers to a cluster of
houses or buildings which are surrounded by walls or a perimeter fence with a gate, with restricted public access.

2.3. The concept of Gated Community Housing
The features of gated communities determine the management systems. Hence each gated community has a different system. There are three categories described by Blakely and Snyder (1997a) are also popular in Malaysia, with the exception of the lifestyle community for pensioners.

i. Conventional gated community
This concept is usually found in high-density housing such as condominiums or apartments. The concept is often readily understood, and included in the sales and purchase agreement. Conventional gated community is provided for according to the Strata Titles Act 1985 (Act 318). The management of the conventional gated community, if not carried out, will give rise to various problems. It is important to adhere to the guidelines provided for in the National Land Code 1965, the Street, Drainage and Building Act 1974 and the Uniform Building By-Laws 1984, Act 1966 (Act 118) of the Housing Development (Control and Licensing). There are also legal provisions under the Strata Titles Act 1985 (Act 318) to ensure the smooth running of the management corporation.

ii. Planned gated community
The planned gated community, unlike the conventional gated community, is not a compulsory set-up. Usually it is implemented by the developer to raise the property values and the image of housing development. The concept was initially introduced in the development of luxury residential homes in exclusive residential areas. However, many low-density housing developments with detached houses, town houses and terrace houses have also started to adopt the concept of planned gated community. The regulations and code of ethics drawn up by the developer in part take into account the guidelines provided for in the Strata Titles Act 1985, albeit with amendments agreed to by the homebuyers.

iii. 'Ad-hoc' Gated Community
This concept is not planned before or during the purchase of residential units. It is implemented only after the residential development is completed, and almost all the homes are occupied. The residents in such a community tend to establish their own position and appoint security guards to safeguard the community. Some access roads to residential areas are blocked by barriers. Perimeter fences are put up and access is restricted. Guard booths, whether temporary or permanent nature, are usually built by the security company. In such a community, there might not be full cooperation from house-owners or residents with regard to the payment of fees to the security company.

2.4. Issues of Physical Planning Aspects
The issues of Gated Community housing in Malaysia are also common in other countries. With the increasing demand for gated housing, more conflicts have arisen, especially those pertaining to the law, planning, social aspects, economic aspects and so forth. Malaysia is also experiencing the impact of the development of Gated Community housing. Based on the current situation prevailing in the Gated Community housing, the development issues in terms of physical planning are as follows:
i. Guidelines on conflict with Local Authorities
The absence of comprehensive Gated Community guidelines has led many Local Authorities (LA) to take the initiative to provide their own guidelines in relation to the approval of the development of Gated Community. Inconsistencies between local authorities guidance has led to conflicts in approving the establishment of Gated Communities. Another problem with such physical fixtures is when they are implemented in an ad-hoc manner, devoid of proper regulation or oversight. Residents in the area face problems when institutionalized guidelines are not heeded in gated community development. Hence, there is need to put in place a mechanism of inspection and monitoring to ensure that mandatory regulations are adhered to. In this regard, the ‘Crime Prevention through Environmental Design’ (CPTED) framework should be adopted in the planning and design of future gated community housing developments (Zurinah et al., 2015).

ii. Gated Community Development Conflict With Current Guidelines
There are housing developers who refuse to comply with current design standards due to the lack of comprehensive guidelines relating to the Gated Community Development. A comprehensive set of Gated Community Housing guidelines should be provided for use by all parties i.e. the developer, the Local Authority (LA) or other authorities. Accessibility becomes an issue, especially with the installation of unauthorized guardhouses, together with physical barriers such as automated or manual boom gates at entrances and exits, sometimes on public roads. Perimeter fencing and the need to surrender identification documents by visitors – an illegal requirement in itself – are other constraints to accessibility into gated communities. This situation makes it difficult for public security personnel to patrol gated community housing schemes (Zurinah et al., 2015). Exacerbating the issue is perimeter fencing that may comprise brick walls concealing the gated community from the outside. The height of such walls that restricts external permeability frequently exceeds what is allowed in guidelines. Again, this makes it very difficult for the local authorities to monitor security of the gated location.

iii. Accessibility
The construction of a wall along the perimeter of the Gated Community blocks the direct access to adjacent areas. Hence residents in the neighbourhoods outside the Gated Community have access difficulties. This may pose a serious problem when emergency vehicles cannot take the shortest route possible. Ambulances, fire vehicles, police and others will also not be able to arrive speedily due to security restrictions at the entrance. As such, the Gated Community Housing has to provide special access for emergency vehicles to facilitate entry into the Gated Community in a short time in the event of an emergency. In addition, there should also be a special gate for the exit of the residents in the event of an emergency.

iv. Change in the 'Townscape'
Conflicts arise when the construction of fences and walls around the homes of long-Gated Community cause negative perceptions among the community at large (Azimuddin, 2007). Gated Community Development has established small blocks in the city and this has changed the 'townscape'. This is especially the case when entrances to the Gated Community become complex structures, making them look like fortresses. In effect the
whole city will look fortified if the Gated Community groups dominate the development in the city.

v. Obstructing and tampering 'permeability'

The height of the fence around the Gated Community is designed to block the view of the public into the Gated Community. Gated community housing can generate a negative perception when a physical barrier divides residents within the gated sector from those on the outside. Such a physical separation that indirectly deters social interaction in the area could lead to an attitude of indifference or separateness within the community. This situation has made it difficult for the police to monitor safety in the Gated Community, and may encourage criminal incidents in the area.

3. Discussion

3.1. CPTED Theory in the Planning of Gated Communities

The planning of gated communities should draw upon the Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) model that is core to crime prevention and security control in gated community housing. This model is particularly compatible with the gated community since it places emphasis on the aspect of security. Hedayati Marzbali et al. (2012) summarize CPTED into four principal elements in crime prevention, namely natural surveillance, access control, territoriality, and maintenance as shown in Fig. 1. In this regard, the CPTED concept embodies strategic components for access to the residential area, target hardening and supporting resources according to the approach promulgated by Cozens (2008). Various aspects of the CPTED strategy are associated with the theoretical component of defensible space (Meghan et. al., 2012).

![CPTED model](image_url)

**Figure 1.** CPTED model

Sources: M. Hedayati Marzbali et al. 2012
3.2. Implications in the Planning

The CPTED concept should be adopted in planning the physical elements of the gated community so that related problematic issues do not arise in the future. As shown in Fig. 1 and Table 1, implementation of CPTED involves four main principles, viz. natural surveillance, access control, territoriality, and maintenance. Effective natural surveillance is dependent on three factors, viz. landscape, lighting, and street layout. Access control relies on physical barriers and the security system employed. The latter also features in the aspect of territoriality which, in addition, is influenced by how residents view themselves as an integrated community. The overall image projected by the gated community would be reflected in the level of maintenance of its exterior surroundings. It can hence be seen that CPTED acts as a dependent variable that is influenced by four principal factors relating to crime prevention, especially where the model addresses issues associated with the elements of physical security (Hedayati Marzbali et. al., 2012).

Table 1. The four basic elements of CPTED

| CPTED dimensions       | Indicators               |
|------------------------|--------------------------|
| Natural Surveillance   | Landscaping              |
|                        | Lighting                 |
|                        | Street pattern           |
| Access Control         | Physical barrier         |
|                        | Security system          |
| Territoriality         | Personalization items    |
|                        | Security system          |
| Maintenance            | Exterior maintenance     |

Sources: M. Hedayati Marzbali et. al., (2012)

This stance is supported by Hedayati Marzbali et. al. (2012) who consider CPTED as an important element in the planning and layout of the surroundings to combat crime. There are those who feel that the greater emphasis of CPTED is on the situation where even as crime is not completely preventable, effort is directed towards remedying the weakness in the physical layout of the environment to heighten security. The ultimate aim here is to prevent crime and to dissipate the fear of crime among residents, leading to a feeling of increased security and a commitment to laws in the community. CPTED principles have been widely adopted during the planning stages of the projects to reduce crimes in new housing developments, including those in Vienna and WDS in London (Christian & Vania, 2012:323). It is hence important that CPTED be implemented as an integral part of physical planning of local gated communities in the future, in line with the concept of sustainable development for quality living environment.

4. Conclusions

The development of gated community housing has brought about both positive and negative implications to the housing areas concerned. Even though such schemes offer security, good facilities and a congenial environment in which to live, gated communities have nonetheless not escaped negative perceptions. Among the criticisms aimed at guarded neighbourhoods is the inevitable erection of social barriers between the classes. In selecting a place of residence,
security, neighborhood, privacy and available facilities and amenities are key factors to consider. The lack of proper planning in the physical aspects of a gated community could bring about deleterious effects in their development. Many potential problems arising from the physical design of the housing community can be avoided by taking heed of crime prevention along CPTED principles. Stringent implementation of such guidelines would allow residents to enjoy wide ranging amenities amidst surroundings that are pleasant and secure.

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