Breaking down walls

Gated communities and sense of security

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1 Introduction

When mentioning gated communities I believe a lot of people, including me, would think in negative terms. I used to think that gated communities have few positive outcomes, that they contribute to segregation and are just a status symbol for wealthy people. Visiting Metro Manila in the end of February in 2016 my perception regarding gated communities changed a lot. Gatedness together with sense of security are what this paper will deal with.

Before going to the Philippines I had no intention on writing about this topic, but during the trip there were a lot of things that caught my attention. I guess others in the group experienced the same thing since a lot of discussions on the subject occurred both during and after the trip. For me this indicates that it is a topic which affects people in one way or another.

Gated communities are not only a phenomenon for the rich people. During the trip I realised that a lot of neighbourhoods in Metro Manila were gated, regardless of income or class. Through literature together with interviews and observations from the Philippines I hope to gain some more knowledge and a greater understanding of the subject and be able to analyse and discuss the concept of gated communities in general but also related to Metro Manila. The paper will furthermore discuss if and how we can aim towards a non-gated future.

2 Gated communities and sense of security

2.1 Approaches related to crime prevention and safety

There have been a lot of people throughout history that have discussed issues related to crime and safety. Two of them are Carina Listerborn and Gabriella Olshammar. In the essay *Vem har rätt till staden?* (Who are entitled to the city?) they mention the city both as something exciting but also as something scary. The city can protect us but at the same time it can provide dangerous places and situations. Listerborn and Olshammar talk about three approaches that all deal with issues related to safety, or at least what we perceive as safe. These approaches differ in how they look upon strangers. The stranger could be someone who can offer a helping hand or someone you need to keep an eye on (Listerborn & Olshammar, 2003).

The first approach mentioned is *Defensible space by* Oscar Newman. He talks about that we need to design places that are easy to control and defend, where we easily can recognise our neighbours and at the same time make it more difficult for criminals to act. Common ways do this, according to Newman, is through camera surveillance, by putting up locks and fences and through increased social control, such as guards but also citizens in general. Listerborn and Olshammar conclude that there are not that many negative sides regarding this approach, but one of them is the exclusion of some groups of people as a result of the increased social control (Listerborn & Olshammar, 2003).

The second approach, or rather person, the authors mention in their essay is Jane Jacobs. In her book *The death and life of great American cities* from 1961 she argues that everyone has to use the street and that the street needs to be able to handle outsiders. To be able to attract people and achieve a safe environment the street requires three main features, with the first one being distinct borders between private and public areas. The second feature regards eyes on the street. People living and working in the area have to be able to see if and when something happens. The third and last feature applies to the sidewalks. People have to use them continuously because the presence of people attract other people and the result will be more eyes on the street and a safer neighbourhood. To make this natural surveillance possible the city street also needs some sort of public attractions both day and night, such as shops and restaurants (Jacobs, 1961). In

conclusion Listerborn and Olshammar mention an example when upgrading an area, to achieve the eyes on the street that according to Jacobs are so important, problems related to safety and crime were not actually solved, just moved (Listerborn & Olshammar, 2003).

The third approach is an example from a project in Toronto from the 1980s, where the focus was rather on fear than on crime prevention perse. This approach is in the text referred to as *the feminist approach* due to the starting point of the project which was originated from experiences by foremost women regarding restrictions in their everyday life. In the project they put in an effort to improve the lighting and increase the flexibility in the bus systems as well as increase the information in general. The aim was to gain an increased knowledge and influence for the citizens. Sadly, the project was dismissed due to a shift in the local government. Listerborn and Olshammar comment that what women and men perceive as dangerous differs and it is important to know whom the safety work is meant for (Listerborn & Olshammar, 2003).

The essay also includes a discussion regarding what makes a place attractive. Listerborn and Olshammar talk about the *right to the city,* inspired by Henri Lefebvre. He believes that the citizens should participate in the creation. People have to meet and interact, and they have to be able to do so without having to spend money (Listerborn & Olshammar, 2003).

> *'Belonging is a central safety issue'*
> *(Listerborn & Olshammar, 2003)*

2.2 Gated communities

In *Walled without gates: Gated communities in Shanghai* Ngai Ming Yip talks, like the title indicates, about gated communities in Shanghai. He discusses the sense of security and community and makes comparisons with gated communities in the United States. Yip mentions three types of 'gatedness'. The first one without any walls or gates, the second with walls and gates but without any access control (later referred to as pseudo-gated) and the third one with access control. He claims that the perceived safety is related to this degree of gatedness. However, in Shanghai factors such as building typologies, type of tenure and the age of the neighbourhood have a greater impact on the safety perceived by the neighbourhood residents. Yip's study is based on questionnaires handed out to

residents in gated communities in Shanghai. They show that the perceived sense of safety is highest in the third type of gatedness, the ones with access-control, but that the pseudo-gated communities are not that far behind. Yip states that maybe these pseudo-gated communities could be safe enough (Yip, 2013).

Karin Wimmer also talks about the concept of gated communities in her report *Gated communities – opportunities or risks for today's society? A case study in Santiago de Chile*. In Santiago the gated communities are becoming more common also in the outskirts. Since it is mainly the wealthier part of the inhabitants that lives in gated communities here, this results in bringing people from different socio-economic levels geographically closer. Apart from a discussion about gated communities in general two case studies in the outskirts of Santiago are included in the report to display how gated communities in these areas are perceived by the ones living next to them. Wimmer addresses three types of gated communities, and refers to Blakely and Sniders book *Fortress America*. The types are lifestyle communities, prestige communities and security zone communities, and according to Wimmer they are often a combination of these. The two case studies are a combination of the two types first mentioned. The lifestyle communities often offer golf courses or other leisure activities in a separated and secure area. The prestige communities are meant to provide both physical and social security, through a homogenous group of residents and a homogenous design together with access control. Finally, the main reason for choosing the security zone communities are the fear of criminality. Therefore, these communities are supposed to protect you from the people living outside with for example built walls. It is mentioned in the report that the desire of control over streets, homes and neighbourhoods applies to residents of all three types. Furthermore, Wimmer addresses alternatives to gated communities. Architecture, city planning and street design all have a part in the prevention and reduction of crime. Territory, natural surveillance and image are a few important aspects to be reflected on (Wimmer, 2003).

> *'If people identify themselves with the territory they live in, they*
> *are more likely to defend it, and the easier it is to servile a*
> *space and the more observers there are, the more criminals will*
> *be deterred.' (Wimmer, 2003, p. 9)*

Wimmer also refers to Teresa Caldeira who, in *City of walls: Crime, Segregation and citizenship in Sao Paulo* (2000), talks about the gated communities as fortified enclaves. Caldeira argues that these fortified enclaves will cause segregation in cities, that they change the spatial patterns of the city and therefore also the public space and the public life. This is also confirmed by the case studies. According to the author some people thought the gated communities had a negative impact on the area as a whole and that the privileged did not share their higher quality of life. However, the studies also show that the greater part of the people in the adjacent non-gated neighbourhood finds a lot of benefits with it. New job opportunities were created, restored infrastructure and improved reputation are three of them. To close up Wimmer concludes that we need to gain more knowledge regarding gated communities and their consequences. The author's perception regarding gated communities changed when she learned that not all think gatedness is negative. Regardless of this she still believes that we need to strive towards a non-gated society and that street design will play an important role (Wimmer, 2003).

3 Discussion

As mentioned in the introduction I believe this is a topic that has the ability to affect a lot of people. It seems like many of us have perceptions regarding gated communities. At least Wimmer did, I did and I know from a lot of discussions that many of my fellow architecture students also did. These perceptions are affected by earlier experiences, something one oneself have experienced, have read or were told. Just like Wimmers, my perceptions regarding gated communities has changed a lot, mostly because of my visit in the Philippines but also because of the literature I have read. Now I believe it has more to do with security and fear of the outside than on status, at least in the Philippines. The gated communities I had the opportunity to visit in Manila correspond to the *security zone communities* and in some cases also the *prestige communities* that Wimmer talks about in her text. The *lifestyle communities* do exist even in Metro Manila, but based on my own experiences those do not represent the greater part of the gated communities existing here.

One of the gated communities I had the opportunity to visit was St. Hannibal. I believe that this was one of the most successful ones I visited. The St. Hannibal

Empowerment Centre (SHEC) is a low-income community located in a squatter area in Pasay City, Manila. The residents were relocated from the creek area nearby. What struck me during the visit was how colourful and lush the area was and how happy and welcoming the people were. One reason for the greenery in the community were that they had rules saying that each family should have ten plants. Rules also applied to the access-control. During the day the gates were opened for everyone but from ten o'clock in the evening the gates were closed. Some interviews[1] were conducted in the community and it turned out that, at least the ones we spoke to, saw the rules as something positive. They welcomed the rules. I really must say that I perceived the area as very well maintained and cared for. This community, I would say, would only partly fit in under the descriptions of a security zone and a prestige community. It has access-control but only during the night. During the day it is more of a pseudo-gated community. The design is homogenous in the way that the buildings all look the same but the public spaces do not thanks to the layout. Nevertheless, the homogenous design results in bringing an identity to the area. This together with the fact that the residents had a great part of both the planning and the building process contributes to a sense of belonging.

I also visited some gated communities made for middle income families. The difference between the communities made for the low compared to the middle income people are according to me quite big. These places consisted of a lot of common facilities such as club houses, swimming pools, playground, basketball courts and fitness centres. These characteristics could be compared to a prestige community but also to a lifestyle community and that was also how the architect described it – as a lifestyle.

I think that one problem today is that a lot of people, just like me, only look to the negative sides when it comes to gated communities and do not look deeper into what they actually stand for. I think it is important to look into what the residents in a gated community actually want to achieve with the wall and to get that information the residents have to be included in the process. First then we can try to 'solve the problems', try to break walls and connect communities. When

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[1] Interviews with residents. *St. Hannibal Empowerment Centre.* Pasay City, Metro Manila: 25 February 2016

reflecting on all information gathered, both during the trip and through literature studies, the walls in Manila seem to represent security, or at least the perceived security. The wall could also be looked upon as a way to mark a territory. As a symbol for this the wall could create an identity in an area and thereby connect the people living inside.

In his text about gated communities in Shanghai Yip presented the result that the so called pseudo-gated communities (walled but without access-control) where perceived almost as secure by its residents compared to the ones with access-control. Therefore, he concluded that it might be enough with the pseudo-gatedness. If the wall is there but the access-control is not, then I believe the wall is just a symbol. For me this raises the question of how we can achieve the feeling of security in a neighbourhood without having the walls.

Yip also mentions other factors, such as building typologies, to affect the security perceived in an area. This is supported also by Jacobs and Wimmer. Both of them talk about how we have to work with the architecture and the street design to gain a safer neighbourhood. If these are the alternatives to gated communities, as Wimmer addresses, then we really need to put in an effort and try to change the way we design. We have to plan for the eyes on the streets, which mean entrances, windows and balconies facing the street but also attractions as Jacobs mentions. Nevertheless, I think it is just as important to think of the things mentioned in the feminist approach, such as lighting and transportation. After all they are a part of the street design. Newman, on the other hand, states that camera surveillance, locks and fences and guards are ways to deal with the security problem but I must disagree. Of course locks could, and should, be used to protect the individual home, but when it comes to locking and fencing the streets and other public spaces, as the term gated communities implies, I believe it is not the future. At least it should not be. Something to take into consideration when designing is the opportunity to include the citizens. That could be one way for the citizens to experience a sense of belonging and as addressed by Wimmer they might be more likely to defend their neighbourhood. This participatory approach is mentioned not only by Wimmer and Listerborn and Olshammar but also by Paul Jenkins et al. They speak of it as part of a new form of urban planning and housing, where all stakeholders can negotiate for their interests (Jenkins, et al., 2007).

> *'While planning may focus on the best strategy for economic development within a new global economy, it equally has a strong role representing the social and cultural needs of existing populations.' (Jenkins, et al., 2007, p. 202)*

When I began to rethink my preconceived notions of gated communities I recalled upon a lecture that I attended before my departure. It was Laura Liuke[2] who talked about designing not only houses, but homes. Provide a feeling of comfort but also a feeling of security were two things of our physical needs as humans. With this on my mind I really began to question my notions that the walls were only negative. I could recognize a lot of my own thoughts when reading Wimmers text about the case studies in Santiago de Chile. I was glad to hear that also the people living next to gated communities finds quite a lot of positive effects from them. Despite this I can nothing else than agree with Wimmer that we nevertheless need to strive towards a non-gated society.

4 Breaking down walls - connecting communities

I believe that Jacobs, Wimmer and the others that agree with them, are right when it comes to that we have to focus on the street design and other public spaces and improve them. Therefore, I strongly feel that we, as architects must take our responsibility. Of course it is not entirely up to us, there will have to be much more efforts and money spent on the public spaces in general, but we cannot wait for someone else to act. I believe we need to think about scale and about communities and sense of belonging. We need to think in different scales both regarding communities and public spaces. We have to start creating homes instead of just houses and blocks.

   In Metro Manila a lot of people today seem to want the gated community, with its surrounding walls and gates. If the walls stand for protection and create a sense of belonging and community, the question is how we can create this in some other way. One solution or at least a part of a solution could be to let the residents participate in the creation, as mentioned in Listerborn and Olshammar's text.

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[2] Liuke, Laura, *Post-disaster housing design.* Lund University: 8 February 2016

Hopefully the people will get to know each other and at the same time feel like they have contributed in the design and therefore potentially also want to maintain it.

I think that we need to strive towards a non-gated community, but with that said I do not think the solution is as simple as just to remove the walls. I think that we need to take it step by step. I want to describe this with some illustrations, as you can see below. If the citizens want a wall, one option could be to begin with one and then step by step get them used to the idea of tearing it down. This would also give the residents a chance to get to know their closest neighbours before opening up the community. If we begin with a wall, we need to work with it and make it more attractive. After a while we could make the wall more permeable and then finally remove it. One solution could be to save some parts of the wall, as a reminder but also as a design feature.

Phase 1:

A solid wall surrounding the neighbourhood in the beginning. Make use of vegetation and add a variation of attractions to the surrounding walls to make them more attractive.

Examples of attractions along the wall:
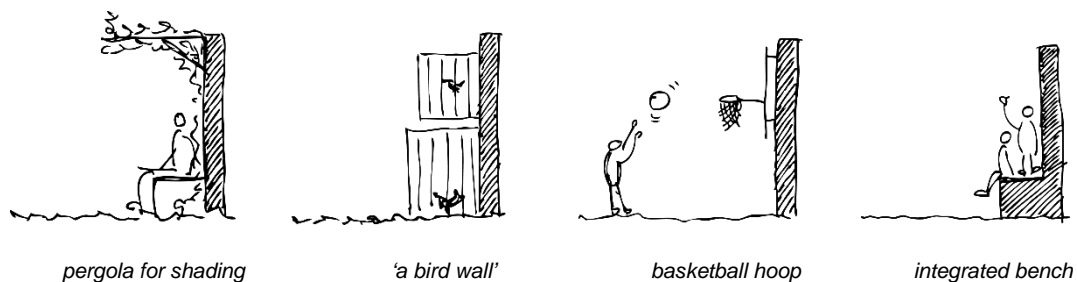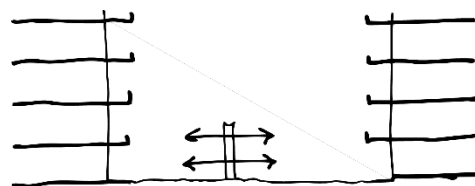
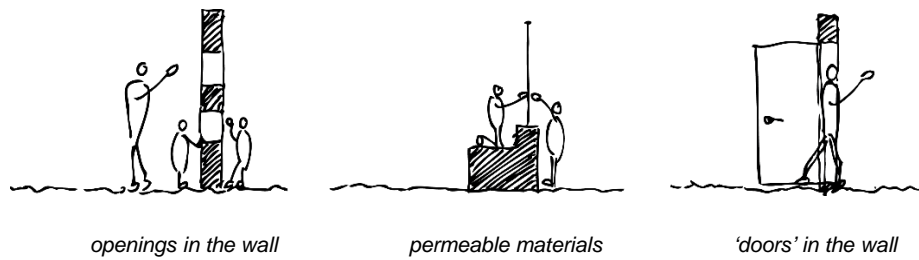| *pergola for shading* | *'a bird wall'* | *basketball hoop* | *integrated bench* |

Phase 2:

*A permeable wall. Possible to step by step open up for interactions between the neighbourhoods.*

Examples of how to make the wall permeable:

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openings in the wall	*permeable materials*	*'doors' in the wall*

Phase 3:

An integrated neighbourhood as a final step. The barriers between the neighbourhoods are removed to bring them together. The walls are replaced with common functions or greenery, which works as connectors.
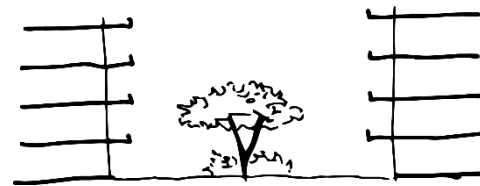
Examples of an integrated neighbourhood:

bring people together	*greenery as connector*	*common activities*
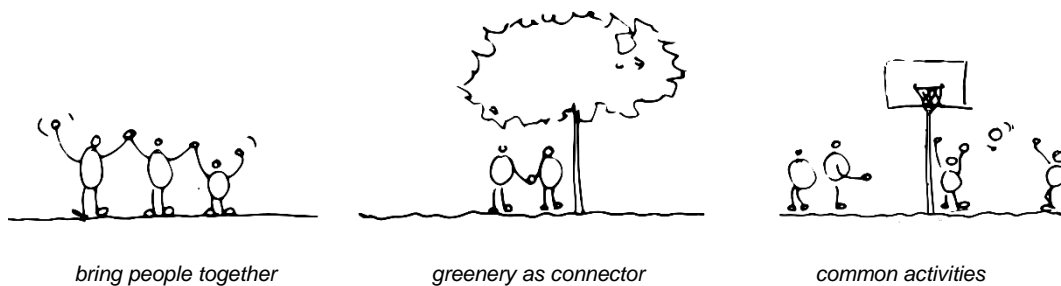
It has to be our responsibility as architects and planners to find solutions to break down the barriers between communities. Since there is not a solution that works everywhere, it might not be possible to implement all phases everywhere, or maybe not even possible to implement them at all. Nevertheless, it is our responsibility to find the reasons behind the wall, and that is something that might differ in different communities. We need to design for something that has the ability to connect people and hopefully contribute to a sense of belonging. One way in which identity could be achieved is through common colours or other design elements in the design.

It is not until we find all the reasons that lie behind the walls that we truly can begin our work towards a gateless society. We must aim high.

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Pictures and graphics

All illustrations are by the author.