



## **Welfare, crime and society**

*Gated communities: who and why?*

### **VOICE OVER COMMENTARY**

Gated communities have become an increasingly common form of residential housing throughout the contemporary world. They are privatised residential enclosures secured by fences and gates. Access to outsiders is controlled and monitored, often through the use of CCTV and 24-hour security systems. While enclosed residential spaces which rely on surveillance technologies are currently on the rise, gated living is not a new concept.

### **SARAH BLANDY**

I think one of the most important general drivers for the growth of gated communities is the, well the lack of trust, the fear of others, fear of disorder, but possibly most important the way in which that is linked to the growing disparity in income and wealth in this country. If we look back to the first wave of gated communities in the eighteenth century, that was also an era of extreme social unrest, movement from the country to the cities and, suddenly this sort of conjunction of people who are extremely poor with those who are very wealthy. And I think we can see the same disparity opening up now which has driven, in my view, the ... the growth of gated communities and it's interesting to reflect on the fact that that first wave of gated communities did come to an end.

In the early years of the twentieth century there was much more a feeling of stability, and so the gates came down really all over England at that time.

### **BILL SMITH-BOWER**

It's in the period since the 1960s that many people have talked about the contemporary rise of gated communities.

I think it's very important to recognise that what drives gated communities on different continents is different things. If you look at India, you're looking at recent development of gated communities where people are just buying into ensuring that they have electrical supplies, clean water, that their streets are clean; that in one sense they're separating themselves off from the more chaotic urban environment around them by buying into gated communities.

In the US, which has got a long history of gated communities, people are buying into not just security, they're normally buying into a number of what we call 'club goods', that they may have – golf courses, tennis courses, other amenities – and that security via gating is just one of a number of menu items that people are attracted to. I think in the UK it's a kind of mixture of what you might call fear of crime, certain kinds of amenities that people want such as simple things like off-street parking that's secure and safe, and also a range of goods such as things like a gymnasium and things like that.

You are buying into a neighbourhood which you have a lot of control of managing, in which you are selecting to live with people who maybe you may perceive as very similar to yourself in terms of lifestyle, in terms of income and in terms of interests.

### **SARAH BLANDY**

Certainly countries where there's, you know, genuine high levels of violence like some countries in South America, South Africa, for example, you can see that gated communities, the development and growth of gated communities has been driven very much by fear of violence.

**BILL SMITH-BOWER**

One perception of gated communities is that they are the exclusive residences of the very rich. But a lot of the research in the US and in South Africa, and even in the UK is showing that there's a diversity of people that live in gated communities.

In the UK, I would say they're more likely to be the preserve of the middle classes or, paradoxically, those in social housing where the estate has been retro-gated.

**SARAH BLANDY**

Estates which already belong to a local authority are now having walls and electronic gates fitted, possibly at the request of the residents, but also is being driven by local authority concerns and the police. But certainly if you look at South Africa or South America, it tends to be the more middle-class and affluent residents who are banding together and gating retrospectively their own neighbourhoods.