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The safety Dilemma of Gated Communities in Turkey: How Borders Threaten Safe Space Formation in Neighbourhoods

Assoc.Prof **Hatice KALFAOĞLU HATİPOĞLU**¹,
*Ankara Yildirim Beyazıt University, Faculty of Architecture and Fine Arts, Ankara, Turkey*¹
*E-mail*¹ hhatipoglu@aybu.edu.tr

Abstract

The production of safe spaces in neighbourhood areas is a challenge for the rapid urbanization in Turkey. The way of providing safety in housing areas has been ensured in the form of designing gated communities as clusters. However, it is possible to promote defensible spaces with the design of an urban form which increases users' impact area and sense of belonging. The urban tissue of neighbourhoods in Turkey, before the transition to gated communities, has already had these characteristics by having the spatial configuration of neighbourhood phenomenon. This study aims to emphasize the possibility of creating defensible spaces with planning and reveal design principles by reviewing the literature. Moreover, the study conducts a critical approach to gated communities which are segregated from urban tissue regarding safety and to their spatial design following the investigated design principles of safe space creation.

Keywords: Gated Communities; Neighbourhood; Defensible space; Urban Design

1. Introduction

Neighborhood, as a sub-unit of urban area, has a crucial role as a reflection of a macro-scaled "home" (Aziz Amen, 2017; Aziz Amen & Nia, 2018; Amen & Kuzovic, 2018; Amen & Nia, 2021), which promote interactions and strong relationships between people its inhabitants. In this sense, neighborhood, as the place where we first socialize outside our home, is not just a physical and spatial phenomenon, but a social phenomenon. In this context, the neighborhood is a place that also responds to the ontological needs of people, and design has a great importance in the formation of elements that affect the quality of life such as sense of belonging, adoption and security. In other words, the neighborhood not only represents a tangible entity, but also strongly reminds us of abstract and first-hand concepts such as solidarity, neighborliness, cooperation, control, partnership, similarity, proximity, border. However, neighborhoods are under the influence of a dramatic change with the intense urbanization in the modern world due to the social, economic, and technological changes. One of the most important factors is the expansion of the cities and suburbanization as a result of the advances in urban transit and highways. This situation has accelerated significant transitions in the physical structure of the neighborhoods which also has an influence on the social structure. Neighborhoods, which were safe and livable spaces in the past, are rapidly transforming into mass housing and gated community areas today with the motivation of creating safe spaces. The concept and texture of the neighborhood also has been affected by this transformation. Especially with the deterioration of a true public-private space hierarchy because of the dissolution of neighborhood pattern. This created a shift in the dynamics of the neighborhood that has a new texture which has been disconnected from the outside as islands by borders and has turned inwards. This situation not only created a change of use, but also caused many consequences due to the physical and social segregation.

Safety is also one of the most crucial elements of neighborhoods phenomenon. Gated communities as segregated islands has become increasingly the most preferred housing type, which is assumed to respond to need for safe place formation. However, creation of safe space cannot be provided with borders. There is a strong relationship between safe space creation and urban design. There is numerous research on crime, criminals, and the places where crimes are committed when the idea of "safety" and feeling of safety" is investigated in the literature in which safety was referred to the surrounding environment.

This study aims to reveal the demolition of the neighborhood pattern in Turkey with the motivation of safety, which reversely influence this safety negatively in the wider perspective according to safe space theories regarding urban design. To achieve this, several theories of safe space creation, including Newman's defensible space theory, have been examined and attention is drawn to the failures of segregated island blocks, which are the most preferred Turkish neighborhood in terms of safety-urban design relationship. Ensuring urban security by considering the neighborhood paradigm and the relationship between security and space in terms of urban design is investigated to create a shift towards defensible neighborhoods.

2. Neighborhood Phenomenon and Safe Space Creation

Neighborhoods, as sub-unit of urban space, are places in which people create social organization according to all definitions of this term. These areas are the places in which everyday life is situated. (Merrifield, 1993), These smallest parts of the city contain social and physical identity, have an organic structure that is not surrounded by structural elements. Neighborhoods have their own unique spatial structure and culture; these neighborhoods form a link between their living environments and people's identities.

The design and configuration of buildings, streets, and open spaces within the urban structure in these neighborhoods creates a dynamic, harmony and spatial relations network within itself. For an efficient design of this configuration, it is important that the relationships in this network integrate with each other and overlap, that the elements create a harmonious part-whole relationship in a functional way, and that they create a distinctively unique "sense of place" with an identity. The characteristics of the transportation scheme in the urban space, the presence of mixed-use areas, the calculation of the urban form and the balance of housing-service spaces, the quality of the open space design are necessary for a qualified neighborhood settlements and to improve sense of belonging in these areas.

The neighborhood unit, which was a concept of Clarence Perry, has conducted modern solutions as a response to modern problems. One of his arguments was that the size, density, and heterogeneity of cities portray anomie and dysfunctional relationships, smaller, homogeneous, and less dense urban cells promote sense of belonging and sense of community. (Perry, 1929) The configuration of infrastructures such as street, dwellings and open spaces creates a physical environment for people for their communication and interaction. For example, low traffic movement, size of neighborhood which should not be more than a quarter mile supporting walkability to school are some of the factors that contribute to a qualified and sustainable neighborhood.

Another important design concept is new urbanism, which emphasizes the importance of walkability, mixed use, and ecological sustainability in residential areas regarding promoting neighborhood ties and sense of belonging. (Parsons and Schuyler, 2002) An efficient public transportation, existence of mixed use and the strategic position of greenbelts, playgrounds, squares are some important indicators discussed in new urbanism.

This physical environment defines a local neighborhood network who defines themselves as neighbors and emotionally connect in each other as a social organization. (Özbek, 2017) While these people are realizing their activity patterns they shop, rest, gather in specific areas and interact in each other. These interactions and communications create social capital and strengthen the neighborhood's resilience. (Breton, 2001)

Enhancing security in urban environments and providing possibilities for sense of belonging and interaction between inhabitants through planning and design, has been at the chore of discussions since the early 1930s. (Kitchen & Schneider, 2007)

2.1. Theories on Safe Space Creation and Urban Design

"Safety and security" are a fundamental human need and one of the most important factors to consider when planning the built environment. Safety has been identified as one of the essential components required for the development of a "neighbourhood phenomenon" and "neighbourliness". "Accessibility and safety" are one of the main criteria of neighbourhood phenomenon. Wandering around the neighbourhood with "feeling of safety" is a requirement which essential for the formation of communication and interaction in neighbourhood. This safety can be promoted with a successful spatial arrangement.

Due to the rapid urbanization processes, the problem of safety in neighbourhood design has gained more importance. When the concept of "safety" has been reviewed in the planning literature, there are countless studies on crime, criminals, and the locations where crimes are perpetrated, but there are also studies on "feelings of safety." Safety has been correlated with the physical environment in all these studies. When examining the different factors that a criminal considers when deciding where to commit an act, it has been emphasized that "the potential of being caught" has an influence which reveals the importance of the physical environment on the concepts of crime and safety. (Demirbaş, 2005)

Jeffery (1971) has developed "Environmental criminology method" which is based on the suggestion of the strong relationship of criminal activity and environmental planning. That means, changing the environmental settings can reduce the crimes in the living environments.

In the "Broken Windows" theory which has been developed by Philip Zimbardo in 1969, it is emphasized that the role of the physical disorder of the space is an important reason in the formation of the security threat in settlements. (Wilson and Kelling, 1982). In this context, if observation, supervision, and physical care around the living environments can be increased, the crime can be prevented there and that potential criminals are more likely to be caught in the case of committing a crime. Another theory is the theory of "routine activities" within the scope of which, daily activities of people outside the home are cited as the cause of crime, and structural changes in routine activity patterns affect crime rates and the formation of crime in three basic elements, related to time and space.

These are motivated offenders, availability of suitable targets to commit crime, and lack of criminal protectors. Routine Activities theory emphasizes that illegal tendencies of human character occur in a particular place and time. (Cohen and Felson, 1977) Following this theory, the design solutions to be created against the realisation of crime in the urban space can remove these areas from being the target areas of the crime.

Newman, as the creator of “defensible space theory”, indicates the relationship of spatial design and safety with as follows: “a comparative examination of how different forms of the residential environment affect their inhabitants’ attitudes and behaviour in the use of facilities”. (Newman, 1976)

3. Newman’s Defensible Space Theory

Newman emphasizes the importance of space configuration and urban morphology and urban safety with his “defensible space” theory. The navigation of people in the urban environment, how people use neighborhood spaces and how sense of responsibility and sense of belonging can be developed between people are the main discussions in terms of spatial and morphological arrangement.

Newman indicates that, the control of the environment and creating zones of influence are the main indicators to provide safety in neighborhood areas. Building type and form, creating the urban pattern, has an important influence on residents’ ability to control their environments. In this sense, building height, as a physical indicator is an important factor which can be correlated with the control of the residents. Higher buildings may result in increase in crime rates in public areas according to the studies. (Newman, 1973, Gehl, 2011). The residents lose their control in the buildings which are more than five storeys. (Figure 1) “The eyes on the streets” are very important to provide safety in the environment. (Jacobs, 1961) Moreover, the number of people who share the entry of a building changes according to the housing form, which has an influence on this control and sense of belonging. Moreover, creating transitional spaces which arrange the hierarchy of public-private with physical or symbolic barriers also contribute to create safe space formation.

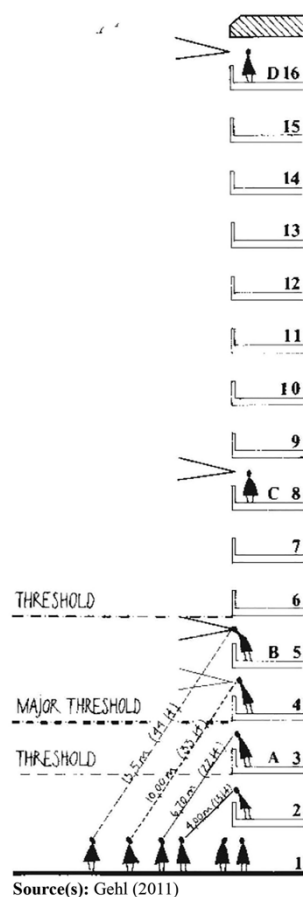


Figure 1. Communication Possibilities with the ground in multi-storey buildings (Gehl, 2011).

It is worth to emphasize that these transitions change according to the form, arrangement, and density of building masses. Since the public-private hierarchy changes according to the number of people sharing the building entrance and circulation, the inside corridors of a high-rise building have turn into a public street due to the crowd in the horizontal and vertical circulation. (Figure 2)

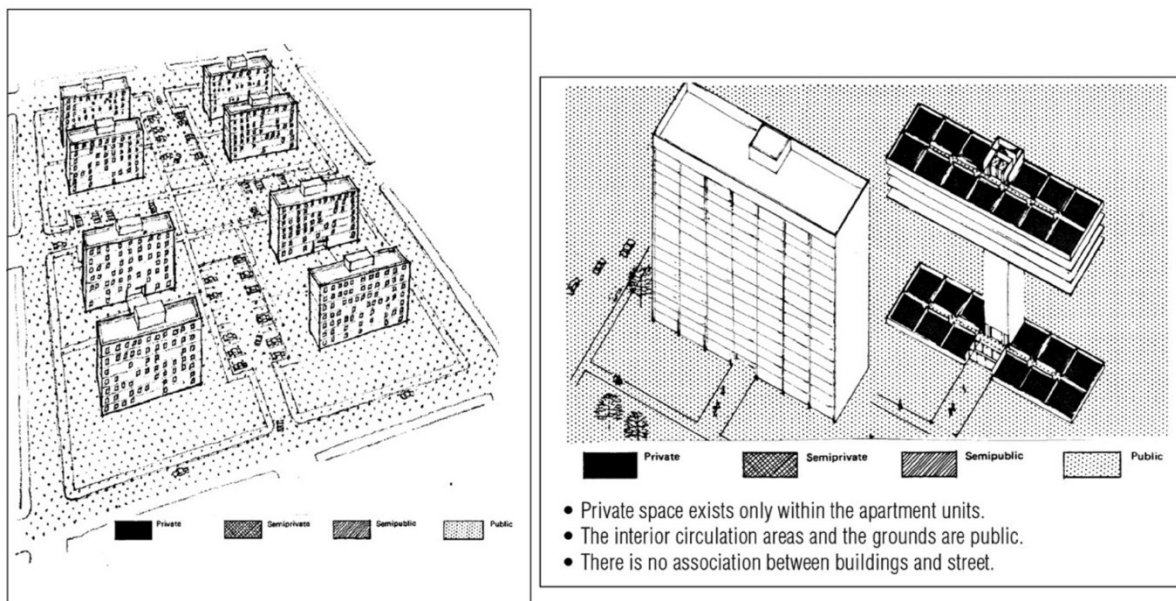


Figure 2. Block highrise development showing the demolith of public-private hierarchy.

Placement of amenities which respond to specific needs of different inhabitants such as sitting areas, play facilities according to different age groups, parking areas contribute to the reinforcement of claim to territory and zones of influence. In addition, spatial organisation, and the nature of relation of these amenities to the building affect the degree of sense of identification with these areas. While distant and unassociated green areas and facilities go unused and vandalised, well-designed, and clearly allocated facilities improve safe-space formation. Sitting possibilities should be designed in relationship with playgrounds which creates the possibility of social gatherings. Laying out on the ground in terms of subdivision and allocation is also important for safety. Assignment of grounds to specific buildings is another indicator for creating defensible space. Subdivision of the grounds to specific buildings create sphere of influence of specific users of the buildings and create surveillance and care due to the vicinity of buildings with their adjacent particular areas. If the grounds around the buildings are accessible to everyone anonymously and are not assigned to specific buildings, residents feel less association to the public areas. These grounds are too open and difficult to be maintained and watched over.

4. Results of Seeking for Security: Gated Communities

In the last 30 years, the effect of globalization became more significant on the housing sector in Turkey. The traditional neighborhood pattern which has its own spatial and organizational dynamics with mixed use and walkable distances has been dissolved to a different urban tissue. High-rise, unqualified, generic mass-housing production with the buildings floating in no-man's land, has shaped the dominant housing morphology in recent years. This approach has satisfied the quantity of housing but created many problems in terms of serious quality insufficiencies and has created a great impact on urban pattern. (Tekeli, 2010; Şenyel, 2006) Due to the dissolution in traditional neighborhood pattern and the destruction of neighborhood phenomenon which has been also a social organization, and the increase in density brought the problem of lack of control and safety. This led to the formation of gated communities in the form of walled/isolated islands with their own guided entrances and gardens. Gated communities, provide security and exclusivity to its residents through a combination of physical barriers, surveillance, security guidance, and community self-regulation of architecture and behaviour. (Norton & Mercier, 2016; Kalfaoglu & Mahmut, 2020) These morphological changes portrayed fragmentation in urban tissue has caused not just spatial segregation but also has accelerated the social segregation. A distortion in the neighborhood relations has been emerged, walkability and safety between these islands has decreased due to the lack of control, surveillance, and lack of feeling of possession outside these borders.

High-rise structure of these housing contain large number of families which bring overcrowding and disconnection with the ground. The disassociated "point" structure of the floating blocks demolishes the transitional spaces in terms of public-private relationship which has been discussed in defensible space theory of Newman. This affects the control of the environment, sense of belonging of the inhabitants in a negative way. Moreover, the ground around the buildings is not assigned to specific buildings which also decreases feeling of possession and sphere of influence.

The borders created with gated communities, create a new segregated morphology, which creates a new neighborhood in the neighborhood. Social segregation created by the spatial segregation is against to the nature and heterogeneity of the definition of the city. This will create segregated communities which destroy the nature of neighbourhood and neighbourliness which is a natural social organisation, which is needed to portray an integration of community. (Roitman, 2005) These new living spaces in fragmented islands create groups of people which are gradually separated and differentiating from each other, plays a role in the transformation and alienation which decreases sense of belonging of people in these neighbourhood. (Uzun, 2006) The lack of sense of belonging decreases the safe-space formation following Newman's defensible space theory. The outside of the borders of these gated communities turns into places of vandalism and anonymous places without surveillance. This demolishes the dynamics of neighbourhood and activity patterns of its inhabitants.



Figure 4. (left) The tendency of housing in Turkey: Copy-paste mass housing blocks (Alagöz, 2011)

Figure 5. (right) Solid-Void Analyse of Batikent Kent-Koop Neighbourhood (by the author)



Figure 6. (left) Overall view of Pruitt-Igoe, public housing project constructed in St. Louis in the 1960s. (Newman,

Figure 7. (right) Demolition of these buildings due to the vandalism and lack of safety

Pruitt-Igoe 2,740-unit public housing high-rise development with 11 floors, which went to ruin has proved the theories of Newman. These housing was imagined as “river of trees”, by the architects but became a sewer of broken glass, garbage, and vandalism. They were not able to evoke feeling of identity or control and the anonymity of public spaces did not let people to develop sense of belonging. A family's claim to a territory increases if the number of families using a building decrease since each individual identify it as theirs and feels right to the territory. In these areas, which can be described as no man's land, people even do not feel sense of responsibility. People did not prefer to live in these unsafe living conditions. As a result, this settlement have been torn down due to the lack of safety about 10 years after its construction.

5. Concluding remarks:

Dissolution of Neighborhood Pattern in Turkey and the Dilemma of Safety

The motivation of the study is the transformation of neighborhoods into segregated housing clusters in Turkey which destroys the dynamics of the "neighborhood" phenomenon morphologically and socially. Neighborhoods have their own unique spatial structure and culture; these neighborhoods form a dialogue between their living environments and people's identities. These traditional neighborhood transformation towards high-density standardized high-rise mass construction most of which are isolated, demolish daily life routines of dwellers, neighbourhood relations, and existing urban pattern.

Physical changes in urban structures, named as morphological changes are correlated with safe-space formation. Morphological arrangement of neighborhoods influences how people navigate themselves within the urban grid, use neighborhood spaces which influence sense of belonging, control, and sphere of influence. The urban and architectural factors of neighborhood safety development of cities that results in urban crimes have been discussed in the research to prevent design failures related to spatial organization.

However, the relationship of spatial organization with safe-space formation has not been a discussion anymore in the housing practice in Turkey, although importance of producing safe space is a crucial issue due to rapid urbanization with rapid population growth in Turkey. Gated communities as segregated urban areas that respond to people's requirements for safe place has been the only solution. But safe-space creation cannot be provided with borders.

Providing residents' ability to control of environment and sphere of influence are the main considerations suggested by Newman to provide defensible spaces. Accordingly, as few families as possible should share a common entry; particular areas of a site should be arranged for the use of specific families. Moreover, the choice of building types and their positioning and the arrangement of their entries are important for the formation of safe space. The spatial organization of buildings in each other and to the amenities are other crucial guidelines which are correlated with defensible space formation.

The gated communities of Turkey the morphology of which is similar to Pruitt-Igoe, should be protected from the destiny of Pruitt-Igoe not by the maintenance with extra budget provided by people who are responsible for security and caring for public areas inside the borders, but with a well-designed spatial organization. Because these isolated borders continue creating no man's land around them and destroy the neighborhood pattern and dynamics in Turkey. Safe-space creation and spatial organization should be correlated and considered deeper in order to create livable and sustainable neighborhood environments in Turkey.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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