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A narrative review of gated communities and the transformative social impact in Middle Eastern Cities

Ahmed Hammad ⬤, Mengbi Li ⬤ and Zora Vrcelj ⬤

Institute for Sustainable Industries & Liveable Cities, College of Sport, Health and Engineering, Victoria University, Melbourne, Australia

ABSTRACT

The rise of gated communities in the Middle East is vastly spreading, driven by socioeconomic fluctuations and a desire for exclusivity. This article aims to contribute to the scholarly debates on the socio-spatial impacts of gated communities by presenting a narrative review that synthesises findings from peer-reviewed articles in the Middle East and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). The study suggests that residents of gated communities benefit from positive attributes, including security, lifestyle, and exclusivity. However, negative influences, including segregation and separation, extend beyond the walls, impacting the surrounding communities. This article argues that the spread of gated communities represents a trend of luxury and exclusivity for affluent individuals, largely driven by developers. It concludes that while gated communities offer several positive attributes, these benefits are limited to a specific group residing within their walls. Planners and policymakers are encouraged to leverage these benefits and incorporate them in future designs.

1. Introduction

Gated communities are spreading worldwide as the preferred residential choice, reflecting a response to the socio-economic changes of the late 20th century and a growing desire for security and exclusivity. In the Middle East, as well as the GCC countries (Gulf Cooperation Council[1]), gated communities are often considered a symbol of prestige and exclusivity, catering to affluent social groups and Western expatriates. Yet in the Middle East, they function as spatial instruments of state governance and expatriate containment (AlQahtany, 2022; Hammad et al., 2024a; Ibrahim & Hamed, 2015). While extensive research has examined gated communities globally, studies on their socio-spatial impacts have primarily focused on Western, Latin American, and African contexts (Le Goix, 2005). The Middle East remains underexplored, particularly in terms of how governance structures, expatriate policies, and Islamic urban principles, such as the segregation of gendered spaces, intersect with neoliberal gating (Ben-Hamouche, 2009). Unlike Western contexts, which are driven by crime and security, or African cities, which are

characterised by neoliberal restructuring, Middle Eastern gated communities are often state-supported, tied to expatriate systems, and embedded in rentier-state political economies (Daher, 2014). Existing studies also overlook how these communities operate within a heterogeneous, state-controlled urban fabric, where foreign investment and privatised governance prevail (Elsheshtawy, 2008b). This study fills these gaps by questioning how Middle Eastern gated communities redefine urban connectivity, governance, and socio-spatial hierarchies.

To understand the challenges associated with gated communities, it is essential to closely explore their unique characteristics, which include restricted public access, comprehensive physical and digital security systems, and a variety of shared facilities and amenities. These features shape the social and physical structures, influencing residents' daily lives and reinforcing their separation from the wider community through restricted public access (Atkinson & Blandy, 2005, pp. 177, 178). Since there is no agreed-upon definition for the term 'gated communities', urbanists can describe what makes this phenomenon, such as privacy, walls, multiple entrances, controlled gates, restricted public access, and shared amenities. Some researchers describe them as private areas where both the insiders and outsiders operate with controlled access (Blakely & Snyder, 1997a). Others suggest that gated communities are urban settlements surrounded by walls and controlled by security guards, which limit access (Touman, 2005). On the other hand, Roitman (2007) defines gated communities as voluntarily enclosed residential neighbourhoods where public spaces are privatised by security systems that restrict residents' access. Building upon these foundational definitions, this article introduces a refined classification tailored to the Middle East and GCC context, identifying three distinct forms of gated communities: socio-political gating, expatriate-centric districts, and luxury-driven gated communities. This classification moves beyond physical characteristics to examine the socio-economic and governance mechanisms that sustain these developments.

In the United States, for example, the demand for gated communities stemmed from various factors, including concerns about crime, a desire for prestige, and a search for a sense of community (Low, 2001; Salim, 2020, p. 48; Wilson-Doenges, 2000). However, Blakely and Snyder (1997b) categorised gated communities into several types, including prestige and exclusivity. While these classifications provide a useful starting point, they do not fully capture the motivations and governance structures that influenced gated communities in the Middle East and GCC. This article builds upon these categorisations, introducing a framework that highlights the role of economic liberalisation, expatriate containment, and state-led urban policies in shaping these developments.

Moreover, gated communities in the Middle East resemble those in North America, as they manifest social and economic disparities, leading to various forms of segregation (Salim, 2020, p. 49). However, this segregation is not merely a spatial assumption limited to a specific space or development; rather, it stems from the behaviour of affluent individuals seeking seclusion, segregation, and distance from the crowd (Alaily-Mattar, 2008, p. 268). This study expands on the notion of voluntary segregation by incorporating socio-spatial stratification theory and urban governance frameworks, arguing that gated communities in the Middle East and GCC serve as mechanisms for both economic restructuring and expatriate containment (Al Omari, 2015, p. 295; Roitman, 2005, p. 303). Contrary

to the common belief that security and fear of crime are the primary motives for the emergence of gated communities in the Middle East, they appear to symbolise wealth and class distinction within society (Alaily-Mattar, 2008, p. 269). In the GCC countries, however, gated communities often cater to a different category of foreign expatriates relocating to work and live there. The primary objective of these products is to offer Western expatriates a lifestyle similar to what they had back home, which can help in containing expatriate culture within the walls (Glasze & Alkhayyal, 2002, p. 137). In a comparable study conducted by Deng (2022) during the COVID-19 pandemic, the author suggests that gated communities can imply social control by managing and controlling the population. By framing gated communities as socio-spatial constructs that reflect broader transformations in economic policy, expatriate governance, and social stratification, this study offers a novel comparative perspective. It contrasts the socio-spatial impacts of gated communities in both the Middle East and GCC, addressing their different yet intersecting roles in urban governance, economic restructuring, and cultural preservation. While the reasons for their emergence vary, ranging from elite-driven exclusivity and lack of infrastructure in the Middle East (Elsheshtawy, 2008b) to expatriate accommodation and control in the GCC (AlQahtany, 2022), this article argues that their socio-spatial consequences, particularly in reinforcing urban fragmentation and exclusivity, are comparable.

With the growing number of articles on gated communities in the Middle East and the GCC, there is a need for a comprehensive narrative review of the literature. Existing reviews tend to focus on gated communities from singular perspectives, either socio-economic, cultural, or political. This study fills a critical gap by integrating these dimensions into a multidisciplinary framework, offering a synthesised interpretation of the socio-spatial implications of gated communities in the region. To address this gap, this article will conduct a narrative review of peer-reviewed articles published between 2001 and 2023. The review will be guided by the emergence of gated communities in the Middle East and GCC, their classification, and their socio-spatial implications, particularly in the context of urban governance and economic restructuring. This article aims to contribute to the existing body of literature on gated communities in the Middle East by compiling articles from multiple countries, including Jordan, Egypt, Lebanon, Turkey, Sudan, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Bahrain. The selection of these countries would provide a comprehensive understanding of the surge of gated communities and their social impacts in the Middle Eastern region and GCC (Green et al., 2006, p. 103). On the other hand, a narrative review adopts a multidisciplinary approach, providing a rigorous interpretation of the history, culture, and socio-spatial characteristics of gated communities by drawing on multiple resources (Sukhera, 2022, p. 416). This narrative review offers a rigorous interpretation of the history, culture, and socio-spatial characteristics of gated communities. It introduces a novel analytical framework that situates these developments within broader urban governance structures, moving beyond conventional interpretations of gating as merely a security-driven phenomenon. The findings offer valuable insights into how gated communities transform urban landscapes and social interactions, contributing

to the broader discourse on urban fragmentation and social exclusivity in Middle Eastern and GCC contexts.

2. Literature review

2.1. Discussions on urban transformation in the Middle East

The urban fabric of the traditional old Arabian and Muslim cities is a complex outcome of geographical conditions, traditions, and the influence of Islamic laws, as argued by Ben-Hamouche (2009). Henceforth, the same was applicable to most Middle Eastern and GCC cities, as they were under the rule of the Islamic state at some point in time. The development of the urban fabric over time was an outcome of individual and community activities, such as subdivisions, extensions, demolitions, and reconstructions, which may have lasted for centuries. Thus, the number of these activities reflects the degree of complexity of the city. Furthermore, individuals had the legal power and freedom to act on their private properties freely without the approval of any governance party. This freedom is evident in the architectural design and character of houses at a particular time, as houses underwent constant alterations in response to family needs (Ben-Hamouche, 2009, p. 24). In addition, the emphasis on privacy and separation has played a significant role in shaping the urban fabric of traditional Middle Eastern cities. Narrow alleyways and streets delineated neighbourhood boundaries, yet these areas remained interconnected through courtyards and civic spaces such as mosques and markets (Hammad, 2023). In Riyadh, for instance, Al-Hemaidi (2001) describes how the city's irregular patterns of narrow, shaded streets created enclosed neighbourhoods that fostered social interaction and provided safe communal spaces for children. The architectural layout, with inward-facing houses and a central mosque as the primary node, reflected local traditions and environmental needs. These designs were tailored to meet the cultural, social, and environmental needs of their people, rooted in local needs and traditions. However, the transformation to modern urban planning in the post-1960s era significantly altered these patterns. The expansion of road networks and the prioritisation of automobile infrastructure physically fragmented neighbourhoods, diminishing opportunities for social interaction and weakening the sense of community Al-Hemaidi (2001), p. 196). As urban spaces became increasingly car-dependent, residents adapted by reinforcing privacy measures, such as installing high walls and closing windows on upper floors. These spatial transformations, imposed through international urban planning models rather than evolving from local traditions, disrupted the social fabric. The sudden shift was often not welcomed by some people who preferred the intimacy and cohesion of their original fabric. In response to these changes, high walls and screens were installed in some private houses, and windows on the second level were closed. The rise of gated communities represents a continuation of these externally driven changes in urban development. Influenced by global neoliberal and capitalist trends, gated developments introduce physical and symbolic barriers that reinforce socio-economic disparities. As Al-Hemaidi (2001, p. 196) suggests, the imposition of imported urban regulations without consideration for local customs has led to social and spatial fragmentation. Gated communities further this divide, creating exclusive developments that

detach residents from the broader urban environment while mirroring the global trend of privatised and securitised urban spaces.

The contrast between traditional urban designs and modern gated communities is evident in both the design and the socio-spatial configuration of cities. While geographical conditions, traditions, laws and regulations have influenced the evolution of urban spaces in the Arab world, which facilitated social interaction, gated communities intentionally limited this interaction. Additionally, these developments emphasised exclusivity and segregation, which often reinforced class and socio-economic divisions. The prioritisation of privacy and isolation stands in opposition to the principles of connectivity and openness, which were characteristic of earlier urban forms. Thus, while traditional urban forms promoted connectivity and inclusiveness, modern gated communities have disrupted the urban fabric, contributing to urban fragmentation and socio-economic divisions.

2.2. *Gated communities in the Middle East*

Gated communities are generally designed with strict security measures, dedicated services and amenities, and limited access for non-residents, which can imply social and physical separation (Roitman et al., 2010, p. 5). The design of gated communities, with their large walls, controlled entrances, and private amenities, can reinforce segregation by separating residents from the surrounding neighbourhoods. This separation not only limits social interaction but also affects daily activities, as non-residents are discouraged from entering these communities. As a result, gated communities can create isolated islands that operate in isolation, both socially and economically, from the wider community.

The discussion around the social impact of gated communities, particularly social segregation, is divided into two groups of discussion among scholars. One group argues that these developments cause separation and segregation due to their designs and access limitations (Blakely & Snyder, 1997a; Low, 2001; Xu, 2009). Conversely, another group counterargues this assumption and claims that gated communities may foster integration, particularly when developed in poor areas, as they create job opportunities and reduce geographical segregation (Corvalán, 2004; Roitman et al., 2010; Salcedo & Torres, 2004; Webster, 2002).

A recent study published by Qureshi (2023) in the Global South, encompassing the Middle East and the GCC, examined the rise of gated communities between 2000 and 2022. The study found that people choose to live there for security, prestige, proximity to work, affordability, and shared common areas. It concludes that these types of developments may pressure planners to balance protection and urban accessibility. Nonetheless, while Qureshi's study encompasses many cities in the Global South with diverse contextual and cultural backgrounds, this article focuses on the Middle East and the GCC, where cities share similar backgrounds, histories, and traditions. The Middle East has recently witnessed a significant increase in the number of gated communities, with Saudi Arabia and Egypt leading this trend by establishing hundreds of developments in the past two decades (Ibrahim & Hamed, 2015). Although gated communities may appear identical in their characteristics, their development purpose and backgrounds may differ

significantly from one country to another (Grant & Mittelsteadt, 2004; Mohamed Salah & Ayad, 2018).

In the GCC, and particularly in Qatar, gated communities emerged in the 1940s as an extended housing development (El-Ekhteyar & Furlan, 2016, p. 130). The discovery of oil in the 1940s and 1950s led many Western professionals to migrate to the Gulf countries, resulting in a significant increase in housing demand (AlQahtany, 2022, p. 18). Consequently, gated communities were developed as a housing solution for Western families, providing them with a lifestyle akin to their home countries while respecting Gulf traditions outside the walls (El-Ekhteyar & Furlan, 2016, p. 129; Salim, 2021, p. 149).

In a study conducted in Egypt by Alaily-Mattar (2008, p. 270), the author concludes that real-estate development has fostered gated communities and marketed them as luxurious, exclusive, and high-end residential solutions. Gated communities have proliferated in Cairo since 1990, driven by socio-economic and cultural changes associated with economic limitations and globalisation (Elsheshtawy, 2008b). Post-2000, gated communities evolved into a distinct concept, serving as a new form of liberation for the affluent, offering escape from crowded cities (Kuppinger, 2004; Mohamed Salah & Ayad, 2018, p. 2745). Similarly, gated communities in Turkey emerged as a result of the socioeconomic and cultural changes that occurred in the 1980s, driven by the financial, real estate, and construction sectors. This period witnessed the emergence of a new class of white-collar workers, driven by the opening of the economy to global markets and the influx of international companies (Geniş, 2007). Gated communities were viewed as a housing solution for individuals preferring to live away from crowded cities. In Lebanon, the emergence of gated communities can be traced back to a weakening public sector, which led the private sector to substitute the public sector and provide housing solutions with suitable lifestyles and amenities that meet the demands of affluent individuals (Glasze & Alkhayyal, 2002, p. 334). In Jordan, gated communities emerged in the 1990s, culminating in the establishment of a fully developed gated community in Amman in 2009 (Al-Homoud & Al Aswad, 2018). The neoliberal restructuring and the experiences of neighbouring countries mainly influenced the development of gate communities (Al Omari, 2015, p. 296; Daher, 2014, p. 101; Hammad et al., 2024b).

Even in Sudan, where a majority of the population lives below the poverty threshold, gated communities have been spreading since 2003, catering to affluent individuals seeking prestige and better amenities (Elhadary & Ali, 2017, p. 45). Furthermore, in a dispersed country such as Iraq, the number of gated communities has grown more than tenfold since 2008 in Sulaimaniyah, largely due to the political and economic changes in Iraq and Syria. Many people flee to Sulaimaniyah, seeking security, safety, and employment (Demir & Mukhlis, 2017, p. 66). Elhadary and Ali (2017, p. 50) suggested that there might be a direct relationship between wealth and the emergence of gated communities at both micro or macro levels, alongside the public sector's inability to influence the private sector to cater for affluent individuals, as suggested by Glasze and Alkhayyal (2002, p. 334).

The emergence of gated communities in the GCC and the Middle East is influenced by historical, cultural, and economic factors unique to each country. The social and spatial impacts of these developments on the surroundings may vary significantly from one country to another. By examining these diverse contexts, this paper aims to contribute a nuanced understanding of the impact of these communities on their surroundings.

3. Methods of investigation

3.1. A narrative review

This investigation employs a narrative review methodology, synthesising peer-reviewed articles on gated communities and their social and spatial impacts to identify key themes, debates, and knowledge gaps within a multidisciplinary framework (Ramdhani et al., 2014, p. 103). Unlike a systematic review, which prioritises empirical studies, a narrative review allows for a broader exploration of diverse perspectives across urban, economic, and socio-political disciplines. This approach is particularly suited to the study of gated communities in the Middle East, as their development is influenced by a combination of geopolitical forces, regulatory frameworks, expatriate housing policies, and socio-cultural factors that are often absent in broader global studies. The study adopts a meta-narrative approach, which reconciles different scholarly perspectives through comparative synthesis and discourse analysis, critically examining the complexities of gated communities in the Middle East. This enables the study to bridge fragmented research perspectives, providing a cohesive analytical lens that accounts for both local and regional socio-political dynamics. The method involves a comparative analysis of how gated communities are framed within urban studies, socio-spatial stratification theories, and governance models, providing a comprehensive examination of their transformative impacts (Sukhera, 2022, p. 416). While this approach provides flexibility and depth, it also presents challenges, such as potential selection bias and the difficulty of synthesising studies with varying methodologies. Nevertheless, the narrative review enables a structured thematic synthesis, critical comparisons, and contextual interpretations of existing studies, making it well-suited to this investigation (Sukhera, 2022, p. 414). To mitigate potential biases and enhance methodological rigor, this study implements structured inclusion criteria to ensure that selected articles contribute to a balanced and representative understanding of the topic.

3.2. Inclusion criteria

To investigate the socio-spatial impacts of gated communities in the Middle East region, a systematic literature search was conducted using academic database search engines, including Google Scholar, JSTOR, Scopus, SpringerLink, and ProQuest. The search strategy employed Boolean operators and keyword combinations such as 'gated communities' AND 'Middle East' OR 'GCC' OR specific country names (e.g. 'Jordan,' 'Saudi Arabia') to identify relevant articles that were published between 2001 and 2023 (Ferrari, 2015, p. 232). The study focuses on articles published between 2001 and 2023, a timeframe that captures two decades of substantial urban restructuring and transformation across the region (Daher, 2014, p. 100).

The initial database search yielded 59 relevant articles, which were screened through a multi-stage process:

(a) Title and Abstract Review: Articles were assessed for relevance to the research objectives.

(b) Full-Text Screening: A detailed evaluation was conducted to ensure alignment with the study's thematic focus

Following this process, 14 peer-reviewed articles were selected for the final review. A set of inclusion criteria was applied to ensure methodological rigour and relevance:

(a) Geographical Scope: Studies conducted in the Middle East and the GCC region, covering selected countries.
(b) Thematic Focus: Articles must explicitly examine the classification, social, and spatial impacts of gated communities, including themes of exclusivity, segregation, governance, and urban transformation.
(c) Publication Date: Studies were published between 2001 and 2023 to ensure relevance to contemporary urban development trends. While some earlier studies may provide valuable insights, this timeframe ensures relevance to contemporary urban transformations.
(d) Academic Rigour: Only English-language peer-reviewed journal articles were included. While this ensures methodological reliability, it is acknowledged that omitting grey literature and non-English publications may exclude region-specific policy discussions and local case studies (Bandauko et al., 2022, p. 345; Sukhera, 2022, p. 415).

3.3. Data extraction and analysis

After identifying an initial set of articles that discussed gated communities in general in the Middle East, a systematic appraisal was carried out to evaluate their relevance to the topic by reviewing the titles and abstracts of the selected articles (Ferrari, 2015, p. 232). A structured thematic analysis was performed to extract and synthesise key findings from the selected literature. Articles were reviewed for:

- Study Objectives and Methodology
- Geographical Focus (Country and City of Study)
- Key Findings on Gated Communities' Social and Spatial Impacts
- Emerging Themes and Conceptual Frameworks

A full review stage was conducted to examine the relevance of the inclusion criteria and extract keywords and themes from the literature, offering a comparative synthesis of how gated communities influence urban and social structures across the region (Bandauko et al., 2022, pp. 345, 346).

3.4. Study settings

The studies and articles reviewed in this paper encompass a total of eight countries: five from the Middle East,[2] including Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, and Sudan, as well as three from the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), specifically Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Bahrain. The selection of these countries was based on their significant urban transformations, the availability of scholarly literature, and their representation of diverse socio-

economic contexts within the Middle East and the GCC. To ensure a representative scope, the review also covers major cities and capitals, including Cairo, Amman, Beirut, Istanbul, Khartoum, and Doha, as well as secondary urban centres, such as Dammam in Saudi Arabia. One article in Bahrain did not mention the city where the study was conducted. By incorporating studies from different development trajectories within the region, this review provides a balanced yet analytically feasible comparison of gated communities across distinct urbanisation models. While other countries may have relevant cases, the lack of sufficient peer-reviewed research would limit their inclusion in this review (Elsheshtawy, 2008a).

3.5. Study limitations

While this narrative review provides a comprehensive synthesis of the existing literature on gated communities in the Middle East and the GCC, certain limitations are acknowledged:

- Language Bias: The exclusive reliance on English-language, peer-reviewed studies may overlook critical perspectives from grey literature (e.g. government reports, dissertations) and non-English publications, potentially limiting the comprehensiveness of regional scope (Palmer et al., 2024). However, this decision ensures that sources meet rigorous academic standards.
- Historical Context: The study's selection criteria, which prioritised research published between 2001 and 2023, may have overlooked earlier works that could provide historical context on the evolution of gated communities (Le Goix, 2005; Webster et al., 2002).
- Geographical Representation: Although the review synthesises findings from eight countries, this may affect the balance of regional insights, the scope of research, and the generalizability of the conclusions (Füller & Michel, 2014).
- Lack of Primary Data: As a narrative review, this study does not conduct primary data collection or statistical validation, meaning that its findings rely on existing interpretations rather than direct empirical measurement. Despite these limitations, the structured selection process and thematic analysis ensure a rigorous and meaningful synthesis of available research (Ferrari, 2015).

4. Results of the narrative review

The collection return from the combined database search that included gated communities in the Middle East and GCC was 59 articles. Eight articles were removed in the initial review of the titles as they didn't match the search inquiry. After that, 51 abstracts were reviewed, and 25 articles were removed to narrow it down to 26. Following this, 26 full texts were assessed, and 12 articles were excluded because they did not meet the set inclusion criteria, resulting in 14 eligible final studies, as shown in Figure 1.

4.1. Reasons behind the emergence of gated communities

The review identified two distinct types of gated communities: the GCC and the Middle East. In the GCC, the emergence of gated communities was primarily driven
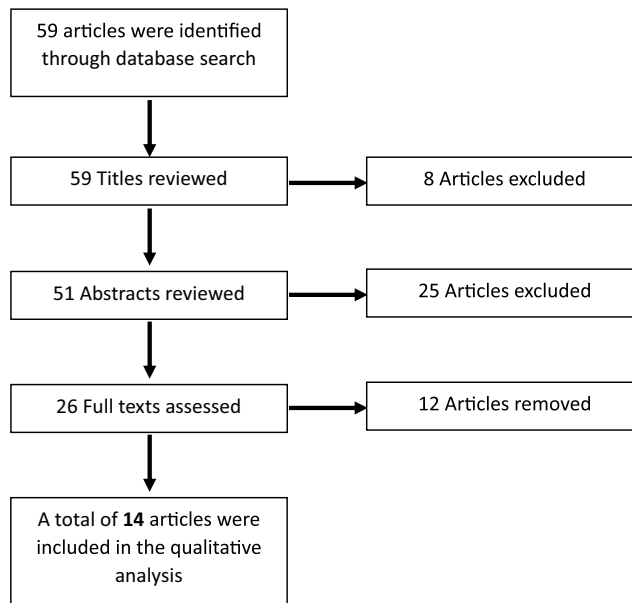
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│   A total of **14** articles were │
│   included in the qualitative │
│   analysis                    │
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Figure 1. Flowchart of the Selection Process. Author

by the discovery of oil in the 1930s, which attracted large numbers of Western professionals seeking housing that aligned with their cultural and lifestyle preferences (AlQahtany, 2022, p. 18). This movement has led to the development of a distinct type of residential housing designed to attract Western professionals with their families to relocate to these countries, away from their home countries. Gated communities provided a housing solution that allowed expatriate families to practice their lives freely within the gates, shielded from the cultural and socially conservative societies of the GCC (Le Goix, 2005; Mahgoub & Khalfani, 2012). In contrast, the other types of gated communities identified in the reviewed articles were from Middle Eastern countries, including Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, and Egypt. These developments were largely driven by socioeconomic changes, particularly the rise of new middle and upper-middle-class groups seeking social distinction, higher quality of life, and social prestige (Al Omari, 2015; Denis, 2006). Furthermore, the public sector's failure to provide adequate infrastructure and services prompted the private sector to offer residential solutions that residents needed, such as public parks, play areas, and safe areas for children. In addition, as argued by Glasze and Alkhayyal (2002), the spread of gated communities is related to weak urban public planning controls, which allow private developers to merge, divide, or subdivide plots and land to cater to new towns (Kuppinger, 2004). This was seen in most cases in the Middle East, including Jordan, Egypt, and Lebanon (Alaily-Mattar, 2008; Ghonimi et al., 2011; Hammad et al., 2023; Makhamreha & Almanasyeha, 2011). On the other hand, security was not considered the primary reason for the emergence of gated communities in the GCC and the Middle East, except in Sudan, where it was the second main reason, following economic growth (Elhadary & Ali, 2017). Instead, the proliferation of gated communities in both the Middle East and the

GCC regions reflects broader socio-political changes, including culture, conservatism, and economic restructuring.

4.2. Social and spatial impacts of gated communities

The reviewed articles identified both positive and negative impacts of gated communities within the same article. Positive impacts were mainly limited to residents, including enhanced security, safety, privacy, a sense of belonging, and increased property value. Gated communities also provide a lifestyle characterised by social homogeneity and exclusive amenities, including parks and sporting facilities. However, the negative impacts predominantly affect the surrounding areas and communities, leading to social segregation, isolation, disruption of spatial fabric, class division, and reduced civic engagement. Table 1 presents a chronological summary of the 14 selected articles.

Five articles (5 out of 14) have utilised qualitative methods to collect data, which include interviews with different concerned stakeholders or questionnaires with residents of gated communities to gather their opinions and feedback, case studies, or referring to urban design principles and theories, for example (Al Omari, 2015; Al-Homoud & Al Aswad, 2018; Alaily-Mattar, 2008; El-Ekhteyar & Furlan, 2016; Elhadary & Ali, 2017; Glasze, 2006; Glasze & Alkhayyal, 2002). Three studies utilised mixed mixed-methods design, including interviews and structured interviews for data collection, for example (Abed et al., 2022; AlQahtany, 2022; Salim, 2021). Based on the reviewed articles, the following sections will present different experiences related to the narrative review questions, which include the reasons behind the emergence of gated communities in various settings and the positive and negative findings regarding the social and spatial impacts of gated communities.

4.3. Negative impacts of gated communities

4.3.1. Social segregation and separation

Social segregation was a recurrent theme in 11 out of the 14 articles reviewed. For cases in the GCC, gated communities were primarily developed to segregate and separate two societies with different backgrounds, namely Westerners from the local community (Glasze, 2006, p. 87). While this arrangement provides Westerners with more freedom and openness within the walls, it results in minimal interaction with the surrounding local culture, to the extent that many expatriates do not learn the local language despite their prolonged stay in the country (Glasze, 2006, p. 87). The socio-economic homogeneity exacerbates social fragmentation and reduces civic engagement, creating a social divide between gated communities and their surrounding neighbourhoods (Al Shawish, 2015, June 10-12, p. 72). The concept of 'private clubs', as Le Goix (2007) indicates, can be observed in these gated communities, where residents represent private members with their exclusive goods and services, serving a select group of people while excluding others. On the contrary, the Middle Eastern context presents a slightly different phenomenon since gated communities have segregated wealthy and affluent individuals from the wider community (Alaily-Mattar, 2008, p. 267). The decision to live in gated communities in the Middle East was driven by social and economic changes within the middle and upper-middle classes, who sought to seclude themselves from

Table 1. Summary of the Reviewed Articles. Author

SN	Article	Reference	Study Country/City	Methodology	Findings related to the reasons behind the emergence of gated communities	Positive findings related to Social and Spatial impacts of gated communities	Negative findings related to Social and Spatial impacts of gated communities
1	Gated housing estates in the Arab world: case studies in Lebanon and Riyadh, Saudi Arabia	Glaze & Alkhayyal (2002)	Saudi Arabia (Riyadh) & Lebanon (Beirut)	Comparative case study	Riyadh: Shift from traditional housing patterns, housing for Western professionals. Lebanon: Socio-political instability, lack of public sector support	Security during the Lebanese Civil War, a safe shared space for extended families, and economic benefits due to higher rents.	Social segregation in Riyadh, spatial isolation due to strict access control, and economic disparities in the surrounding areas.
2	Segregation and seclusion: the case of compounds for Western expatriates in Saudi Arabia	Glaze (2006)	Saudi Arabia (Riyadh)	Qualitative narrative interviews	Housing demand for Western professionals, the need for security and controlled access.	Community bonding among expatriates, cultural freedom, higher rental yields, and social networks.	Physical and social isolation, urban fragmentation, and pricing disparities affecting affordability.
3	Beyond gated communities? Detachment and concentration in networked nodes of affluence in the city of Beirut	Alaily-Mattar, (2008)	Lebanon (Beirut)	Qualitative study based on conceptual analysis	Desire for security, privacy, and social exclusivity.	Increased security, stronger social ties among affluent residents, and improved urban aesthetics.	Detachment from wider community, urban fragmentation, exacerbation of social disparities.
4	The Contribution of Gated Communities to Urban Development in Greater Cairo Region, New Towns	Ghonimi et al., (2011)	Egypt (Cairo)	Urban Studies, sociology, and urban planning theories	Protection of property boundaries, private sector-led urban expansion.	Social homogeneity, exclusive services for residents.	Spatial isolation, disruption of urban connectivity, and social polarization.
5	Gated communities in Istanbul: the new walls of the city	Akgün & Baycan (2012)	Turkey (Istanbul)	Ethnographic Study	Legislative, socio-economic, and demographic factors.	Sense of security and privacy, increase in property value.	Social division, urban sprawl, traffic congestion.
6	Choices and changes in the housing market and community preferences: Reasons for the emergence of gated communities in Egypt	Almatarneh (2013)	Egypt (Cairo)	Mixed Methods approach: Interviews with stakeholders (developers, marketers, designers), Survey questionnaire, discourse analysis of marketing material	Market demand, exclusivity, influence of real estate marketing.	Sense of community, homogeneity, shared amenities.	Socio-spatial segregation, transformation of urban space.

Table 1. (Continued).

SN	Article	Reference	Study Country/City	Methodology	Findings related to the reasons behind the emergence of gated communities	Positive findings related to Social and Spatial impacts of gated communities	Negative findings related to Social and Spatial impacts of gated communities
7	The Emergence of the Residential Gated Communities in Jordan	Al Omari (2015)	Jordan (Amman)	Qualitative study-review of secondary literature, comparative evaluation	Security, status, socio-economic restructuring, Western lifestyle influence.	Controlled environment, urban expansion, privacy.	Reinforces socio-economic distinctions, alters urban planning and land use.
8	Evaluating the Impact of Gated Communities on the Physical and Social Fabric of Doha City	Al Shawish (2015, June 10-12)	Qatar (Doha)	Qualitative case study with theoretical review of urban design principles	Demographic diversity, economic changes, employer-based housing.	Child-friendly spaces, diverse income-level offerings.	Urban fragmentation, restricted accessibility, weakened public interactions.
9	Sense of Community in Gated Communities in Doha: The Case of Al-Ein Compound in Ein Khaled Neighborhood	El-Ekhteyar & Furlan (2016)	Qatar (Doha)	Qualitative study: Case study with Interviews	Security, influx of foreign workforce.	Safe spaces, exclusive amenities, controlled environments.	Social isolation, exclusivity, affordability concerns.
10	A New Trend in Urban Housing: Gated Communities in Khartoum, Sudan	Elhadary & Ali (2017)	Sudan (Khartoum)	Case Study methodology	Economic growth, lack of government services, security concerns.	Social cohesion, improved urban stratification.	Spatial fragmentation, economic inequality, limited design diversity.
11	Social Shifts – Living in Gated Communities: A Case of Andalucía, Jordan	Al-Homoud & Al Aswad (2018)	Jordan (Amman)	Survey with a structured questionnaire	Lifestyle preference, investment appeal, privacy.	Sense of belonging, well-designed neighbourhoods, green space preservation.	Socio-spatial exclusivity, privatization of services.
12	Gated communities in Bahrain: historical and urban geographies	Salim (2021)	Bahrain	Mixed method study including semi-structured interviews	Housing for foreign workers, economic ties with Saudi Arabia.	Quality of life, diverse cultural adaptation.	Socio-economic segregation, social disconnection.
13	Evaluating the demographic scenario of gated communities in Dammam metropolitan area, kingdom of Saudi Arabia	AlQahtany (2022)	Saudi Arabia (Dammam)	Mixed method study, triangulation technique	Housing for expatriates, preference for homogeneity, security.	Community bonding, positive social interactions.	Gender-related segregation, socio-economic exclusion.
14	Social Sustainability in Gated Communities Versus Conventional Communities: The Case of Amman	Abed et al. (2022)	Jordan (Amman)	Mixed method – Survey and structured questionnaire	Housing affordability, rising costs, security, public amenities.	Strong social bonds, cohesive socio-economic groups.	Reduced civic engagement, service privatization, spatial segregation.

the broader community (Al Omari, 2015, p. 296). The architectural design of the single housing types also reinforces social and spatial discontinuities, which ultimately impact the social behaviour of the surrounding areas (Ghonimi et al., 2011, p. 6). In Turkey, Tanulku (2018, p. 107) argued that gated communities hinder the dialogue between residents, which thwarts the acceleration of society's diversity. By examining the marketing materials advertised by developers, prestige and exclusivity are identified as the top features of a successful gated community, and these features can be achieved through walls and gates that convey an evident exclusivity for a particular social class (Almatarneh, 2013, p. 571).

4.3.2. Seclusion and isolation

Another recurring issue is the seclusion and isolation created by the privatisation of public space and restricted access to gated communities. In the GCC, and based on the reviewed articles from Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Bahrain, gated communities are often guarded by security personnel, and access is usually limited to the residents of these developments and their visitors; for example, Saudi nationals were prevented from living or entering these communities (Glasze, 2006, p. 85). In Qatar, for instance, the walls surrounding these gated communities lead to poor urban accessibility and weak interaction between people; this includes the interrelationships among residents within the same community due to lake of socio-economic diversity (Al Shawish, 2015, June 10-12, p. 76). In another example, in Qatar, residents do not have any social interactions with the surrounding neighbours, and even their children are prohibited from leaving the community (El-Ekhteyar & Furlan, 2016, p. 132).

On the other hand, the articles reviewed in the Middle East, from Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, and Sudan, reflect that gated communities are typically built on large, often isolated plots that are far from city centres. This physical separation creates isolated islands of wealth, disconnected from the surrounding urban infrastructure (Alaily-Mattar, 2008, p. 265; AlQahtany, 2022, p. 17). For instance, developers in Jordan and Lebanon designated vast natural or agricultural land to build their projects away from the city and urban structures (Glasze & Alkhayyal, 2002, p. 333; Makhamreha & Almanasyeha, 2011, p. 253). Similarly, in Turkey, gated communities were proven to offer social values; nevertheless, these social interactions were within the residences and were not extended to the surrounding neighbourhoods due to the surrounding high walls (Akgün & Baycan, 2012, p. 107). In Sudan, neighbouring residents were unable to access services offered within gated communities as access was restricted to residents only. Thus, hiding behind walls implies that people are not enthusiastic to interact with people from outside the walls (Elhadary & Ali, 2017). In Egypt, Ghonimi et al. (2011, p. 9) explained the definition of social impact from Putnam's concept of social capital, where social interaction supports creating strong communities and personal commitments. On the contrary, gated communities disconnected any possible correlation between parts of the city and isolated people from the public domain. For instance, the initial vision of gated communities in Cairo was to create new towns that interconnect and correlate the wealthy with their inferior neighbours in an amalgamated urban form that is liberal, and all services are within walking distance. Tragically, the outcome was a product that excludes people with low incomes and secludes high-class individuals in walled zones (Ghonimi et al., 2011, p. 15).

4.4. Positive impacts of gated communities

Despite the negative impacts, gated communities have several positive aspects, particularly for their residents and the local economy, as highlighted in the majority of the reviewed articles. One of the most frequently highlighted benefits is the creation of temporary jobs during the development and construction phase, or long-term jobs for service providers during the post-delivery phase (Elhadary & Ali, 2017, p. 52). Moreover, most of the reviewed articles mentioned that gated communities often foster a strong sense of community and social cohesion among residents, as they gather people of similar socio-economic backgrounds (Abed et al., 2022; Glasze, 2006). From a security perspective, most articles agreed that gated communities offer a safer environment, particularly for children, as they restrict traffic and cars. In addition to the increased green urban spaces due to the large, landscaped areas, swimming pools, natural spaces, and well-designed neighbourhoods (Al-Homoud & Al Aswad, 2018).

4.4.1. Economic impact

Economically, several researchers have argued that gated communities can have a positive impact both internally, within residents, and on the surrounding neighbours. For example, Salcedo and Torres (2004) suggested that developing gated communities can help create low-skilled jobs, such as those of construction workers during the construction phase or security personnel and cleaners post-completion. Whereas Le Goix (2005) discussed that the tax revenues generated from these developments can help local governments. Furthermore, Webster (2002) suggested that gated communities can function as 'economic clubs' where economic rights over shared neighbourhood features are legally protected. In other words, since gated communities operate as clubs, members can gain privileges and benefits by being a part of this community. On the other hand, Landman (2000, Aug 23-25) suggested that gated communities are influential urban products that have the potential to influence and transform the environment of urban areas in the 21st century. Her argument regarding the financial implications is complicated, as gated communities promise increased property values and potential insurance benefits. Nevertheless, they impose significant costs during their establishment and maintenance, which may add financial burdens on residents that lead to internal conflicts and ultimately impact democracy and urban sustainability (Landman, 2000, Aug 23-25, p. 5).

However, the reviewed articles in the Middle East align with the positive economic benefits of gated communities worldwide, as they reduce the cost of shared infrastructure and communal areas, and typically provide common amenities, such as playgrounds and recreational facilities (Glasze & Alkhayyal, 2002, p. 324). Moreover, rental rates in gated communities tend to be higher when compared to similar properties in non-gated developments, primarily due to the enhanced facilities and services they offer. Additionally, property owners refuse to reduce rental charges, which provides misleading indications of the rental market to the surrounding areas and leads to economic disparities (El-Ekhteyar & Furlan, 2016, p. 130; Glasze & Alkhayyal, 2002). In Sudan, for instance, where a significant portion of the population lives below the poverty line, gated communities may exert additional pressure on local governments to improve public

services for residents outside the walls (Elhadary & Ali, 2017, p. 52). Similarly, in Egypt, gated communities have been found to create an imbalance in the distribution of economic resources due to their unaffordability, making them inequitably unaffordable for the average Egyptian citizen (Ghonimi et al., 2011, p. 17). Furthermore, gated communities may impact the prices of houses in the surrounding areas, as they tend to elevate the actual prices of these houses to match those in neighbouring gated communities.

5. Discussion

The primary objective of this study was to critically examine the rise of gated communities in Middle Eastern and GCC cities through a narrative review of the literature, focusing on the reasons behind their emergence in the selected study area, as well as their positive and negative social and spatial impacts. This article suggests that two types of gated communities have emerged in the study area: the Middle Eastern type and the GCC type. The Middle Eastern type has primarily developed due to the government's lack of public facilities and infrastructure, which has allowed the private sector to fill this gap. Additionally, the demand for exclusivity, security, and prestige among affluent individuals has contributed to the expansion of these services. On the contrary, the GCC type originated as a residential model catering to Western expatriates, driven by oil exploration and foreign investment in the region.

Despite these contextual differences, gated communities across both regions exhibit shared socio-spatial attributes, which can be categorised into positive and negative aspects:

5.1. Positive aspects

- Enhanced Security and Safety: Gated communities are perceived to provide a controlled environment with lower crime rates, which remains a key attraction for residents.
- Community Cohesion and Identity: The controlled nature of these developments fosters a sense of belonging among residents.
- Access to Green Spaces and Exclusive Amenities: Many gated developments prioritise landscaping, recreational spaces, and high-quality infrastructure, which may not always be available in surrounding urban areas.
- Lifestyle: Gated communities often serve as aspirational living environments, attracting families.

5.2. Negative aspects

- Segregation and Social Fragmentation: By restricting access, these communities create divisions between residents and non-residents, exacerbating socio-economic inequalities.
- Urban Discontinuity and Spatial Isolation: The physical barriers and exclusive nature of these communities disrupt urban connectivity and limit integration with the surrounding city.

- Affordability and Exclusion: Due to high costs, these developments remain accessible only to specific social groups, reinforcing socio-economic stratification.

The findings of this study align with Qureshi (2023) results, which also include insights from other cities in the Global South. Consequently, it can be suggested that gated communities may contribute to urban challenges such as the integration of functions and duplication of services. By examining the phenomenon through a social control perspective, it provides a deeper understanding of the socio-political implications associated with gated communities. Furthermore, findings of this study align with existing literature on gated communities in terms of their role in fostering socio-spatial segregation and urban discontinuity. However, what differentiates Middle Eastern gated communities from their global counterparts is their entanglement with state-driven development agendas, expatriate housing policies, and the privatisation of urban governance. In particular, the Gulf states exemplify a model where gated communities serve as strategic tools for economic diversification and attracting global investment, a phenomenon less commonly observed in Western or African contexts. Furthermore, the region's governance structures, which blend state intervention with privatised urban management, create a unique framework for spatial control and exclusivity. By foregrounding these factors, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how gated communities function within the socio-political fabric of the Middle East, rather than merely replicating global trends.

This study contributes to the existing literature on gated communities by providing valuable insights into their motivations and impacts, particularly in the context of the Middle East and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).

6. Conclusion and study implications

The reviewed articles were narratively and critically analysed to extract key issues related to the development of gated communities in the Middle East and GCC. The analysis revealed that the social segregation of Westerners from the local culture, aiming to replicate similar lifestyles back home, was a primary factor behind their emergence in the GCC. In contrast, in the Middle East, the rise of the middle and upper-middle class in society seeking seclusion from the crowd, along with desires for luxury and safe play areas for children, drove the development of these communities. Additionally, the transformation and urban restructuring that took place over the past two decades, influenced by globalisation and neoliberalization, facilitated the proliferation of gated communities led by private developers.

The findings also highlighted both positive and negative social and spatial impacts, with the majority of the articles emphasising the benefits of gated communities, such as safe places for children, a sense of belonging, social networking, social homogeneity, and exclusive amenities.; however, these positive impacts and advantages tend to be confined within the walls of these communities. Unlike the motivation for gated communities in the U.S. and Europe in the 1950s, which focused on security and prestige, their spread in the Middle East and the GCC has become a trend of luxury and exclusivity for affluent individuals who can afford to live in them.

The current study serves as a starting point for understanding the implications of this type of residential product on the broader social and spatial urban transformations within the surrounding neighbourhoods. The new products of gated communities largely replicate the Western global model, built to serve affluent individuals as a safe haven. Furthermore, the private sector has filled the gap left by inadequate local government services, providing comparable facilities and services, as predicted by several authors since 2002, notably in the case of Cairo, Egypt.

Despite the spread of gated communities across the Middle East and GCC, the number of articles remains limited, and more studies are required to understand how planners and decision-makers plan to control the spread of gated communities. Additionally, a gap exists in understanding the relationship and comparison between GCC and Middle Eastern gated communities, particularly the reasons behind their emergence. While gated communities appeared in the GCC due to the exploration of oil, it raises the question as to why they continue to proliferate nearly a century after oil exploration, especially when over 48,000 vacant units were reported in 2011.

The conclusions extracted from this narrative review illustrate several social and spatial implications of gated communities at both micro and macro levels. There is an urgent need to revise the design regulations to control and diversify their growth, as this article does not advocate replacing gated communities with alternative housing products. Instead, it acknowledges their benefits and advantages while recognising the isolating impacts of how real estate developers marketed these products as elite places and distinct environments. To mitigate the spatial and social challenges that emerged from the spread of gated communities, planners and policymakers can leverage their positive aspects and benefits, such as safety and security for children, reduced traffic, green areas, a sense of belonging, enhanced quality of life, community and lifestyle and incorporate them in the neighbourhood design.

Notes

1. GCC: is a political and economic alliance of six Middle Eastern countries – Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, and Oman, and is called the Gulf Cooperation Council. Gulf Cooperation Council – Wikipedia.
2. Middle East is a geopolitical region that comprises the Arabian Peninsula (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Yemen, southern Iraq and Jordan), the Levant, Turkey, Egypt, Iran, and Iraq. Middle East – Wikipedia.

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ORCID

Ahmed Hammad http://orcid.org/0009-0006-7848-8116
Mengbi Li http://orcid.org/0000-0001-7499-8940
Zora Vrcelj http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1403-7416

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