

A Systematic Review of the Global Literature on Gated Communities: A Temporal Perspective

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Abstract

This study systematically reviews 336 peer-reviewed articles on gated communities (1997–2023) to examine thematic evolution and geographic diversification. Guided by a unified conceptual framework, it identifies six meta-themes and traces a transition from early defensive architecture to contemporary sustainable assemblages. The findings also reveal a significant “Southern turn” dominated by China and a conceptual shift where the gate has evolved from a physical barrier into a sophisticated filter for socio-political and ecological management. Transcending the state-retreat binary, this review advocates for assemblage theory and “negotiated urbanism” to address the urgent environmental and equity challenges posed by global gated urbanization.

Keywords

gated communities, systematic review, temporal analysis, southern turn, sustainability

Introduction

Gated communities (GCs) are defined as residential areas characterized by restricted access, private governance arrangements, and the privatization of spaces that are typically public (Bandaiko et al. 2023; Ehwi 2023; Webster, Glasze, and Frantz 2002). These enclaves house populations that are relatively homogenous in wealth (Giroir 2007), education (Almatameh 2013), interests (Saarinen and Wall-Reinius 2019), affiliations (Çavdar 2016; Rosen and Razin 2009), profession, and migration status (Jia and Morrison 2025). McKenzie (1994) distinguishes GCs from other large-scale residential schemes by their governance structures, particularly covenants, conditions, and restrictions regulating residents’ behavior, while Cséfalvay (2011) suggests looking beyond physical design to examine self-governance mechanisms and fiscal exchange models.

Since the 1980s, GCs have proliferated globally. By 2021, an estimated 29% of Americans (74.2 million people) lived in common interest communities (many comprising GCs or condominiums) (Foundation for Community Associations, 2021). Between 2000 and 2020, more than 200 new towns and cities emerged worldwide, particularly across Africa, the Gulf Region, India, and China, many featuring gated elements (Ehwi and Morrison 2022; van Noorloos and Kloosterboer 2018). This spatial form has received sustained

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scholarly attention since the early 1990s (Webster, Glasze, and Frantz 2002), though systematic reviews remain limited.

To date, two systematic reviews specifically focusing on GCs are documented. Blandy et al. (2003) conducted the first review, analyzing 30 studies largely centered on England with additional papers from North America, Australia, South Africa, and Latin America. The authors identified themes such as public attitudes, crime, segregation, and legal regulation, concluding that GCs correlate with spatial, social, and ethnic segregation. Bandaiko, Arku, and Nyantakyi-Frimpong (2022) provided the second review, examining GCs within African urban contexts. Their sample of 31 articles (1990–2020) identified urban fragmentation, globalization, and security as drivers; reported outcomes included increased social interaction and economic activity, alongside spatial inequality and division.

We contribute to the systematic review of GC research in two ways. First, we adopt a global approach that facilitates the synthesis of findings beyond the specific geographical focus of prior reviews. Second, we trace changes in thematic foci over time, addressing issues such as social justice, integrated urban environments, and sustainability, which are central to current planning scholarship (Ehwi and Morrison 2022; Mahmoudpour and Shirazi 2025; Pineo 2022). Overall, this review examines how gated living is conceptualized, produced, governed, and experienced in the context of residential segregation and environmental factors. We contend that the thematic focus of GC literature is not static; rather, certain themes have gained prominence, reflecting changing geographies and providing a transdisciplinary agenda aligned with contemporary challenges in urban planning. The remainder of the article is organized as follows: The “Methodology” section details the methodology. The “A conceptual framework for a global review of literature on gated communities” section outlines the conceptual framework based on established research themes. The “Findings” section presents the findings, and the “Discussion” section discusses the results and outlines future research, followed by conclusions in the “Conclusion and future research directions” section.

Methodology

We employed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) to identify and select materials for this study. We considered 336 peer-reviewed articles from more than 50 countries, with no thematic restrictions, to provide a global synthesis. We utilized PRISMA to report the review’s rationale, the procedures we followed, and the findings we obtained (Page et al. 2021). We used the systematic literature review (SLR) method to identify patterns in existing research, highlight knowledge gaps, and guide future inquiries. Additionally, we adopted a temporal lens to track when and where specific themes gained or lost prominence up until 2023.

The guiding question for this review was: “How have the thematic foci of gated community research shifted over time, and what issues have scholars emphasized since the field’s emergence?” To answer this, we compiled a search string encompassing singular and plural forms and UK/US spellings of terms: “gated community/communities,” “gated neighborhood/hoods,” “gated housing,” “private enclave(s),” “walled settlement(s),” “fortified enclave(s),” “urban gating,” and “gated estate(s).” We included variants such as “master-planned estate,” “settlement,” and “development.” We conducted searches across Scopus, selected for its indexing of social-science literature, and Taylor and Francis, using Boolean operators to capture identified synonyms. We scoped other databases (Web of Science, JSTOR) but excluded them due to duplication; we omitted Google Scholar to focus on peer-reviewed rather than gray literature.

We conducted the initial search on December 31, 2019, followed by a second search covering the period from January 1, 2020, to December 19, 2023. We selected 1972 as the starting year to coincide with Oscar Newman’s work on crime prevention through urban design, which scholars frequently cite as an early reference point for gated communities (Blakely and Snyder 1997).

The initial Scopus search, limited to titles, abstracts, and keywords, returned 1,195 results. We filtered these to 1,057 based on language (English only) and further reduced the sample to 710 journal articles to prioritize this format. After screening titles and abstracts, we retained 436 articles. Simultaneously, the Taylor and Francis search yielded 2,959 results; after filtering for language and document type, 2,346 remained, and we identified 87 articles as eligible through screening.

By merging these datasets, we produced 536 outputs. We removed 245 duplicates, leaving 278 articles, and added six articles identified via Google alerts in January 2020. We later excluded eighteen articles due to study design or data consistency issues, leaving 266 articles. Following the same protocol for the second search, we identified 70 new articles (64 from Scopus and six from Taylor and Francis), resulting in a final sample of 336 articles (see Figure 1).

To assess each article, we used eight questions focusing on: (1) aims and objectives, (2) research questions, (3) methodology, (4) theory, (5) analytical techniques, (6) findings, (7) conclusions, and (8) themes. We concentrated the final analysis on the four elements present across the entire sample: aims/objectives, research questions, findings, and conclusions. We recorded data in Excel and exported it to SPSS (version 28) for statistical analysis. We conducted both thematic and temporal analyses of the data.

For the thematic analysis, we followed Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six-phase approach in two stages. In the first stage, we allocated articles among the team and recorded reflections based on the eight review questions. The team then peer-reviewed these summaries to ensure consistency. In the second stage, the lead author categorized the articles under the

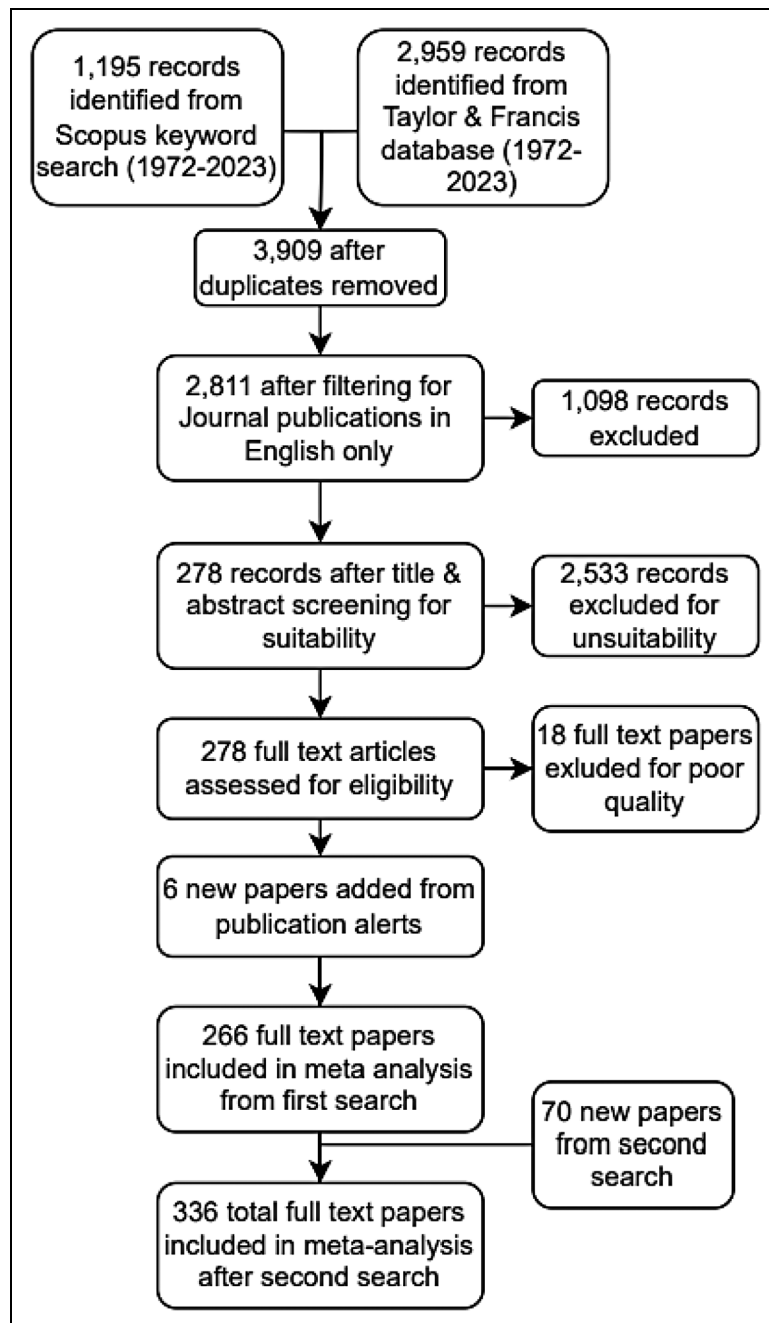


Figure 1. Summary of steps taken in the systematic review of literature following the PRISMA approach. Source: Authors' creation (2024).

meta-themes of the conceptual framework by examining their objectives and findings. All co-authors reviewed and validated these categorizations.

We grouped the publication years into four six-year intervals: Phase 1 (1997–2003), Phase 2 (2004–2010), Phase 3 (2011–2017), and Phase 4 (2018–2024). These intervals facilitated the identification of short-to-medium-term shifts in thematic focus. We then filtered each theme based on these phases and extracted the research questions, findings, and conclusions of each article into a dedicated document. We

reviewed this material and generated descriptive and in-vivo codes from the findings, which we grouped into categories and refined into sub-themes for discursive analysis. To ensure thematic significance, we only retained sub-themes that appeared in more than one article (Gupta 2025).

We then named each sub-theme to reflect its core argument and integrated it into a synthesis aligned with the conceptual framework. To protect against groupthink, we followed established research steps (Van Bavel et al. 2020) and shared the coding schedule and thematic classification spreadsheet with

two external urban scholars for feedback. They audited the classifications to ensure the themes represented the research aims, findings, and conclusions. This external peer-review exercise served to address potential biases in the study. Finally, we recognize that while our study draws from an evidence base of 336 articles, it is limited to peer-reviewed journal articles published in English. As such, we acknowledge that our findings may not fully capture perspectives available in non-English scholarship.

A Conceptual Framework for a Global Review of Literature on Gated Communities

Scholars have employed a range of theories to explain the operation and appeal of GCs. One foundational framework is Buchanan's (1965) *club good theory*, later applied by Foldvary (1994), Webster (2001), and Cséfalvay (2011). This theory conceptualizes GCs as exclusive clubs, where restricted access and regular fees support communal amenities, resolving the free-rider problem (McKenzie 2003). Complementary ideas such as *public choice theory* (Cséfalvay 2011, Gooblar 2002) and the *gating coalition model* (La Grange 2014, Vesselinov, Cazessus, and Falk 2007) help explain how municipal governments, real estate developers, and households coalesce to enable GC development. Municipalities facing budget constraints, aging infrastructure, and voter discontent, developers seeking profit, and residents desiring safety and prestige are the core actors in this alignment. Together, their shared interests foster GC proliferation. Further theories enrich this understanding. Oscar Newman's *defensible space* (1972) and Kelling and Wilson's *broken windows theory* (1982) suggest that spatial design can deter crime or encourage it through visible neglect. Tiebout's model (1956) also explains how households relocate, or "vote with their feet," when dissatisfied with public services.

Evidently, each theoretical perspective illuminates specific facets of gated developments; however, none alone captures the phenomenon's full complexity, particularly on a global scale. In response, the authors drew on their extensive experience as GC researchers across diverse geographies to propose a flexible framework that accounts for how GCs develop or emerge, their characteristics, people's rationales for choosing GCs, residents' lived experiences in GCs, and the impacts GCs have. This framework (Figure 2) served as the basis for organizing themes during the detailed analysis of the shortlisted literature and allowed the researchers to introduce new sub-themes reflecting the evolution of the literature beyond existing conceptions. Additionally, a multiple-theme category was created to accommodate articles that did not fit neatly under a single theme. The subsequent paragraphs offer an overview of the main thematic issues.



Figure 2. A conceptual framework of main themes in gated communities literature. *Source:* Authors' creation (2024).

Development of GCs includes literature exploring the conditions and processes underpinning GC formation. Key contributors include global economic forces, such as neoliberalism, consumer culture, and international investment flows (Grant 2009; Güzey 2014; Roitman and Phelps 2011). Local market practices play a role, such as the denomination of real estate transactions in US dollars (Grant 2005b), as do national policy incentives like enterprise zones and innovation hubs (Zoomers et al. 2017). Planning frameworks, including legislation and design codes, guide GC emergence (McKenzie 2003), while actor relationships, particularly those framed by the gating coalition, influence project dynamics (Grant 2005a; La Grange 2014).

Individual motivations for living in GCs cover the drivers that prompt households to leave conventional suburbs. Motivations include crime fears (Branic and Kubrin 2018; Durlington 2009), insecurity (Obeng-Odoom and Elhadary 2014; Low 2003), difficulties securing tenure (Ehwi 2023), and poor access to public amenities (Anokye, Paul, and Agyemang 2013). Additionally, residents often seek reliable electricity, water, refuse collection, and mechanisms for holding leaders accountable (Frias and Rodriguez 2018). Further to these push factors, there may be other pull factors such as prestige (Cséfalvay 2011), property value premiums (Soyeh, Asabere, and Owusu-Ansah 2021), increased property taxes and relief from financing public infrastructure (Ehwi 2024), and high profitability from the sale of houses in GCs (LaCour-Little and Malpezzi 2009) that make GCs a normalized phenomenon among households, planners, and developers, respectively. For households, these decisions precede relocation and reflect broader societal conditions.

Experience of gated living captures residents' regular experiences after moving into GCs. Studies by Kufour (2011) and Sander (2016) have revealed discrepancies

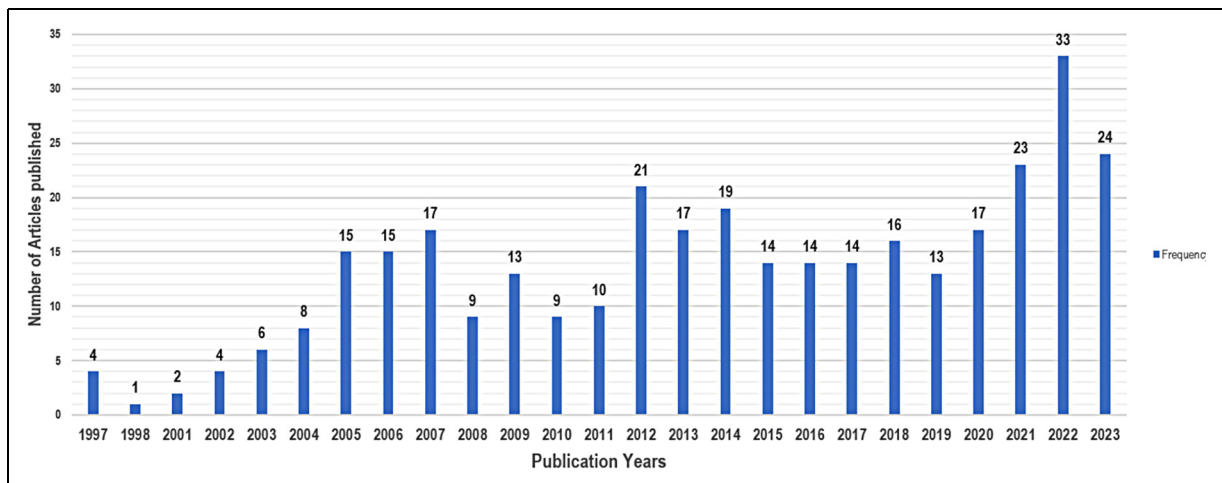


Figure 3. Number and percentage of articles published on gated communities, 1997–2023. *Source:* Authors' creation (2024).

between developer-driven expectations and residents' lived experiences, including those of children and young people growing up within gated settings (Tang 2017). Positive accounts often contrast with unmet promises or latent tensions, offering a nuanced picture of everyday life in GCs (Kufour 2011).

Features of GCs address both physical and symbolic characteristics. This includes GC typologies (Grant and Mittelstaedt 2004; La Grange 2018), design elements (Clement and Grant 2012; Xu and Yang 2009), and security infrastructure (Ehwi 2023; Roitman 2013). Governance frameworks such as homeowners' associations (HOAs) and Conditions, Covenants, and Restrictions (CCRs) feature prominently, shaping interactions between developers, residents, and local authorities (Blandy, Dixon, and Dupuis 2006; Jia, Morrison, and Sielker 2023; McKenzie 1994). Social dimensions include internal relationships among GC residents (Blandy and Lister 2005) and links to surrounding communities (Roitman 2013).

Impacts of GCs comprise the broader effects GCs have on both residents and nonresidents. These include increased social interaction and economic dynamism within GCs (Mantey 2016), as well as heightened segregation and inequality in adjacent areas (Roitman and Phelps 2011). The issues highlighted under each theme are neither exhaustive nor static over time, as they would evolve in line with global developments and local specificities. We acknowledge that other thematic classifications are possible, but our framework captures the breadth of the literature while remaining manageable for synthesis.

Findings

Overview of the Data Analyzed

Although the search window for this review extended from 1972 to 2023, the final body of literature covers the period 1997–2023, representing a 27-year timeline and comprising

336 peer-reviewed articles. Over this period, publication output increased from the late 1990s, experienced a decline around 2011, and rose after 2020. The year 2022 recorded the highest number of publications, with 33 articles, indicating the current frequency of scholarly output (see Figure 3). These temporal patterns reflect the trajectory of research on GCs over recent decades. More than 96% of the studies in the sample were published after the review by Blandy et al. (2003), illustrating the expansion of the evidence base and the context for an updated synthesis.

In terms of the countries GC studies focus on, China represents one-fifth of all publications (67 articles, or 20.1%) (Figure 4). This follows accounting for studies that examine more than one country (14 articles, or 4.1% of the dataset) and those with at least five publications (approximately 1% of the dataset). This is followed by the United States (29 articles, or 8.6%), South Africa (24 articles, or 7.1%), Turkey (19 articles, or 5.6%), and Australia (14 articles, or 4.1%).

Research on GCs is distributed globally and most world regions are represented (see Figure 5). Asia accounts for the largest share (118 articles, or 35%), followed by Africa and North America (each contributing 44 articles, or 13%), Europe (30 articles, or 9%), and South America (27 articles, or 8%).

A longitudinal analysis shows the United States was the primary source of GC scholarship from 1997 to 2011 (Figure 6). From 2012 onwards, China emerged as the leading source of scholarship, with Turkey, South Africa, Argentina, and Ghana appearing more frequently after 2016. China's position correlates with its urban expansion and pro-growth policies since the 1980s (Fu and Zhang 2023) as well as international interest in its urban models. The 336 articles reviewed appeared in 149 distinct journals. The leading outlets ranked by the number of publications on GCs were *Housing Studies*, *Urban Studies*, *Urban Geography*, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, and *Housing Policy Debate*. Some journals, like *Housing Studies*, commissioned special issues on GCs in 2005 (see

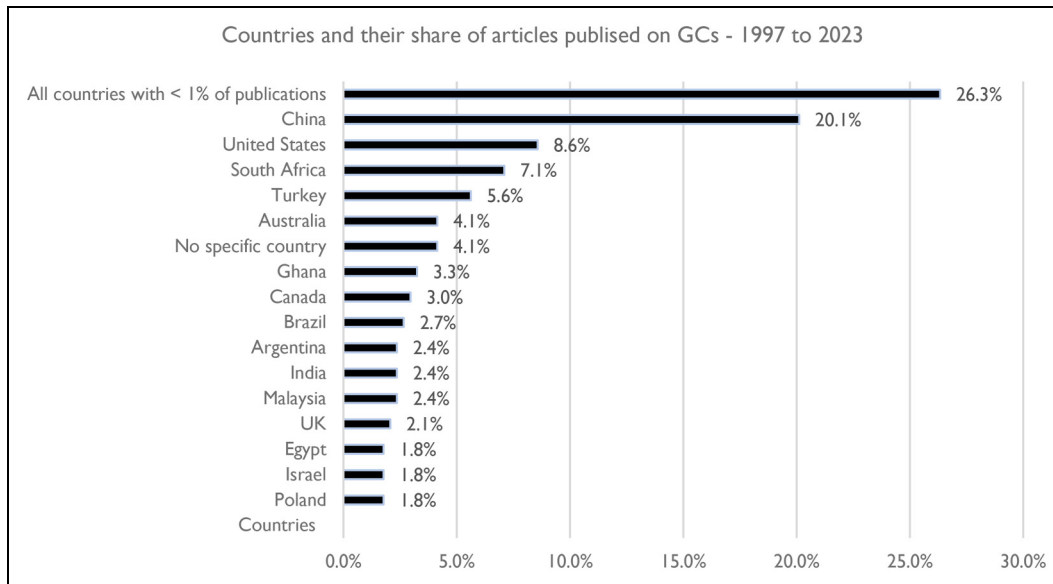


Figure 4. Countries and their share of publications on GCs. Note: Less than 1% of publications = five articles. Source: Authors' creation (2024).

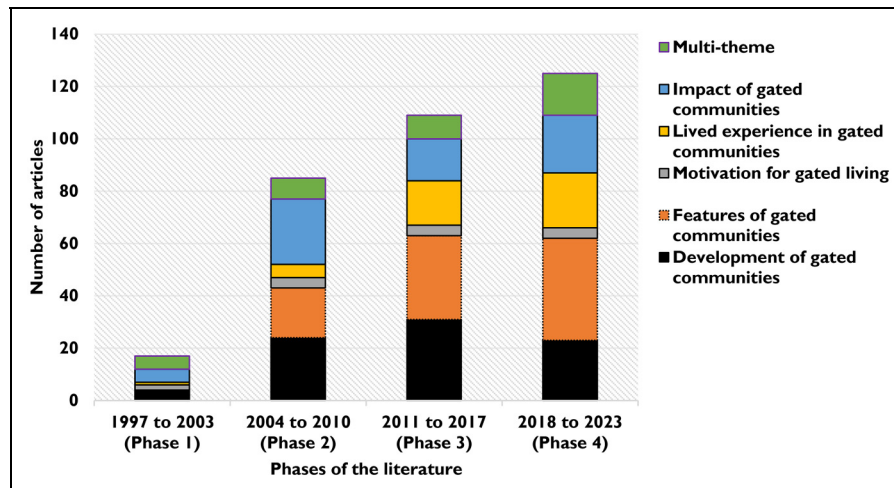


Figure 5. Global spread of gated communities across four phases (1997–2023). Source: Authors' creation (2024).

Volume 20, Issue 2), contributing to their ranking. Beyond these, GC scholarship spans fields such as law, sociology, politics, conservation, anthropology, and environmental studies, highlighting its transdisciplinary nature.

Temporal Analysis of Main and Sub-Themes Identified

The scholarship, as shown in Figure 5, continues to focus on physical form, with “Features” (90 articles) and “Development” of GCs (82 articles) comprising the majority of the corpus. This indicates an established focus on GCs as a product. In contrast, “Individual Motivations” (14 articles) and “Lived Experience” in GCs (44 articles) provided

qualitative insights. A Phase 3 decline in “Impact” studies correlates with a shift from macro-sociological critique toward micro-level management and private governance. However, the steady rise of “Multiple Themes” (38 articles) represents a significant trend, indicating that the field is moving toward an intersectional understanding of GCs as socio-political assemblages where design, governance, and social outcomes are linked. The following sections unpack how the focus of each theme has shifted over the four phases.

Development of gated communities

Phase 1 (1997–2003): Regulatory lacunae and defensive urbanism. At the turn of the millennium, early scholarship

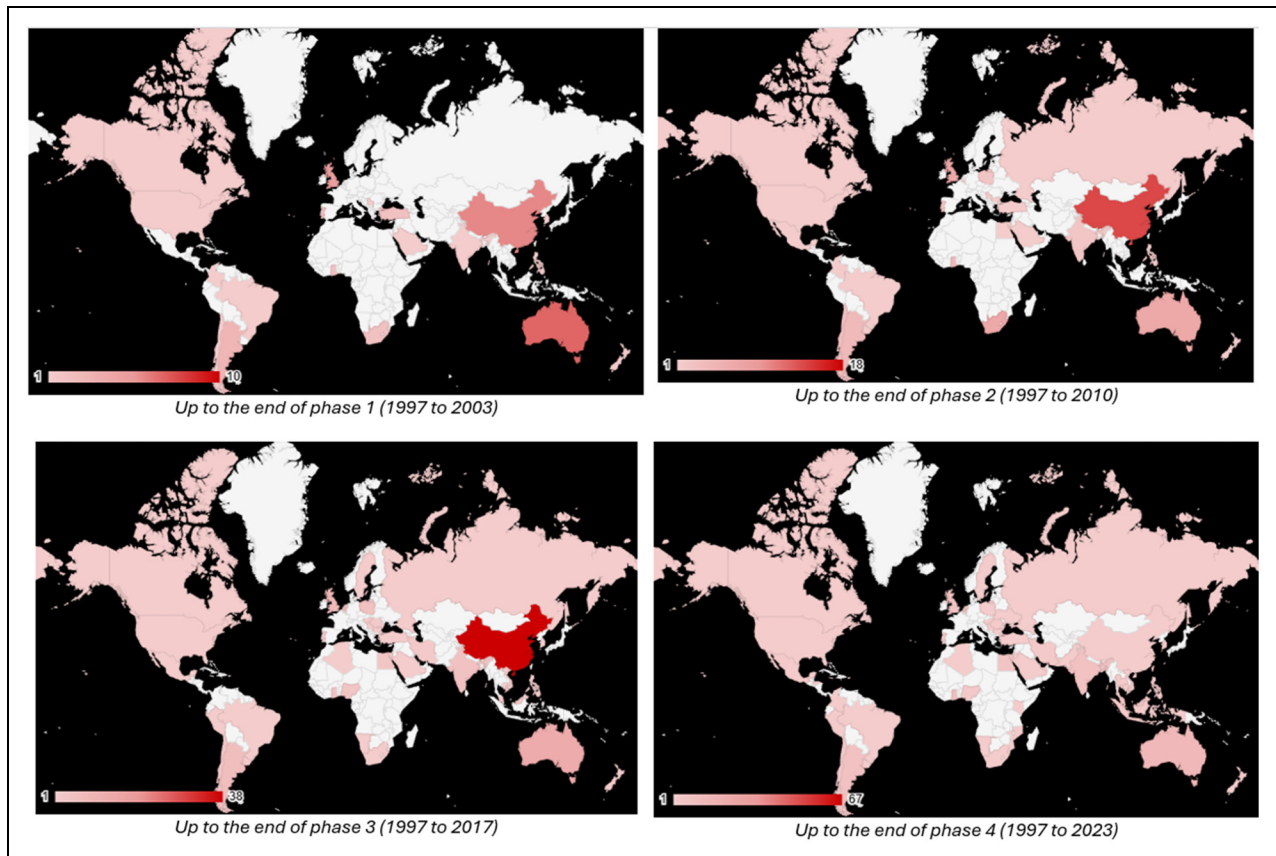


Figure 6. Temporal analysis of the main themes of GCs between 1997 and 2023. Source: Authors' data analysis (2024).

characterized GC development as a product of a regulatory vacuum within neoliberal planning (Blandy and Parsons 2003; Webster 2001). However, subsequent analysis (e.g., Lu, Zhang, and Wu 2020; Pow 2009) suggests that this was less a vacuum and more an active state strategy to facilitate market-led enclosure and urban segregation, particularly in the Global South. Simultaneously, research in the United States by Luymes (1997) and McKenzie (2003) observed that the proliferation of common interest developments correlated with a preference for private governance and security among buyers seeking alternatives to municipal service delivery. Scholars during this era (Blandy and Parsons 2003; Luymes 1997) argued that these developments were influenced by market incentives that prioritized suburban land value over social integration.

Phase 2 (2004–2010): Commodification, globalization, and hybrid identities. The discourse subsequently focused on the commodification of the “gated lifestyle” as a globalized product. Comparative studies in Germany and Hungary by Bodnar and Molnar (2010) highlighted how varying degrees of state involvement influenced the marketization of these estates. In China, marketing strategies blended Western prestige

symbols with local cultural nuances (Wu 2010), while in Saudi Arabia, expatriate compounds utilized Western models to maintain local segregation (Glasze 2006). As gating expanded across Canada (Grant 2005a), Turkey (Geniş 2007), and Brazil (de Souza e Silva 2007), scholars noted that while globalization was a common driver, unique planning cultures produced varied spatial outcomes. In Ghana, the development of these enclaves revealed a tension between the professional rhetoric of “compact city” ideals and the fiscal motives of developers catering to affluent demand (Grant 2005b).

Phase 3 (2011–2017): Transnational capital and politicized enclaves. During the third phase, research expanded to address mega-projects and the intersection of gating with transnational capital and socio-religious identities. In Latin America and Africa, speculative investments produced self-sufficient “mega-gated cities” that correlated with documented ecological impacts (Klaufus et al. 2017). In Turkey, GCs were analyzed as arenas where secular and religious identities influenced lifestyle choices (Çavdar 2016), while in India, private cities became associated with middle-class aspirations and liberalization, alongside patterns of increased segregation (Dupont 2016). Research in South Africa further

developed this argument by suggesting that gating often expressed collective nostalgia and social anxiety rather than immediate security threats (Dirsuweit and Wafer 2016). During this period, municipal governments in Singapore (Pow 2013) and Puerto Rico (Carrasquillo 2011) utilized gated living as a tool for city branding and consumer citizenship.

Phase 4 (2018–2024): Diversification, governance, and the ethics of enclosure. The contemporary era reflects a more diverse body of scholarship. In China, the discourse has focused on “un-gating” policies, which highlight the tension between enhancing urban connectivity and protecting residents’ private property rights (Hamama and Liu 2020). In Turkey and India, the state has increasingly assumed the dual role of regulator and developer, using branded housing to facilitate the privatization of land (Serin, Smith, and McWilliams 2020) and sacralize consumption (Roy Chaudhuri and Jagadale 2021), respectively. In the latter context, this involves framing luxury lifestyle choices as a marker of social status, associating private consumption with narratives that justify the exclusion of the wider public. Recent scholarship has examined the consequences of leisure-oriented gating, such as “green apartheid” in South African wildlife estates (Koot, Büscher, and Thakholi 2022), and the labor dynamics supporting Indian golf communities (Waldman 2022). While historical precedents for gating in social housing exist, often rooted in defensive space theories (Manzi and Smith-Bowers 2005; Newman 1972), recent studies identify a change in how these enclosures are governed and perceived. In Sweden and France, contemporary gating in social housing is increasingly analyzed through the lens of “micro-segregation” rather than crime prevention (Grundström and Lelévrier 2023). This indicates that the institutional logic of the GC is expanding across the socio-economic spectrum, reflecting a broader normalization of enclosure in the modern urban fabric.

Features of gated communities

Phase 1 (1997–2003): Thematic absence. During this phase, empirical research into the internal features of GCs was limited. While scholars documented the proliferation of these estates and their impacts within other themes, the physical and architectural characteristics were not a primary focus of scholarly interest at this time.

Phase 2 (2004–2010): Emerging taxonomies and territorialization. Scholarship on the features of GCs increased in the mid-2000s, with the development of descriptive taxonomies to classify emerging forms of enclosure. A review by Grant and Mittelsteadt (2004) established eight distinct factors to categorize physical forms, including functions of enclosure, types of barriers, and internal amenities. Concurrently, research in the United States by Charmes (2010) indicated that features such as cul-de-sacs and street closures served to territorialize space and were associated

with social homogeneity. In the Global South, South African scholarship linked walls and controlled entries to institutional fragmentation (Roitman, Webster, and Landman 2010), while North American hedonic analyses indicated that restricted access features correlated with increased property values, positioning the gate as a commodified symbol of prestige (LaCour-Little and Malpezzi 2009). In China, research observed that designs prioritizing private individuality often correlated with a sense of anonymity, noting a lack of public involvement in the design process (Pow 2007).

Phase 3 (2011–2017): Socio-legal frameworks and club goods theory. During this period, scholarship increasingly adopted socio-legal frameworks to understand the transition of gated features. Research from China indicated that diverse housing types, including high-grade villas and high-density units, often coexist within single gated complexes, suggesting that gating features respond to market supply and demand (Song and Liu 2017; Yang, Li, and Webster 2016). In Malaysia, studies by Ainur Zaireen et al. (2015) and Zainudin and Hussin (2015) distinguished between high-rise strata enclaves and landed estates, showing how specific legal provisions and land codes dictate physical layouts. Meanwhile, research in South Korea by Woo and Webster (2014) applied club goods theory to argue that private amenities co-evolve alongside, or in response to, the limitations of public services. These works shifted beyond typology to explain how features reflect regulatory regimes and social hierarchies.

Phase 4 (2018–2024): Socio-political assemblages, sustainability, and governance. Contemporary research treats physical features as instruments of governance, sustainability, and socio-political dynamics. In the Chinese context, scholars (Lu, Zhang, and Wu 2020; Phelps, Miao, and Zhang 2023) argue that gating has become a mechanism through which the state transfers the responsibility for housing and infrastructure to the market while retaining a degree of social control. In Pakistan, the reduction of street connectivity has been linked to lower perceptions of crime (Gul et al. 2019), reflecting the defensive utility of the gate. However, other Chinese studies (Liao, Wehrhahn, and Breitung 2019) have noted that walls often regulate and filter flows rather than preventing them entirely, suggesting that mobility can remain fluid despite enclosure. In India, the presence of class and caste boundaries continues to restrict access to gated estates (Waldrop and Egden 2018), suggesting that physical features mirror social exclusions.

Research in Ghana by Ehwi (2023) suggests that while perimeter walls provide security and serve as marketing devices, cluster walls are used to organize internal social space. Research from Turkey by Korkmaz and Alkan Meşhur (2021) has highlighted the rise of “eco-estates” that utilize natural imagery as a marketing feature, though these may not always deliver environmental sustainability. The

governance of these features has also come under scrutiny, with analysts (Shi and Ling 2023; Treuke 2023) noting that property management companies, rather than homeowners' associations, often dominate neighborhood governance. Finally, while South African studies (Mistry and Spocter 2022a) suggest that "eco-estates" may support environmental goals, they raise questions regarding social cohesion. This has led to the proposal of principles for managing the "residential commons," emphasizing the need for membership rights and rules that align with local contexts (Shi, Ling, and Wang 2022).

Across these four periods, the scholarly focus has shifted from an essential documentation of physical attributes to a multi-layered analysis of how enclosure territorializes space and commodifies security. While early studies established the fundamental parameters of the GC as a distinct urban form, contemporary scholarship increasingly conceptualizes these enclaves as socio-political assemblages, where design elements mediate relations between residents, the market, and the state to highlight issues of urban justice.

Individual motivation for living in GCs

Phase 1 (1997–2003): Defensive urbanism and social ordering. Early scholarship conceptualized gated living as a response to perceived urban decline, primarily within the Global North. In the United States, research illustrated how discourses of fear were associated with physical safety and reflected class, race, and gender anxieties (Low 2001). According to Blakely and Snyder (1998), during this period, the rationale for gating was linked to class-based exclusion, where both luxury and middle-class developments utilized gates to signal status and maintain social distance. Motivations were identified as a combination of the defensive and the aspirational, correlating with a preference for privatized, homogenous social environments over municipal governance.

Phase 2 (2004–2010): The search for prestige and privatized control. By the mid-2000s, motivations diversified as gating became a globalized marker of distinction. In Turkey, residents sought seclusion and silence, viewing the gate as a barrier against traffic and urban disorder (Guzey and Ozcan 2010). In post-communist contexts such as Poland and Serbia, gating represented an ideological shift, where households utilized physical enclosure to secure private property rights (Polanska 2010) and spatial control (Hirt and Petrović 2010). Meanwhile, in South Africa, Durrington (2009) observed that media reportage of violence was associated with a heightened focus on safety, leading residents to avoid public spaces in favor of the perceived sanctuary of the enclave.

Phase 3 (2011–2017): Speculative investment and cultural identity. During this period, motivations were frequently associated with the socio-legal context of the state and the pursuit of financial capital. In Iran, the decision to move into GCs was linked to a 290 per cent increase in land values and the decline

of the agricultural sector, which positioned real estate as a stable investment avenue (Kheyroddin and Hedayatifard 2017). In Ghana, Sarpong (2017) observed that the search for "discernible neighbors" and private services was a primary factor, though reports of robberies within these estates indicated the limitations of formal security. European scholarship, particularly in the Netherlands, highlighted that motivations were sometimes rooted in architectural nostalgia and the desire for status symbols derived from built heritage (van Veldhuizen and Meier 2014). Research in the United States during this era identified that minority groups were represented in GCs in increasing numbers, specifically, African American and Hispanic populations grew to represent approximately 15% and 18% of the gated population respectively by the late 2000s, suggesting that the search for security and social advantage had expanded beyond traditional elite boundaries (Plaut 2011).

Phase 4 (2018–2024): Institutional failure and lifestyle migration. Contemporary research portrays GCs as "personalized infrastructures" selected in response to state fragmentation. For example, in South Africa, households engage in "semigration" by moving to coastal estates to avoid institutional challenges and crime while pursuing retirement or lifestyle migration (Ramsawmy, Rink, and Anderson 2020). In Ghana, the primary driver is identified as navigating land administration challenges and tenure insecurity, with gating serving as a surrogate for institutional protections (Ehwi, Morrison, and Tyler 2021). In Saudi Arabia, the gated lifestyle is often a deliberate choice to maintain internal social bonds while mediating relations with the outside world (AlQahtany 2022).

Over the four decades, scholarly interpretations of resident motivation have shifted from a focus on fear-driven withdrawal toward a complex analysis of status, lifestyle, and investment. Reflecting broader socio-political changes, the literature now frames the gate less as a defensive posture and more as a strategic tool for navigating fragmented urban systems. This transition illustrates how evolving research priorities and contexts have reoriented our understanding of risk and identity in gated landscapes.

Experience of Gated Living

Phase 1 (1997–2003): The fortified way of life. During the late 1990s, the lived experience in GCs was characterized by a focus on security. In societies with documented high crime rates, such as Brazil and South Africa, research by Landman and Schönteich (2002) indicated that security measures became central to daily life, involving 24-h guards and sensor-activated surveillance. This period saw a trend of spatial fragmentation, where urban experience was mediated by physical barriers that limited interactions between different social groups, ethnicities, and classes (Landman and Schönteich 2002).

Phase 2 (2004–2010): Conservative politics and manufactured community. By the mid-2000s, scholarship expanded to examine the political and social dimensions of enclosure. In Canada, residents of GCs were found to show a greater alignment with conservative political ideals than their non-gated neighbors, suggesting that the spatial environment relates to specific ideological orientations (Walks 2010). In Australia, the “lived experience” was utilized as a tool for social branding, where developers employed the concept of “community” to differentiate estates, even when social interaction was incidental or restricted (Gwyther 2005). In the British context, research by Blandy and Lister (2005) indicated that the experience was often solitary, as the focus on security was prioritized over communal engagement.

Phase 3 (2011–2017): The paradox of perceived safety versus functional security. During this period, research identified a gap between the psychological perception of safety and the physical reality of crime. In Nigeria, while street gates and barricades improved residents’ feelings of safety, they were found to be ineffective at curbing actual crime and often hindered emergency services (Adzande and Gyuse 2017). In Malaysia, resident satisfaction was associated with safety features like gates (Tan 2016), while in Iran, surveillance was linked to increased internal social cohesion alongside the reinforcement of external boundaries (Hedayati-Marzbali, Maghsoodi Tilaki, and Abdullah 2017). In China, research indicated that the experience varied by age group, with gated compounds providing areas for children while being perceived as restrictive by teenagers (Sander 2016).

Phase 4 (2018–2024): Governance, privacy, and the resilience of the enclave. In the contemporary era, the lived experience is characterized by the quality of private governance and environmental amenities. In rural China, research by Zhang et al. (2020) indicates that improved public lighting and facilities enhance the sense of safety more than physical gating, which is sometimes associated with a decline in neighborly relations. Current scholarship also examines the “management” of life, with studies in Ghana highlighting that satisfaction is predicted by privacy and the quality of property management services alongside security (Bandauko et al. 2023). Finally, recent findings in India (Adnan et al. 2023) and Malaysia (Bhattacharjee 2023) suggest that when diversity and managed amenities are present, the lived experience can involve improved social connectedness, moving the enclave towards a model of “managed resilience.”

The scholarship on lived experience has transitioned from documenting a “fortress mentality” to analyzing GCs as socio-political assemblages. The experience of gated living is currently framed as a managed mediation of urban life, where residents trade traditional public connectivity for a curated sense of safety, status, and private governance.

Impacts of gated communities

Phase 1 (1997–2003): Commodity production and the weakening state. Earlier studies identified the primary impact of GCs as the commodification of urban security and a transition in state regulatory involvement. In Portugal, the real estate sector took a lead role in the spatial organization of estates for the affluent, a process associated with a state framework that provided limited public goods or general spatial regulation (Raposo 2006). Comparative studies from Lebanon and Europe (Glasze 2003) indicate that these developments were characterized as “club economies,” where the provision of services was transferred from the public sphere to private homeowners’ associations, representing a shift in the social production of urban space (Kenzie 1997).

Phase 2 (2004–2010): Territorial mindsets and ecological fragmentation. By the mid-2000s, research focused on the hardening of social boundaries and environmental externalities. In Poland, the introduction of fences and surveillance was associated with “territorial mindsets,” where the distinctness of boundaries related to a decline in architectural and social flexibility (Kotus 2009). In Mexico, the impact was identified as both social and ecological (Sheinbaum 2008), as the demand for enclaves was linked to the loss of forested areas and increased spatial separation between different socioeconomic groups (see also Landman 2006 in South Africa). While some integrated developments in Chile reported improved amenities (Salcedo and Torres 2004), the reported global impact across the UK (Atkinson and Flint 2004) and South Africa (Landman 2006) was a fragmented urban fabric where private residential comfort was prioritized over municipal integration.

Phase 3 (2011–2017): From enclaves to gated cities. The third period documented a transition from isolated estates to larger-scale privatization. Projects like Waterfall City in South Africa indicated the rise of the private city, where the scale of gating relates to shifts in urban governance (Herbert and Murray 2015). In China, the “xiaoqu” model transitioned residential services into exclusive club goods, which was associated with a more polarized urban experience (Hendrikx and Wissink 2017). Research from Turkey (Apak 2015) and Palestine (Handel 2014) highlighted the “mobility paradox,” where walled suburbs were linked to car dependence and the creation of compartmentalized cities that restricted the movement of the non-gated population

Phase 4 (2018–2024): Quality of life versus social integration. Contemporary research highlights a trade-off between individual satisfaction and collective cohesion. In Kenya, while gated residents report higher quality-of-life satisfaction, they experience lower levels of community integration and social networking (Jimmy, Martinez, and Verplanke 2020). In China, the discourse has focused on the potential

effects of “un-gating,” which is estimated to improve local accessibility by up to 52%, though this faces resistance from residents who associate the gate with property value and safety (Yang, Tan, and Yan 2021). In South Africa (Ballard, Jones, and Ngwenya 2021) and Thailand (Moore 2022), research indicates that gating can impact vulnerable populations by restricting mobility and influencing the nature of service work within the enclaves that exclude them.

The impacts of GCs reflect a transition from physical segregation to institutional and ecological fragmentation. While providing selective amenities to residents, the literature documents external effects such as crime displacement and environmental pressure. Within a market-led urban context, the proliferation of GCs represents a spatial manifestation of shifting priorities in urban governance, affecting the pursuit of integrated planning outcomes.

Multiple themes

Phase 1 (1997–2003): Defensive revivals and the erosion of street life. Early multi-thematic scholarship identified an intersection between historical spatial patterns and modern privatization. In comparing Saudi Arabia and Lebanon, Glasze and Alkhayyal (2002) observed that the rise of gated estates was associated with a continuation of fragmented settlement patterns alongside a decline in public sector efficiency. This period identified a relationship between physical features and urban impact; in China, the “sealed residential quarter model” was found to alter public street life, as physical barriers limited the casual social interactions and pedestrian flows associated with integrated urban environments (Miao 2003).

Phase 2 (2004–2010): Parallel captivities and the roaming enclave. During this era, the discourse expanded to include the symbolic and transnational dimensions of enclosure. A conceptual development occurred with the identification of “roaming enclaves,” such as luxury cruise ships, which function as mobile GCs for high-net-worth individuals, combining specific tax statuses with social withdrawal (Atkinson and Blandy 2009). In Turkey, scholarship identified “parallel captivities” associated with neoliberal urbanism, where both the elite in their compounds and residents in informal settlements experience different forms of spatial exclusion (Candan and Kolluoğlu 2008). This period indicated that gating had transitioned beyond housing to become a lifestyle commodity defined by prestige and a preference for privatized environments over the heterogeneous public realm.

Phase 3 (2011–2017): Governance as an instrument of homogeneity. Between 2011 and 2017, research focused on how private governance frameworks relate to social outcomes. In Australia (Kenna and Stevenson 2013) and the United States (Forsyth and Crewe 2011), the rise of master-planned estates indicated that the socio-legal structures of “community titles” do more than manage assets; they are

associated with the maintenance of social homogeneity. While these enclaves can foster internal solidarity among residents, they are associated with a reduction in urban diversity, as private governance frameworks operate independently of municipal integration goals (Forsyth and Crewe 2011). In China, the degree of gating was identified as a primary predictor of resident safety perceptions, illustrating how physical features modulate the psychological lived experience (Yip 2012).

Phase 4 (2018–2024): Exclusionary commoning and the sustainable enclave. Recent scholarship utilizes the concept of “exclusionary commoning” to analyze how gating is framed as a collective social good. In Poland, research indicates that residents justify enclosure as a means of protecting the “commons” (Grabkowska and Szmytkowska 2021). Similarly, the rise of “eco-estates” in South Africa (Mistry and Spocter 2022a) and Iran (Mousavinia 2022) reflects a coupling of environmental sustainability with security to rationalize contemporary spatial segregation. Table 1 provides a summary of the temporal distribution of sub-themes on GCs’ literature analyzed above.

Discussion

The temporal analysis of the global literature on GCs reveals a transition from a focus on architectural morphology to an interrogation of socio-political assemblages. This shift represents a conceptual genealogy, where the thematic trends of one era influenced subsequent research agendas. In the initial phase (1997–2003), the literature was characterized by a supply-side narrative. Scholars primarily examined the development and features of enclaves, viewing them as physical manifestations of state frameworks or the privatization of public space (Glasze 2003; Raposo 2006). This early focus on defensive design and club economies established an empirical baseline for subsequent analysis. By defining the GC as a government-like entity (Callies, Franzese, and Guth 2003), researchers provided the groundwork for the socio-legal and governance-focused enquiries that followed. During this period, the “gate” was frequently framed as a binary marker of exclusion.

As GCs became globalized between 2004 and 2010, the field underwent a symbolic turn. The frequency of impact studies during this second phase was associated with an effort to understand the externalities of the previous decade’s growth. Research expanded beyond physical barriers to examine territorial mindsets (Kotus 2009) and the commodification of security (LaCour-Little and Malpezzi 2009). The emergence of the roaming enclave concept (Atkinson and Blandy 2009) decoupled the gated experience from fixed geography, suggesting that enclosure functioned as a portable identity. Findings on parallel captivities in the Global South provided a counterpoint to Eurocentric views of gating, indicating that enclosure was not only a Western import but often

Table 1. A Summary of the Temporal Distribution of Sub-Themes on Gated Communities' Literature (1997–2023).

Time Period	Development of GC (N = 82)	Features of GC (N = 90)	Motivation for GL (N = 14)	Lived experience in GC (N = 44)	Impacts of GC (N = 68)	Multi-theme (N = 38)
1997–2003	Regulatory lacunae and defensive urbanism (n = 4). E.g., (Blandy and Parsons 2003) and (Webster 2001) UK; (Webster 2001) US.	No study (n = 0)	Defensive urbanism and social ordering (n = 2). E.g., (Low 2001) and (Blakely and Snyder 1998) US.	The fortified way of life (n = 1). E.g., (Landman and Schönteich 2002) South Africa & Brazil.	Commodity production and the weakening state (n = 5). E.g., (Raposo 2006) Portugal; (Kenzie 1997) US.	Defensive revivals and the erosion of street life (n = 5). E.g., (Glasze and Alkhayyal 2002) Saudi Arabia & Lebanon; (Miao 2003) China; (Callies, Franzese, and Guth 2003) US.
2004–2010	Commodification, globalization and hybrid identities (n = 24) E.g., (Geniş 2007) Turkey; (Wu 2010) China; (Grant 2005a) Canada.	Emerging taxonomies and territorialization (n = 19). E.g., (Grant and Mittelsteadt 2004) No specific country; (Charmes 2010) US; (Roitman, Webster, and Landman 2010) South Africa.	Search for prestige and privatized control (n = 4). E.g., (Guzey and Ozcan 2010) Turkey; (Polanska 2010) Poland; (Hirt and Petrović 2010) Serbia.	Conservative politics and manufactured community (n = 5). E.g., (Walks 2010) Canada; (Gwyther 2005) Australia; (Blandy and Lister 2005) Britain/UK.	Territorial mindsets and ecological fragmentation (n = 25). E.g., (Kotus 2009) Poland; (Ward 2009) Mexico; (Sheinbaum 2008) South Africa.	Parallel captives and the roaming enclave (n = 8). E.g., (Atkinson and Blandy 2009) No specific country; (Candan and Kolluoglu 2008) Turkey.
2011 to 2017	Transnational capital and political enclaves (n = 31). E.g., (Klaufus et al. 2017) Latin America and Africa; (Çavdar, 2016) Turkey; (Dupont 2016) India.	Socio-legal frameworks and club good theory (n = 32). E.g., (Song and Liu 2017) China; (Ainur Zaireen et al. 2015; Zainudin and Hussin 2015) Malaysia; (Woo and Webster 2014) South Korea.	Investment and cultural identity (n = 4). E.g., (Kheyroddin and Hedayatifard 2017) Iran; (Sarpong 2017) Ghana; (van Veldhuizen and Meier 2014) Netherlands.	Paradox of perceived safety versus functional security (n = 17). E.g., (Adzande and Gyuse 2017) Nigeria; (Tan 2016) Malaysia; (Hedayati-Marzbali, Maghsoodi Tilaki, and Abdullah 2017) Iran.	From enclaves to gated cities (n = 16). E.g., (Herbert and Murray 2015) South Africa; (Hendrikx and Wissink 2017) China; (Apak 2015) Turkey.	Governance as instrument of homogeneity (n = 9). E.g., (Kenna and Stevenson 2013) Australia; (Forsyth and Crewe 2011) US; (Yip 2012) China.
2018 to 2023	Diversification, governance and ethics of enclosure (n = 23). E.g., (Hamama and Liu 2020) China; (Serin, Smith, and McWilliams 2020) Turkey; (Roy Chaudhuri and Jagdale 2021) India.	Socio-political assemblages, sustainability, and governance (n = 39). E.g., (Lu, Zhang, and Wu 2020) China; (Gul et al. 2019) Pakistan; (Ehwi, Morrison, and Tyler 2021) Ghana.	Institutional failure and lifestyle migration (n = 4). E.g., (Ramsawmy, Rink, and Anderson 2020) South Africa; (Ehwi, Morrison, and Tyler 2021) Ghana; (AlQahtany 2022) Saudi Arabia.	Governance, privacy, and resilience of the enclave (n = 21). E.g., (Zhang et al. 2020) China; (Bandauko et al. 2023) Ghana; (Bhattacharjee 2023) India.	Quality of life versus social integration (n = 22). E.g., (Jimmy et al., 2020) Kenya; (Yang, Tan, and Yan 2021) China; (Moore 2022) Thailand.	Exclusionary communing and sustainable enclaves (n = 16). E.g., (Grabkowska and Szymkowska 2021) Poland; (Mousavinia 2022) Iran; (Mistry and Spocter 2022a) South Africa.

a continuation of local settlement patterns (Candan and Kolluoğlu 2008).

The third phase (2011–2017) was marked by the application of socio-legal and club goods frameworks. Following the documentation of the existence and impacts of gates, scholars examined the internal mechanics of power. The prominence of governance as a theme during this period corresponds to the institutionalization of gated life. Findings indicated that the lived experience involved the management of club goods as an alternative to public services (Woo and Webster 2014). This period identified the paradox of perceived safety, where walls provided psychological comfort despite documented limitations in curbing crime (Adzande and Gyuse 2017).

The contemporary era (2018–2024) is defined by multi-thematic research where scholars increasingly view gating through integrated lenses. The emergence of “exclusionary commoning” (Grabkowska and Szmytkowska 2021) represents a shift in the literature, where the concept of the commons is utilized to rationalize enclosure. The current focus on “eco-estates” and sustainable design (Korkmaz and Alkan Meşhur 2021) suggests the field is examining how gating is framed in the context of environmental concerns. The temporal trajectory indicates that research focus has shifted from the gate as a barrier to the gate as a filter.

Early studies on development influenced later studies on impact, which in turn related to the current focus on lived experience and governance. The discipline has transitioned from viewing the gate as an architectural feature to conceptualizing it as a socio-political assemblage. Future research can now move beyond the enclave to interrogate how these private governance models relate to the definition of the public in the twenty-first-century city.

Conclusion and Future Research Directions

This systematic review of 336 peer-reviewed articles spanning nearly three decades indicates that GCs have transitioned from urban anomalies to an institutionalized mode of global city-building. The temporal analysis demonstrates a conceptual trajectory from the late 1990s, where research focused on regulatory gaps (Blandy and Parsons 2003) and defensive urbanism (Luymes 1997) in Britain (Webster 2001) and the United States (McKenzie 2003), to a contemporary understanding of the enclave as a socio-political and ecological assemblage. Theoretically, these findings suggest a move beyond the traditional state-retreat binary. As observed in the transition toward branded housing (Roy Chaudhuri and Jagdale 2021; Serin, Smith, and McWilliams 2020) in Turkey and India, the gate functions as an instrument of state reconfiguration, where governments facilitate gating to privatize land and sacralize consumption (Serin, Smith, and McWilliams 2020). Future scholarship can adopt lenses such as assemblage theory (Lu, Zhang, and Wu 2020) to explain how private property rights and hybrid governance arrangements intersect to redefine the social contract.


Additionally, while this review tracks the literature up to the contemporary era, the potential role of digital social networks and the pandemic-induced “cocooning” effect remains a research frontier. Future studies should investigate whether these sociological shifts have further influenced the retreat into privatized, risk-managed environments, potentially redefining the city’s role as an open social network.


Conceptually, the discipline now accounts for the rise of the sustainable enclave. Findings from the 2018–2024 period indicate that sustainability branding and natural imagery (Korkmaz and Alkan Meşhur 2021) are mechanisms of socio-spatial filtering, particularly in the eco-estates of South Africa (Mistry and Spocter 2022a) and Iran (Mousavinia 2022). This shift relates to the paradox of perceived safety (Adzande and Gyuse 2017), where the psychological comfort of the wall is documented alongside its limitations in curbing crime, as evidenced in studies from Nigeria (Adzande and Gyuse 2017) and Ghana (Sarpong 2017). Future research may adopt a comparative turn to interrogate whether these green enclaves deliver biodiversity or represent a form of “green apartheid” (Koot, Büscher, and Thakholi 2022) that caters to a lifestyle migration elite (Ramsawmy, Rink, and Anderson 2020).


These findings carry implications for the planning profession. The rise of mega-gated cities (Herbert and Murray 2015) in South Africa (Ballard, Jones, and Ngwenya 2021) and un-gating tensions in China (Yang, Tan, and Yan 2021) suggest that planners manage a balance between urban connectivity and the protection of private property rights (Hamama and Liu 2020). Policy-making could consider models of negotiated urbanism, where the granting of gating rights is contingent on the provision of public goods, such as accessible residential commons (Shi, Ling, and Wang 2022) and porous street configurations, to mitigate the mobility paradox (Apak 2015) and institutional fragmentation (Roitman, Webster, and Landman 2010). At a time of socio-economic polarization, the GC serves as a spatial response that fluctuates between a resident’s sanctuary and a factor in urban fragmentation. This review highlights a tension between private security and the preservation of integrated urban systems. Future scholarship should investigate governance models that manage these tensions to ensure that enclosure does not further affect urban connectivity.

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