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# The infectious divide: a comparative study of the social impact of gated communities on the surrounding in the middle East

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## Abstract

In recent years, gated communities have increasingly become an attractive lifestyle residence worldwide and in the Middle fostering security, privacy, seclusion, and exclusivity. Nonetheless, it seems that with these benefits, other impacts had unfolded and exposed the urban fabric to new attributes such as segregation, fragmentation, and social exclusion. However, gaps exist in the literature on comparative studies on gated communities in regions such as GCC (Gulf Corporation Council) countries and the Middle East (Glasze & Alkhayyal, 2002). This paper aims to examine the social impact of gated communities on the surrounding neighbourhoods through a comparative analysis of cases from the Middle East and GCC. The methodology was implemented to develop a qualitative framework of social segregation indicators to examine similarities and differences between the cases, aiming to identify patterns and gain insights to answer the article's question of whether this phenomenon can be contagious in different settings. Findings reveal that gated communities can have negative and positive impacts on the social well-being of the surrounding neighbourhoods and may lead to social segregation and exclusion in different geographical settings despite their emergence motives. The paper concludes that isolation and lack of interaction between residents inside and outside the walls may have impacts on the social aspect of the surroundings.

**Keywords** Gated communities · Urban/neighbourhood segregation · Social exclusion · GCC and Middle East

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## 1 Introduction

The rise of gated communities has been a vigorous topic globally discussed among planners and researchers. Literature has liberally discussed several cases of gated communities in the U.S. being the pioneering experiment in gating and closed housing developments (Webster, 2002). Researchers have argued their impacts on urban areas as well as their effects on social and economic development (Atkinson & Blandy, 2005). Nonetheless, the spread of gated communities has surged worldwide and become a feature of the urban landscape in many countries (Roitman, 2010). Developers promoted gated communities as housing products that offer lifestyle, attraction, and free-from-issues and provide attractive amenities for residents (Almatarneh, 2013). Henceforth, developers recognise this gap in society who cannot depend on public infrastructure to provide protection or lifestyle and would prefer living in gated developments. In addition, researchers have debated the relationship between gated communities and social cohesion. For example, Low (2001) argued that gated communities led to social segregation, whereas Salcedo and Torres (2004) counter-argued the social segregation impact and argued that gated developments promoted social integration and positively impacted the surroundings (Harold, 2018). The common understanding of gating and gated developments is that they represent isolation and serve privatism, eliminating community connections and cohesion (Gottdiener, 2019).

Although there is a growing body of literature on gated communities globally, there remains a dearth of comparative research in regions such as GCC and the Middle East, where gated communities are rapidly expanding. To the best of our knowledge, the only comparative study on the topic in GCC and the Middle East was by Glasze and Alkhayyal (2002), when they compared gated communities in Lebanon and Riyadh. Their study summarised the reasons behind the emergence of gated communities in both cities and concluded that their emergence in Lebanon is comparable to most of the other locations where the private sector takes the lead in providing affluent people with a Western lifestyle. Whereas in Saudi Arabia, gated communities may be related to the old Arabian traditions and patterns.

However, this study aims to investigate the impacts gated communities have on the surrounding neighbourhoods by conducting a comparative analysis of the social impact on the surroundings in four different settings: Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Bahrain, and Jordan. The selection of these countries was related to the contradicting reasons behind the emergence of gated communities, yet they may share similar social impacts. For example, in the GCC, researchers argued that gated communities can be related to the historical evolution of walled cities since cities throughout history were surrounded by walls for safety reasons (Touman, 2005). In addition to the arrival of Westerners with their families in the 1930s with the exploration of oil (AlQahtany, 2022). However, the emergence of gated communities in Jordan transpired after the year 1990 as extended family housing, then developed into a commercial gated community post-2009 with motives related to the demand of middle and upper middle society seeking lifestyle and seclusion from the crowd (Al Omari & Al Omari, 2015). The selection of these countries, along with their socioeconomic difference, may create an opportunity to examine the impacts associated with such developments in different conditions. Therefore, the primary objective of this study is to assess the reasons and motives behind the emergence of gated communities in different geographical locations and subsequently examine if the social impact on the surrounding neighbourhoods remains consistent across these diverse settings.

## 2 Literature review

Post World War II, the transformation of towns across the globe, and mainly in the U.S., created new suburban neighbourhoods that were remote from work, shopping areas, and entertainment, which later became the predominant form of neighbourhoods. With this change, new forms of walled cities, gated neighbourhoods, and gated communities were reformed late 20th century, influenced by socio-economic and urban forces. Over time, gated communities extended to many countries, attracting people who seek security, lifestyle, and socioeconomic isolation (AlQahtany, 2022, p. 14; Mohamed Salah & Ayad, 2018, p. 2745). For example, the U.S. has witnessed the highest growth of gated communities during that era due to several reasons, including socio-political changes, fear of crime, sociocultural differences, and the decrease in government responsibilities. Also, gated communities were seen in European cities such as London and Paris, as well as in developed and developing countries such as South Africa and Mexico City, but with different reasons for their spread (Smets, 2005, p. 3).

Moreover, in the Middle East region, gated communities spread enormously in Saudi Arabia, with more than 20 million residents selecting this type of housing (Mohamed Salah & Ayad, 2018, p. 2744). In Egypt as well, a study carried out by Ibrahim et al. (2011) identified more than 466 gated communities in the capital city were developed until 2010, and the number increased to 500 gated communities after three years in 2013 (Metwally & Abdalla, 2013). In a recent study carried out by Reda et al. (2022), the government introduced a housing development scheme for the middle class, which delivered an additional 140 thousand units in 2020 as gated communities developed by the government. Their study concludes that gated communities may pose social segregation despite their “utopian and revolutionary designs”.

Thus, gated communities are private residential areas that are known for their limited access and luxurious facilities; they have attracted the interest of scholars who are keen on exploring their origins, influences, and effects on urban growth and community relations. They are often criticised for their role in promoting social exclusivity and segregation. Researchers indicated that these developments tend to attract affluent residents, leading to economic divisions and limited social diversity within the gated communities. Awaad and Hamed (2015) argued that gated communities are isolated islands that emerged for certain layers of society who are seeking social and spatial isolation from the wider community. Moreover, gated communities, with their exclusive amenities and controlled access, have the potential to restrict interactions and connections between diverse social groups. This could result in the isolation of certain segments of society, raising concerns about the exclusion of marginalised populations, particularly low-income communities in the surrounding area, from the benefits and opportunities offered by such communities (Roitman, 2005, p. 307).

By reviewing the literature on gated communities in the study area, AlQahtany (2022) carried out a questionnaire in Saudi Arabia to understand the motives behind selecting gated communities as the preferred housing choice and found that lifestyle is the main reason. Furthermore, the author argues that gated communities are considered for the middle and high-income groups in society who share the same socioeconomic backgrounds, cultural preferences, or nationalities. The results of the study conclude that gated communities do not live in isolation since positive social attributes were found between residents and the

surroundings. Further examination is required to explore the thoughts of the people living in the surrounding areas to confirm the hypothesis.

In Qatar, for example, Al Shawish (2015, p. 68) demonstrated the impacts of gated communities on the physical and social aspects through a qualitative study based on urban theories and a case study. The article argued that the physical barriers and restricted access contributed to a sense of exclusivity, creating a social division between the residents of gated communities and the surrounding neighbourhoods. Such divisions can hinder social cohesion, limit interactions between different socioeconomic groups, and perpetuate inequalities in the broader urban context. The study pointed out that the main issue of gated communities in Doha is that they are built in the middle of the city and not on the outskirts, which has helped in further disconnecting the neighbourhoods and the demise of public interaction. The article recommends proposing design guidelines that allow the construction of an alternative model inspired by the positive attributes of gated communities, such as a sense of community and children's safety. Testing such a hypothesis may be carried out on a small-scale gated community prior to extending the experience to the rest of the city.

Furthermore, Salim (2021) investigated the urban and historical characteristics of gated communities in Bahrain through a case study analysis. The article highlighted the unique fragmentation that gated communities have on the urban. The article suggested that gated communities in Bahrain, in particular and in the GCC, in general, differ from gated communities in other regions since the GCC ones cater for expatriates relocated for work, and these developments create isolated islands. The article offers a new approach to examining the initiation and impacts of gated communities. Further studies are required to analyse the impact of migration, especially the expatriates, on the urban.

In a recent study by Abed et al. (2022) in Amman, the authors assessed the social sustainability factors in gated and non-gated communities by analysing social support, community engagement, safety, and common values between residents. They argued that personal relationships and social networks in large gated communities are much appreciated compared to conventional developments. Their study called for the prospect of growing this experience further in Amman by introducing design guidelines that may aid in improving the social sustainability between residents. The study concludes with a recommendation to regulate the spread of gated communities in order to maintain a cohesive urban realm as part of the urban landscape. This may be achieved through conducting design workshops and reviews between different stakeholders.

In a similar study carried out by Bandaiko et al. (2022) in Africa, where they carried out a systematic review procedure on 31 peer-reviewed articles on gated communities, they summarise that the crime rate, lifestyle, and globalisation are the main reasons behind the emergence of gated communities in the study area. In addition, their reviewed articles emphasise that gated communities may be responsible for encouraging social fragmentation, closing off public spaces, increase in inequality levels, and urban segregation. The authors conclude to address the spatial segregation by designing spaces that consider “*both social and functional urban integration*”, which may foster inclusion in society. Their study recommends a general planning approach, which may involve citizens and governments in future spatial planning. This approach can be merged with the suggestion of Al Shawish (2015), who suggests carrying out design guidelines to allow the construction of alternative designs inspired by the positive attributes of gated communities.

The reviewed literature is predominantly concerned with the impacts and effects of gated communities within a single setting and highlights their effects on social cohesion. Limited studies have compared more than one gated community in different geographical locations and examined if social impacts are comparable. One study was carried out by Glasze and Alkhayyal (2002) comparing gated communities between Saudi Arabia and Lebanon. The authors employed a case study method to analyse the cultural, political, and economic circumstances that aided in the appearance of gated communities in these two settings. The study concludes that gated communities in Saudi Arabia may be considered a resurgence of some social and spatial characteristics derived from the old Arabian cities. Whereas in Lebanon, their appearance may be related to the failure of public organisations. The article examined each setting separately and did not carry out a comparison of the outcomes.

Despite the differences between gated communities in several countries, including Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Bahrain and Jordan, the general theme of exclusivity and luxury prevailed in attracting affluent people to these developments and led to socio-economic divisions. Moreover, the location of gated communities within the city may contribute to a further disconnection between neighbourhoods. While other studies in Amman highlighted the positive social interactions within gated community residents, the study raised concerns about isolation. Notably, the study recommends regulating the spread of gated communities to maintain a cohesive urban realm as part of the urban landscape. Building on the literature review, there is a lack of discourses on gated communities and studies on the socioeconomic impact of gated communities in the Middle East; where this study seeks to fill in this gap by examining and comparing multiple gated communities in several geographical locations, aiming to determine whether the social impacts remain consistent regardless of the geographical location.

### 3 From old cities to gated communities

The natural growth and expansion of Arabian cities were related to the needs and desires of people driven by cultural and social behaviours influenced by the religious order. Therefore, cities grew into an organic, unforced, or spontaneous pattern formalised by the social behaviour of people rather than rigid formal plans (Ben-Hamouche, 2009). Additionally, the concept of privacy and sacred spaces has distinguished Arabian cities from others, where mosques were fully integrated into people's daily lives on the one hand and the architectural fabric of the city on the other hand. The same sacredness was extended into residences as houses were built inward with a central courtyard to protect people from extruders and to provide further privacy (Hammad & Hammad, 2023). Furthermore, the central core was occupied by the main mosque, which was surrounded by multi-layers of interconnected buildings through a system of roads and streets that small shops occupied (Bianca, 2000). The access from these shops to the surrounding residential quarters was through narrow alleyways and small gates controlled by the residents, which resulted in closed neighbourhoods. Therefore, the idea of gating and closed architecture in old Arabian cities was primarily extrapolated from the social hierarchy within the urban population. For example, each residential section was divided into quarters and neighbourhoods with its daily mosque and markets and was occupied by residents of the same background, ethnicity, social level, wealth, and occupation (Al-Hemaidi, 2001). Thus, traditional Arabian cities, especially cit-

ies that were governed by Islamic rules, displayed common characteristics such as low-rise buildings, compact urban, complex geometry, walled cities, narrow streets, and shared courtyards, and the most evident character is the organic form, which was seen in the 12th century. These characteristics did not represent a lack of control; they represented a transformative urban structure that evolved with the needs and desires of people (BenHamouche, 2003; Bianca, 2000).

Several forces, such as climate, construction materials and technology, social hierarchy and organisation, and legal systems, impacted the urban fabric formation of Arabian and Islamic cities. However, by focusing on the Middle Eastern region, Abu-Lughod (1987) suggests that the main forces that created Islamic cities can be limited to social, legal, and political aspects that were influenced by religious laws since the climate and construction methods were almost identical. For example, several classes within the society were introduced based on their relationship with the state, and this was reflected in the spatial configuration of the city. Furthermore, the configuration of neighbourhoods became a critical building block of Arabian cities, such as defence during breakdowns or wars, which strengthened social cooperation between neighbours. For example, each neighbourhood was dominated by a powerful family household and surrounded by other poorer families, where the dominant families provided municipal services, including safety and protection, and this may imply that the separation of the population was not based on class distinction. The idea that neighbourhoods defend themselves was witnessed in Beirut during the civil war in 1975, where local young boys were involved in protecting their neighbourhoods and society. Such social obligations had spatial implications on the urban planning of Arabian cities as reflected in the house's layouts, the configuration of courtyards, and the arrangements of quarters. Though this has encouraged spatial distance between the society, it did not impose social segregation since different ethnicities and backgrounds used to live in harmony, as witnessed in most Arabian cities. For example, the Christian and Jewish communities who lived within Muslim society until the 19th century were protected under special laws and regulations; however, they selected to live within closed communities for protection reasons. The nearest example of such ethnic segregation in modern history is the city of Beirut, where Christians and Muslims lived voluntarily in socially isolated quarters; nonetheless, both societies were heavily interacting with each other (Abu-Lughod, 1987, p. 165).

Analysing urban planning features of Arabian cities revealed that elements such as walls, gated neighbourhoods, gender segregation, and traditional religious laws have played fundamental roles in shaping Arabian cities. Where physical elements and symbolic functions remain comparable, high walls and gates are immensely seen as key features in most modern gated communities. These elements represent secure parameters, controlled accesses, seclusion from the surroundings, and a sense of exclusivity and prestige for residents, while initially, they were designed to reflect defensive purposes for a larger community or neighbourhood (Hammad et al., 2024). Furthermore, spatial distancing between different ethnicities witnessed in Arabian cities was not merely related to class distinction; it was, moreover, a reactive response to the social hierarchy within the society. Nonetheless, spatial segregation within contemporary gated communities is a deliberate design strategy that may result in isolation and social exclusion. Walls and gates surrounding gated communities were built to isolate and buffer certain social groups from the wider community through the privatisation of public urban spaces. As suggested by Ben-Hamouche (2009), the urban fabric is a result of complicated and continuous activities carried out by a community over decades

and centuries; nonetheless, gated communities can be considered fast-development urban communities led by private developers that aim to create a sense of community in a short period. Their isolation from the broader communities has impacted the urban environment, where social segregation and diverse qualities may lead to social exclusion and a decrease in unity within the society.

#### 4 Distinctive motives – the emergence of gated communities

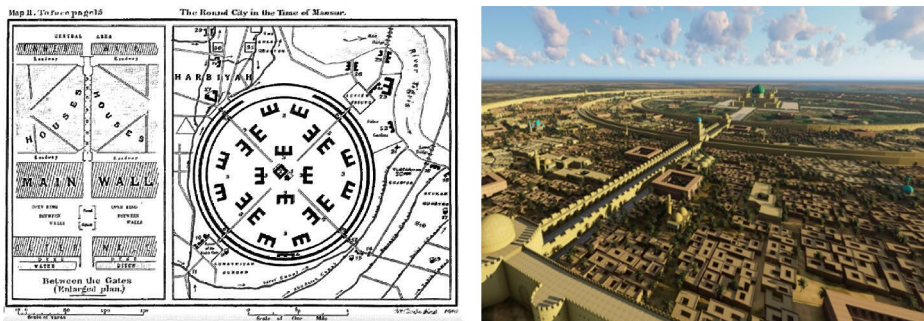
Gates and walls are not an innovation and have been seen in old Chinese cities as well as the old Arabian Peninsula. They have been a distinct feature of old nations and performed a substantial role in creating their environment (Hamama & Liu, 2020, p. 2; Li & Xie, 2021). Glassner (1999) indicates that the latest gating witnessed is more private and exclusive for their residents and built around fear. The culture of fear of crime had resulted in unnecessary risks, which encouraged people to adopt isolation and gating (Manzi & Bowers, 2005). The residents' perception of safety is referred to as fear of crime and has little correlation with the actual crime rate (Wilson-Doenges, 2000). Over time, fear of crime may negatively impact peoples' social interaction, decrease the levels of trust, and exploit dispensable security measures, leading to a decline in community interactions. In addition, a lack of community interactions may lead to regression in the sense of community and an increase in stress, impacting families, neighbourhoods, and any other religious or social gatherings (Nisbet, 1967). As discussed by Musterd (2020), people's behaviour generally produces certain levels of inequality, which in most cases generates spatial segregation based on economic, cultural, or demographic (age, race, sex) variances, and this segregation is impacted by historical and contextual factors. Furthermore, segregation in any urban setting is correlated with the surrounding built environment, natural attributes, and social and economic factors, especially in metropolitan cities, as discussed in the segregation theory by Park et al. (1967). Henceforth, the distinction between insiders and outsiders of the walls will lead to potential segregation or separation in society since gated communities are considered strangers within an urban setting (Musterd, 2020, p. 4).

Nonetheless, in the Arab world, as in the Middle East or GCC (Gulf Countries Council), spatial seclusion and fragmentation of urban settings were reflected in neighbourhoods and quarters as a key feature due to the large variety of ethnicities, backgrounds, and religions (Glasze, 2006, p. 84). Therefore, fragmentation was effectuated in the urban pattern where courtyards were employed to provide privacy and protection (Bianca, 2000, p. 79). Yet, at the social level, the structure of extended families and the shared daily activities invigorated unity and homogeneity (Bianca, 2000, pp. 155–157). Such an urban morphology characteristic was seen in Cairo city, established in 969 CE and was renowned as one of the oldest cities in the modern Middle East and North Africa (Masoumi et al., 2019, p. 172). The organic planning of Cairo city, akin to other historic Islamic cities, manifests the general configuration and urban planning represented by narrow and wide streets along with closed alleyways and courtyards. Such configuration served pragmatic functions, encouraging privacy, security, and social interactions as a reflection of the social and economic aspects of daily life (Amro & Bahauddin, 2015, p. 162). Moreover, the concept of walls, which was noticed in most old cities, was derived from their functional role in illustrating privacy, sacredness, and protection from harsh weather and intruders, which was reflected in the cities' built environ-



ments and shaping their architectural fabric. For example, the city of Baghdad was planned as a circular walled city in 762 AD and primarily served defensive purposes, reflecting the practical approach to urban planning during that era, as seen in Fig. 1.

The pattern of old Arabian cities shares a common set of religious, social, and geographic aspects, which led to similar urban fabric outcomes. In addition, they were impacted by several forces, such as climate, construction materials and technology, social hierarchy, and legal system (Abu-Lughod, 1987; Ben-Hamouche, 2009; Bianca, 2000). This was seen in the classic built environment observed in the GCC as towns were walled with one or two-story houses made from mud with a central courtyard used for daily family use up until the 1950s, in addition to the narrow, bent and shaded streets that played a social role, such as family gatherings and outdoor play areas for children at that time. The mid-20th century heralded a paradigm shift in urban development, characterised by the erosion of this traditional built environment. This period witnessed the adaptation of international planning regulations, which were often discordant with local architectural practices and climatic considerations, as noted by Al-Hemaidi (2001, p. 180). New neighbourhoods emerged with wider roads, signalling a departure from the communal ethos, undermining the social vibrancy and erasing the distinctive open spaces intrinsic to traditional neighbourhoods. Many courtyards were removed, enabling a new grid system of roads and streets to be superimposed, which in return forced children to play indoors and ultimately affected social activities. Free-standing single houses and other modern types of concrete developments replaced traditional houses. Concurrently, the advent of oil discovery and the consequent demographic surge, driven by the influx of Western professionals, precipitated significant socioeconomic transformations. This era saw the introduction of imported urban planning strategies aimed at accommodating the population influx, culminating in the emergence of gated communities in the 1970s and 1980s. Henceforth, the spread of gated communities in the GCC was a response to the demographical changes that took place after the discovery of oil, which resulted in the mass movement of Western professionals in the 1970s and 1980s (AlQahtany, 2022, p. 14). Consequently, the provided gated communities represented a housing complex product for workers and employees as a government policy requirement. In addition, gated communities offered to Western professionals were an attempt to attract Westerners and their families to leave their countries and relocate to GCC. Residents could practice their daily lifestyle freely within the gates due to the conservative laws and regulations implemented outside the gates (Mahgoub & Khalfani, 2012, p. 54). On the other hand, gated communities spread out to neighbouring countries in the Middle East, where oil was not the driving factor behind



**Fig. 1** Map of Baghdad, the Round City by Guy Le Strange. *Source* (Bayaty; Epoch, 2021)

their development. Gated communities were offered as a luxury and prestigious offerings to upper-class communities, as was the case in Cairo. These developments functioned as isolated islands from the surrounding fabric, offering prestige, lifestyle, and security (Ibrahim & Hamed, 2015, p. 45). However, gated communities emerged in Jordan in the 1990s as extended family housing, then evolved into commercial, residential development in 2015 (Al-Homoud & Al Aswad, 2018, p. 894; Hammad et al., 2024, p. 437). The metamorphoses of gated communities in Jordan resulted from the demand of the young social society of the middle and upper middle class seeking seclusion and lifestyle away from the crowd, and they were replicated in the U.S. and Europe (Al Omari & Al Omari, 2015, p. 297). Figure 2 reflects the motives behind developing gated communities in GCC and the Middle East.

As examined by AlQahtany (2022) through a questionnaire study, fear of crime has been recorded at 4.333%, being the least motive for residents to move to gated communities in Saudi Arabia. Therefore, it may be suggested that the evolution of gated communities in the GCC and Middle East may not be related to the motives of their development in the US and Europe, where fear of crime and searching for safety were the predominant factors for people to embrace gated communities as their safe haven (Wilson-Doenges, 2000, p. 599). The term “blind imitation”, which relates to the skills of imitating or copying a trend or a movement driven by the real estate market of demand and supply, might be a suitable description for emerging gated communities in the Middle East but not in the GCC.

### 5 Study background

This section provides information about the four selected locations for the empirical study. The selection of three locations in the GCC (Saudi, Qatar and Bahrain) were chosen since they represent the most significant number of gated communities in that region (Al Shawish, 2016; AlQahtany, 2022; Salim, 2021). They also represent the old Arabian cities as part

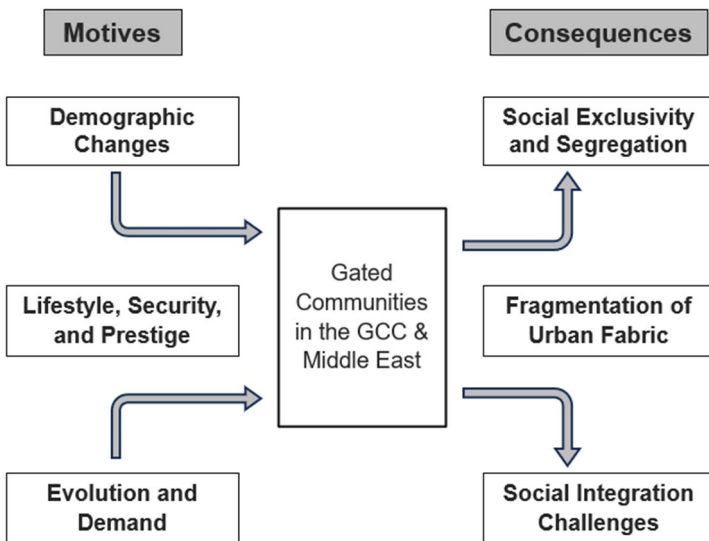


Fig. 2 Motives for developing gated communities in GCC and the Middle East. Source The Author

of the Arabian Peninsula, as closed neighbourhoods were seen in Riyadh until 1985 (Al-Hemaidi, 2001, p. 286). The fourth location (Jordan) was selected as a non-oil-producing country where gated communities emerged as a social seclusion preference. In addition, Jordan was part of the Arabian Peninsula (Wikipedia, 2023) and Bilad al-Sham (Wikipedia, 2024) and was impacted by the city planning of the old Arabian cities with narrow streets and closed alleyways (Alzyoud & Hammad, 2020, p. 67). The first fully developed gated community in Amman is Al Andalusia, which was developed between 2009 and 2015. Though there were earlier attempts since 1990, they were on a smaller scale and categorised as a family housing product. The selected case study will be further examined to investigate the reasons behind this late emergence on the one hand and then to investigate if such development has any impacts on the surroundings on the other hand.

As this paper will discuss the social impact of gated communities on the surroundings in the selected four regions, each country will be summarised below to include social cohesion and fragmentation impact individually. Following that, thematic data analysis will be implemented to identify patterns and themes found in the four locations' data sets to investigate if such developments can share similar impacts on the surrounding neighbourhoods in different geographical settings (Nowell et al., 2017, p. 8).

### 5.1 Gated communities in Qatar-Doha

The history of gated communities in Doha goes back to the mid-1940s when merchant families such as Darwish and Al Manna established their residential houses on the shoreline where goods used to arrive (Lockerbie, 2005, pp. 8–9). The residential houses, which used to be called “compounds”, spread to other families within the city of Doha by building walls to surround a group of houses from the same family. As argued by Mahgoub and Khalfani (2012, p. 54), neither fear of crime nor safety and security were the motives behind the development of gated communities (compounds) in the old city of Doha. Like other Oil countries in the GCC and with the exploration of Oil in the late 1950s, several multinational companies have relocated their staff and workers to Doha. Henceforth, multiple housing compounds or gated communities were constructed to cope with the increasing housing demand due to the economic development witnessed in the city (Al Shawish, 2015, pp. 72–73). In addition, and as discussed by Mahgoub and Khalfani (2012, p. 55), merchants capitalised on this opportunity to provide housing offerings in the form of camps (for labourers) and gated communities (for professionals with families).

### 5.2 Gated communities in Saudi Arabia

The introduction of gated communities in Saudi Arabia, much like other GCC countries, can be traced back to the discovery of oil in the 1930s (Glasze, 2006, p. 85). The influx of Western professionals has caused considerable social, urban, and economic transformations, resulting in a substantial upswing in the need for residential properties in the metropolis (AlQahtany, 2022, p. 14). Nevertheless, the selection of gated communities as a residential solution was related to the socio-religious configuration of the conservative Saudi society at that time (Glasze, 2006, p. 87). The idea was to provide Westerners with the freedom of social life within the gates, which imitates their lifestyle back home. This is considered an

attractive proposition as a short-term housing solution and an incentive to attract foreigners to relocate to Saudi Arabia.

Historically, Saudi cities were classified as a compacted urban pattern, with narrow streets and alleyways, which created miniaturised communities in the form of neighbourhoods that protect each other from intruders and strangers (Giddings et al., 2023, p. 5). Furthermore, Bagaen (2010) examines how communities in old Arabian cities in the Middle East employed various elements such as climate, culture, religion, and social norms to control aspects of their environment, which was manifested in the barriers and gates placed in the designs of the built environment. The general typology of houses utilised courtyards as multifunctional open-private spaces for family socialising and safe places for youngsters to interact and play (Giddings et al., 2023, p. 6). However, according to Giddings et al. (2023, p. 2), some people perceive courtyards as a connection to the past that they do not wish to reconsider. Instead, they prefer modern designs introduced to the country by Western professionals as early as the 1940s. The evolution of housing designs at the macro (urban planning) and micro levels (private houses) was affected by the American designers and Architects working for the oil companies. Henceforth, the modernisation of processes and the massive demand for private housing compounds for Western professionals resulted in a sprawl of gated communities, which later became a preferred housing solution for other expatriates relocating to work in Saudi Arabia (Glasze, 2006, p. 85). In a recent study carried out by Bint-e-Waheed and Nadeem (2020) related to the perception of security in gated and non-gated communities in Lahore, Pakistan, the authors carried out face-to-face interviews with residents from both communities to examine the increased demand for gated communities in the city. Their study recommends the implementation of the cul-de-sac concept of closed roads as this may reduce the crime rate and create safer areas. Their recommendation is in line with the notion of old Arabian cities where neighbourhoods were built as courtyards.

### 5.3 Gated communities in Bahrain

Replicating the situation in Saudi Arabia and Qatar, the urbanisation in Bahrain was reflected by the mass movement of labourers from the Indian subcontinent and Western professionals due to the discovery of oil (Salim, 2021, p. 149). Nevertheless, as pointed out by Salim (2021, p. 149), Bahrain was the first country among the other GCC countries to discover oil, indicating that the migration of labourers and professionals commenced earlier than in the other oil countries. In addition, the connection between Bahrain and Saudi Arabia through a causeway completed in 1986 has further remedied Bahrain's urban growth (Al Ghatam, 2012). Furthermore, Bahraini citizens are considered a minority, with 54% of the residents being expatriates (Information). The housing demand reflected this demographic allocation, which impacted the urban landscape distribution, where expatriates with high incomes preferred living in gated communities (Salim, 2021, p. 149).

However, as described by Salim (2021, p. 154), gated communities in Bahrain are different from those in Saudi as they are generally smaller in size, have fewer amenities and facilities, and are less independent than gated communities in Saudi Arabia. It is worth mentioning that the establishment of gated communities in Bahrain wasn't solely intended to provide Westerners with a secluded way of living behind the gates. This is because Bah-

rain is less conservative compared to its neighbouring country, Saudi Arabia (Salim, 2021, pp. 154–155).

#### 5.4 Gated communities in Jordan

The development of gated communities in Jordan was primarily impacted by two major dimensions: financial and social, as the security aspect had minor effects based on a study carried out by (Al-Homoud & Al Aswad, 2018, p. 903). During the financial-economic prosperity in the GCC between the years 2003 and 2020, multiple developments took place in the Middle Eastern countries to attract international investments in a search for secure investments (Daher, 2014, p. 100). As part of the Middle Eastern competition, Jordan had its share of multiple developments, such as Abdali development in Amman, Jordan Gate, and Al Andalucía gated community, developed by an investor from the United Arab Emirates. On the social dimension, the rise of the middle and upper middle class in society seeking seclusion and lavish lifestyles mimicking American and European gated communities (Al Omari & Al Omari, 2015, p. 297). The development of gated communities in Jordan is markedly distinct from the driving factors influencing their emergence in the GCC region. For example, Al Andalucía gated community was developed approximately 20 km away from the city centre towards the outskirts of the city. Positioning this project between farms and agricultural lands and surrounding it with walls may imply social exclusion from the surrounding community and might prevent any possible interaction between the neighbours. Figure 3 shows the walls surrounding the development and statement of isolation presented by Al Andalucía development.

**Fig. 3** The wall surrounding Al Andalucía development.  
*Source*The Author



## 6 Social impact

As rationalised by Roitman (2005, p. 304), the emergence of gated communities is either captivated by social and economic factors, as in the cases in GCC, or a social group preference, as in Jordan. Furthermore, several elements may lead to social division within gated communities, such as economic stratification, cultural backgrounds, spatial design, and community engagement. To start with the economic implications, doubtless, gated communities provide jobs in the short and long term, such as construction activities, security guards, and cleaning services (Roitman & Phelps, 2011, p. 3489). On the other hand, some researchers argue that gated communities may impact the surrounding areas positively by increasing the property values of the neighbouring plots; nonetheless, Le Goix (2005) argues that developing a gated community in a particular district might affect the affordability levels of the surrounding plots and the purchasing powers resulting in disruption in wealth distribution and access to amenities. Moreover, cultural background composition within gated communities may achieve social homogeneity among residents. However, such homogeneity is merely based on socioeconomic levels, specific race or age, where residents might be interviewed prior to being accepted to live in these communities (Roitman, 2010, p. 35). This might imply that gated communities do not increase social disparities. However, they enforce the homogeneity of a specific social layer, which may increase social segregation at the societal level. In addition, spatial designs of gated communities, such as the privatisation of public spaces, streets, and parks, may lead to spatial fragmentation and separation due to the increase of polarisation and the decrease of cohesion within the society. Rafiemanzelat (2016, p. 673) suggests that spatial fragmentation may influence the sense of community which will result in impacting the social interactions between residents and their surrounding neighbours. While developing gated communities, the roles and responsibilities of the government are indirectly transferred to the private sector, and this can include the development and maintenance of infrastructure and support services such as small shops and markets, in addition to the maintenance of parks and public facilities. With such ownership and privileges come the responsibilities of the developer to involve residents in some specific responsibilities to encourage community engagement. Residents may feel socially and physically engaged in certain changes and decisions, which might enhance community cohesion and unity (Qureshi, 2023, p. 549). However, such community engagement might be limited to a certain group even within the same gated community, as Blakely and Snyder (1997b) pointed out that gated communities do not increase local participation. Furthermore, privatisation of public space along with autonomous decisions might decrease democracy as people from different social groups will not have similar rights (Caldeira, 2001).

Despite the different reasons and motives for the emergence of gated communities in each country, the outcome of the previous discussion in this article suggests that gated communities in both GCC and Jordan aid in secluding certain social groups spatially from the local society. However, in order to examine the social impact of gated communities on the surrounding neighbourhoods and to investigate if the social impacts are similar in different geographical locations, this article adopted a thematic analysis as a method of investigation to analyse published articles on gated communities in the study area and then to extract meaningful themes related to the impact of gated communities on the surrounding neighbourhoods. Thematic analysis is a qualitative research method used to identify, analyse, and

report patterns (themes) within a dataset, which can help to gain a deeper understanding of the content and findings of the articles examined (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 81). Henceforth, the purpose of such a method is to extract useful and meaningful patterns to address the research question by interpreting and synthesising the data (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017, p. 3353). The first phase of the thematic analysis is data transcription through reading a wide range of texts related to gated communities in GCC and the Middle East. Then, generating initial codes based on features observed in the data. After that, codes are collated into themes, data is reviewed, and theme names are defined for each theme. Finally, a report is produced which is related to the research question and literature review (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87). Data will be analysed by examining the reasons and motives that provoked the emergence of gated communities in the Middle East and GCC on the one hand. Then, social impact will be explored and evaluated in the context of urban design critiques offered by urban theorists such as Bagaeeen and Uduku (2010a) and Atkinson and Blandy (2013) on the other hand. In addition, several case studies will be reviewed in the study area in order to visualise and extract social impact attributes that may support the thematic analysis and the urban design critiques.

In order to examine the social impacts of gated communities on the surroundings, this section aims to review critiques and analyses offered by urban theorists such as Bagaeeen and Uduku (2010b) and Atkinson and Blandy (2013), which denote definitions and meanings of the social impacts. At first, the definition of gated communities in general will be analysed to understand their structure and characteristics. The definition of gated communities is still ambiguous as there is no agreed meaning of such a term; however, historians and urbanists have described what establishes a gated community. For example, Blakely and Snyder (1997b) identify gated communities as private areas where insiders and outsiders use controlled entrances. Furthermore, (Touman, 2005) suggests a general definition for gated communities to allow other researchers to draw their own interpretation as it is difficult to limit their definition. He suggested that gated communities are urban settlements that are surrounded by walls and have multiple entrances and gates controlled by security with limited access to residents and their visitors. According to Atkinson and Blandy (2013), gated communities are “*housing developments that restrict public access*” as they include multiple shared services and amenities between residents as they share maintenance costs. In addition, they added that gated communities are physical structures and legal bonds that confine a group of people within a wall or a fence. The concept of privacy, exclusion of non-residents, and private lifestyle disguised by security are all personal attempts for some people to exclude themselves from the surrounding neighbourhood and the wider community. Whether the separation is a wall, gate, concrete block, or even soft landscapes and cul-de-sacs, the results of liberty of access and social exclusion remain unchanged.

As conceptualised by Atkinson and Blandy (2005, p. 179), the search for Security, as affirmed by certain affluent individuals, along with the passion for disengagement from the wider community, has segregated the people outside the walls and may have impacted the urban social relationships. The social division is seen at large in many areas where people are being clustered based on their social and financial status or ethnic backgrounds which led to social segregation. Hence, gated communities may create an additional urban issue as they tend to separate people from the wider community on both social and financial spectrums. They aim to generate an exclusive and isolated experience for affluent individuals and enjoy freedom of movement within the gates. Furthermore, the text argues that group-

ing affluent individuals in a confined space, such as gated community, did not sound like an issue; nonetheless, clustering poor people in one area appeared as an urban dilemma. If gated communities were developed to reduce crime rates, then the same issue of crime control remains unresolved on the outside of the walls and in poor districts. As summarized by Atkinson and Blandly, there are several impacts associated with the decisions made by affluent people when choosing to live in gated communities. First, the areas they moved out from may lose social diversity as the intensity of one social group is increased and that may lead to social segregation. Second, crime levels may transfer away from gated communities to less-secured areas. Lastly, gated communities are a clear representation of the “*social withdrawal*” of wealthy people, which may impact the spatial engagement between different neighbourhoods.

On the other hand, Bageen and Uduku (2010a) explained that the integration of gated communities within the urban has affected the planning and design of most contemporary areas. They added that gated communities imply that the people living outside the walls are criminals or from the lower class, and the walls are there to protect the middle-class residents physically and sociologically from the fear of the people living outside the walls. Furthermore, social sustainability was introduced in Bageen and Uduku’s argument, where they discussed the definition of social sustainability in literature. In summary, social sustainability is related to reduced segregation and exclusion between people, access to amenities and services, community interaction and participation, and the density of urban. They concluded that the form, impact on the urban, and the location of gated communities comply with the social sustainability criteria set in the literature. In addition, the spread of gated communities was associated with motivational aspects such as exclusivity and social status and not only fear of crime since gated communities are spreading in low-crime areas. Their study suggested extracting positive attributes from gated communities, such as the shared interest people tend to have when they choose to live together, can form stronger ties and connections.

The analysis offers an understanding of the heterogeneous nature of gated communities. Atkinson and Blandly illustrate the potential social consequences associated with gated communities, such as social division, crime transfer, and spatial isolation. Whereas Baqaeen and Uduku provide insights into the social sustainability criteria and how gated communities can contribute positively to reducing segregation and enhancing community connection if aligned with social sustainability criteria.

On the other hand, Blakely and Snyder (1997a) indicated that fear of crime and the search for security are the main grounds for developing gated communities. However, in the GCC and Jordan, it is more related to social polarisation, real estate influence, lifestyle, exclusion from the crowd, and exclusivity (Roitman, 2005, p. 305). Therefore, it is a personal choice for a social group to be segregated from the urban society without considering any repercussions of such a decision that might contribute to urban segregation. The social division demonstrated in a particular neighbourhood due to the emergence of a gated community might lead to a hierarchical relationship between residents within the walls and their surrounding neighbours, which can be seen as domination (as the residence of the gated community) and subordination (as the surrounding neighbourhood), the inclusion of certain society versus exclusion of the surrounding, privilege of living within the walls and deprivation of the surrounding community (Marcuse, 1993, p. 357). Therefore, it is more than inequality and distinction in architectural design, housing quality, amenities, and facilities.



By analysing the general characteristics of gated communities developed globally and in the GCC and Jordan, they share the following common criteria:

1. Large-scale land: gated communities are usually developed on large-scale private land, which will limit street continuity, connectivity, and accessibility and will restrict people from interacting with the city and the surroundings, as well as the loss of public life (Al Shawish, 2015).
2. Walled blocks: Gated communities often have high walls and boundaries restricting access and connectivity. These barriers may limit the continuity of street networks and hinder the flow of movement in and out of the area. As described by Jacobs (2006, pp. 80–92), the interactions between people causally in streets may lead to a sense of belonging and social cohesion. By blocking the urban streets with walls, pedestrians from the surrounding areas will have limited interactions with residents within the walls, and this may lead to social fragmentation.
3. Similar housing types and residents' socio-economic class: gated communities generally have similar housing prototypes and designs surrounded by walls. In addition, they accommodate residents from comparable socio-economic backgrounds and classes. This social homogeneity and the typical prototype of designs distinguished from the surroundings will thwart any possible social interactions between neighbours (Al Shawish, 2015, p. 72).

By reviewing the case of Al Andalucía gated community in Amman, and examining the social impact based on the urban design critiques offered by urban theorists, the case study may illustrate segregation from the wider community, social seclusion, and disintegration. Furthermore, the implication of high walls and private entrances may affect the outer community as they may feel they pose danger to the people living inside the walls. The prevalence of such development in an agricultural area may reflect a symbolic barrier that can emphasise social segregation. Though such development may create a distinct housing option for certain layers in the Jordanian society, they can accentuate segregation and reduce social interaction, as seen in Fig. 4.

**Fig. 4** Al Andalucía development. *Source*The Author



## 7 Research findings

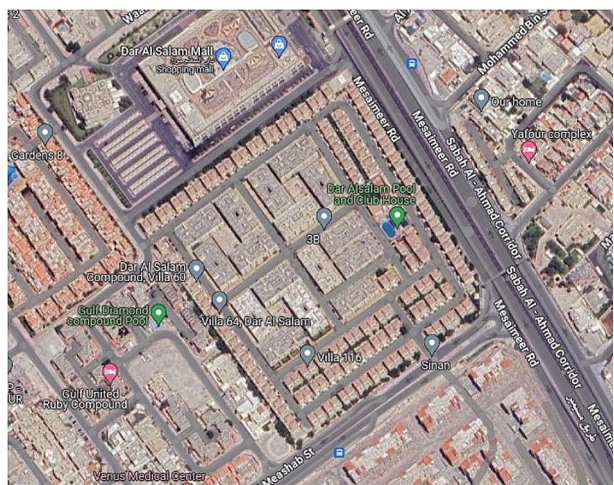
By examining different cases in the study area, the analyses will evaluate the impact of gated communities on the physical and social aspects of the surroundings in order to extract themes related to social impact.

### 1. Qatar (Al Shawish, 2016; Mahgoub & Khalfani, 2012).

The selected case study is Dar Al Salam gated community located in Qatar as in Fig. 5. The development consists of 320 apartments and 151 villas, with a total population of approximately 1700 residents. Based on the analysis of the case study, the following impacts can be extracted:

- **Social Isolation:** Gated communities are often viewed as isolated neighbourhoods that lack social interaction and diversity, weakening the sense of community both within and outside the gated area.
- **Inequality and Exclusivity:** Gated communities can promote an environment of exclusivity that favours only particular socio-economic groups. This exclusiveness not only maintains existing social inequalities but also exacerbates societal divisions.
- **Loss of Public Life:** Gated communities have a detrimental effect on public life as they restrict access to shared spaces through physical barriers and walls. This ultimately leads to a decline in community involvement and social interaction opportunities.
- **Fragmentation of Urban Fabric:** Gated communities encourage isolation and division within cities. Their physical barriers disrupt the natural interconnectedness and interdependence of neighbourhoods, destroying the social fabric of communities.
- **Impact on Social Cohesion:** Gated communities can weaken social cohesion within a city. The lack of interaction between residents of gated communities and the wider community can undermine the sense of belonging and shared identity among citizens.
- **Sense of Security:** Gated communities are often associated with a perceived sense of security. While this can positively affect residents, it can also lead to a false sense of

**Fig. 5** Dar Al Salam gated community. *Source* Google Maps



security and reinforce divisions between different social groups.

2. Saudi Arabi (Alhawaish, 2015; AlQahtany, 2022; Giddings et al., 2023; Glasze, 2006; Glasze & Alkhayyal, 2002).

In Saudi Arabia, the selected case study is The Kingdom gated community located in the city of Riyadh, as in Fig. 6. This development was built in 1997 on a land of approximately 250,000 m<sup>2</sup>. The development consists of 368 villas, as explained on their official website (City). The analysis of the case study shows:

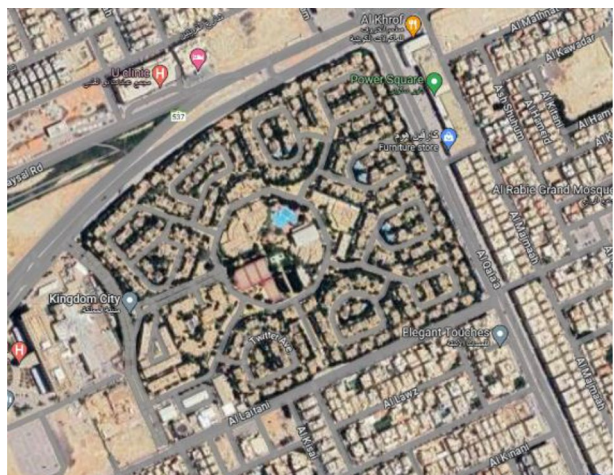
- Segregation: The establishment of gated communities reflected a form of spatial seclusion and segregation of social groups with different cultural backgrounds.
- Fragmented City: Private and guarded gated communities contributed to the fragmentation of the city, creating distinct enclaves or autonomous neighbourhoods.
- Differentiation of lifestyles: The trend of gated communities is driven by the growing differentiation of lifestyles and cultural orientations, resulting in the development of exclusive communities.
- Cultural diversity: Gated communities for Western expatriates accommodated people from various cultural backgrounds, fostering a diverse community within the enclaves.
- Limited interaction: Residents of gated communities may have limited interaction with the wider Saudi Arabian society outside the gates.

3. Bahrain (Salim, 2021, 2022).

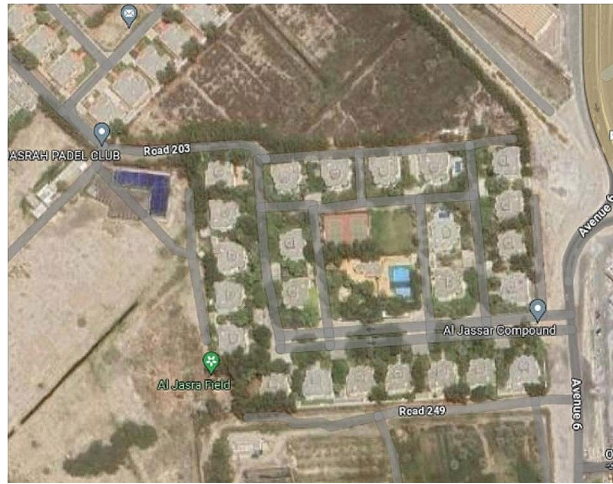
However, in Bahrain, the selected case study is Al Jasser gated community as in Fig. 7. The development consists of 26 villas, as explained on their official website. General attributes from the case study are:

- Residential segregation: Gated communities contribute to residential segregation, creating social divisions.
- Socioeconomic status: The affordability of gated communities affects the socioeconom-

**Fig. 6** The Kingdom gated community. Source Google Maps



**Fig. 7** Al Jasser gated community. *Source* Google Maps



**Fig. 8** Al Andalucía gated community. *Source* Google Maps



ic composition of residents, where everyone wants to live in a gated community due to the lack of public amenities and facilities.

- Nationality and diversity: Gated communities have diverse nationalities among their residents.
  - Cultural heterogeneity and adaptation: Gated communities serve as a means of adapting to cultural and religious differences.
  - Access to safe open spaces: Gated communities provide residents with access to safe open spaces.
  - Wealth transfer: Employer-provided housing in gated communities results in wealth transfer.
4. Jordan (Al-Homoud & Al Aswad, 2018; Al Omari & Al Omari, 2015; Lawson, 2021; Makhamreha & Almanasyeha, 2011).

Furthermore, in Jordan, the selected case study is Al Andalucía gated community as in Fig. 8. This development was developed between 2009 and 2015 on a land area of approxi-

mately 800,000m<sup>2</sup>. The development consists of 588 villas. General outputs from the case study:

- **Social Distinctions:** Gated communities contribute to class distinctions, allowing affluent individuals to distance themselves from other groups.
- **Detrimental Effects:** Gated communities can create class divisions and have detrimental effects on the natural and social environment.
- **Fulfilment of Needs:** Gated communities aim to fulfil various needs, such as sheltering, security, comfort, and socialisation.
- **Status and Symbolism:** Gated communities serve as status symbols, representing wealth, social status, and success.
- **Consumer Rationale:** Gated communities provide consumers with their desired lifestyle by offering a luxurious living experience, including exceptional amenities and a desirable location.
- **Urban Development and Spread:** Gated communities notably influence urban growth and are becoming more prevalent in metropolitan areas.

By analysing the selected case studies and the literature on gated communities in the study area, codes were extracted to identify themes related to social impact. The list of themes identified was used to provide a qualitative data presentation (Low, 2001, p. 52). An analysis of literature and articles identified shared themes related to segregation, inequality and exclusivity, fragmentation of urban fabric, as well as safety and security, and changing life standards. To elaborate on the themes that were extracted from each country, further analysis was required to understand the impact of each theme on the social aspect to test if such impact can be contagious:

Table 1 below summarises the initial codes generated from the data set and the names of the themes that were defined. The table's outcome relates to the main article question and literature review.

## 8 Discussion

The results of the thematic analysis demonstrate the reasons and motives behind the emergence of gated communities in the GCC and Jordan and explore the social impacts that these developments pose on the surroundings. In the GCC, for example, the main aspect extrapolated from the analysis is spatial seclusion and the need to seclude social groups from the wider community. Multiple socioeconomic factors, including the mass movement of Western expatriates to the GCC, drive the desire towards seclusion. However, the motives behind their emergence in Jordan are distinct from the GCC, as the main desire is exclusivity and seclusion from the crowd. Their emergence in Jordan is related to the personal preference of certain affluent individuals from the middle and upper middle class seeking symbolism. The results emphasise the importance of considering any contextual and cultural contrasts in several geographical settings in order to understand the reasons behind the emergence of gated communities.

Thematic analysis in the study area has uncovered shared themes across gated communities in Saudi, Qatar, Bahrain, and Jordan, such as inequality, social isolation, and fragmenta-

**Table 1** categorises codes and themes in a comparative aspect:

	Qatar	Saudi	Bahrain	Jordan
Code	<i>Segregation</i>			
Theme	Social isolation	Segregation	Residential segregation	Detrimental effects
Code	<i>Social Exclusion</i>			
Theme	Inequality and exclusivity	Differentiation of lifestyles and exclusion of Saudi nationals	Socio-economic status	Social distinctions
Code	<i>Fragmentation</i>			
Theme	Fragmentation of urban fabric	Fragmented city	Nationality and diversity	Status and symbolism
Code	<i>Social Cohesion</i>			
Theme	Loss of public life	Limited interaction	Neighbourhood life cycle	Economic restructuring and social changes
Code	<i>Safety</i>			
Theme	Sense of security	Perception of safety and security	Access to safe, open spaces	Safety and security

tion, where each theme has contributed to different aspects of the social influence. The lack of social interaction and diversity may weaken the sense of community and may contribute to class division by allowing certain social groups to seclude themselves from others. For example, the case of Dar Al Salam gated community in Qatar emphasised that restricted access and exclusivity may lead to a decline in community involvement and an increase in social inequality. Similarly, in the Kingdom gated community in Saudi Arabia, the spatial seclusion of Western expatriates from the wider community may create additional complexity in the social fabric of the city. Furthermore, in Al Jasser gated community in Bahrain, though such development may foster cultural diversity, nonetheless, they may create segregation between the residents inside the walls and their surroundings. In Jordan, for example, the walls of Al Andalucía gated community may imply symbolism, which may create class division.

The review of the selected cases in the study area has identified common juxtaposes of lifestyle, exclusivity, as well as symbolic representation. These gated communities became a symbol of wealth and success since they fulfilled different needs of comfort, safety, and social life. Furthermore, the analysis of the social impacts of gated communities in different geographical settings in this article aligns with the critiques presented by Bagaean and Uduku and Atkinson and Blandy related to social division and isolation.

## 9 Conclusion

The thematic analysis of gated communities in the study area has yielded insights into their social impact. A comprehensive qualitative data presentation has been constructed by identifying common themes such as segregation, inequality, exclusivity, urban fragmentation,

safety, security, and changing lifestyles. Further investigation was undertaken to assess the contagious nature of these impacts and understand their influence on the social aspect.

The research findings in this article revealed meaningful impacts on the social aspect due to isolation and lack of interaction. In Saudi Arabia, the establishment of gated communities reflects a form of spatial seclusion and segregation among different social and cultural groups. These private and guarded enclaves contribute to the fragmentation of cities, resulting in distinct autonomous neighbourhoods. The trend of gated communities in Saudi Arabia is driven by the increasing differentiation of lifestyles and cultural orientations, leading to the development of exclusive residential areas. While gated communities may accommodate a diverse mix of nationalities, the limited interaction between residents and the wider society poses a challenge to social integration.

Similarly, in Qatar, gated communities are often viewed as neighbourhoods lacking diversity and social interaction, leading to a weakened sense of community inside and outside the gated areas. The exclusivity of these communities may perpetuate social inequalities and further divide society, while the physical barriers restricting access to shared spaces diminish community involvement and opportunities for social interaction. As a result, the social fabric of neighbourhoods is impacted, and the overall social cohesion within the city is undermined. While gated communities may provide a perceived sense of security, they can also create a false sense of security and reinforce social divisions.

In Bahrain, gated communities contribute to residential segregation, as they create social divisions based on socioeconomic status. The affordability of gated communities affects the socioeconomic composition of residents, as the lack of public amenities and facilities compels many to seek housing within these enclaves. However, these communities also provide a platform for cultural heterogeneity and adaptation, serving to embrace and manage cultural and religious differences. Furthermore, they offer residents access to safe open spaces while concurrently resulting in wealth transfer through employer-provided housing.

And finally, in Jordan, gated communities strive to fulfil various needs such as security, comfort, and socialisation. They also serve as status symbols, representing wealth, social standing, and success. Consumer preferences play a significant role in driving the development of gated communities, as they offer a luxurious lifestyle with exceptional amenities in desirable locations. However, these communities contribute to class distinctions and impact urban growth, potentially detrimental to the natural and social environment.

This paper suggests that gated communities share similar themes driven by the lack of interactions between different groups. Regardless of their geographical location, residents tend to seclude themselves for different reasons such as diverse social backgrounds, ethnicities or religions, symbolism, exclusivity, socioeconomic, or even exclusivity. Consequently, it was necessary to analyse gated communities in different locations in order to investigate if the reason behind their emergence has any influence on their social impacts. This paper indicates that the social impacts associated with their emergence in the GCC may have created a community within a community. To a large extent, an autonomous community of expatriates with different backgrounds and ethnicities isolating themselves from the traditional local culture. As an example of such isolation, a small number of expatriates learnt to speak Arabic, though the formal language in GCC is Arabic. Whereas in Jordan, the social impact was admired by a certain group with the same background and ethnicities as the surroundings who are seeking seclusion and deliberate isolation. Overall, this study can be considered the first step in assessing the social impacts of gated communities in several locations within the

Middle East. Future studies may include other locations in the Middle East, hoping to assess if the social impact remains contagious in other countries.

In conclusion, the extracted analysis from the review of gated communities in the study area demonstrated significant social impacts regardless of their geographical location. They lead to a lack of diversity, limited social interaction, spatial seclusion and segregation, class distinctions, and urban growth impacts. Overall, gated communities cause social isolation, inequality, and exclusivity, fragmenting urban environments and hindering interaction with the wider society. While providing a sense of security, they reinforce social disparities and negatively impact the natural and social environment. Informed urban planning is crucial for fostering inclusive and united communities. Although gated communities may provide a sense of security, ultimately, they contribute to social isolation, inequality, and exclusivity, which disrupt the fabric of urban environments and hinder interaction with the larger society. Therefore, informed urban planning is crucial to promoting inclusive and cohesive communities.

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