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Being inside or being left out: Neoliberal communities behind gates

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Abstract

The proposed paper is aimed at understanding the links between a fast growing form of suburban housing and its implications for the dichotomy of order and disorder. Through an analysis of guarded, autonomous and exclusive housing developments, so-called gated communities, a culture of inclusion and exclusion becomes visible. The paper builds on a previous attempt to position this phenomenon between neoliberalism and communitarianism. These two ideologies father contradictory general tendencies in contemporary society, and they have more in common than originally expected. Gated communities seem to reveal a cumulative popularity of “communalization” (M. Weber, F. Toennies) in recent years. Might this raise in community bonds be due to neoliberal influences, and what would this imply for social interaction? The paper points to the limitations of such an approach and welcomes the opportunity to include the promising dichotomy of order and disorder. Are gated communities able to bring social order to a neoliberal way of life, or are they leading to an even bigger disorder in society? Therefore, the hypothesis is advanced that an increasing “communalization” leads to more social order and that security is an increasingly needed good. The paper concludes by discussing the implications of such an intended ideological convergence for the dichotomy of order and disorder and sociological research.

Keywords

Social space, suburban inclusion/exclusion, cultural sociology