Private community: the lived experiences of privatism and community in a gated residential neighbourhood

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Private residential estates (PREs), often termed ‘gated communities’, are an important part of contemporary residential development in metropolitan Australia. PREs are the most recent extension of the more generic master planned residential estate that has attracted significant attention in recent times in Australia, particularly for their possible contribution to processes of segregation in metropolitan regions. This paper begins by charting the emergence of private residential estates and community schemes legislation in the residential development industry. I will then demonstrate how the private governance structure of this new suburban neighbourhood has been important in the formation and sustenance of community. In relation to the development of private residential estates in metropolitan regions across Australia, community is seen to be a commodity (purely a marketing device). However, the nature of community within PREs is under-researched in Australian urban studies. I (re)connect with community in the form of neighbourhood based interactions and associations through an engagement with the residents of a private gated residential estate (Macquarie Links) in Sydney, Australia, during detailed qualitative fieldwork in 2007. I provide a conceptualisation of the concept of community that takes into account commonalities and differences, consent and disagreement, private and community. This paper will present findings on the meanings and lived experiences of both privatism and community in the context of Macquarie Links. Finally, in this paper I will discuss the communal tactics for protection in a private gated residential neighbourhood.