

Social exclusion and place in northern Adelaide: unpacking the role of 'exclusive' master-planned communities

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Abstract

This paper unpacks how new, upmarket, master-planned communities located in a predominantly working class region of northern Adelaide might contribute to social exclusion. A case study is offered of 'Brads Crossing' an 'exclusive' new settlement in northern Adelaide that is co-located with suburbs with a different socio-economic profile. The marketing and design of Brads Crossing suggests an attempt to create a partially gated community with a sense of identity that contrasts with surrounding suburbs. Unpacking the demography and identity of this community provides an understanding of how the residents of an area assign meaning to themselves and the place in which they live and also an understanding of the meaning assigned to the place by others. Brads Crossing is offered as an example of a community that might create and protect a secure place on the social ladder. It is argued that the amenities of this community are associated with a different identity from less advantaged adjacent suburbs with implications for social exclusion.

Introduction

This paper offers a case study of how place affects social exclusion in northern Adelaide with reference to 'Brads Crossing', a code name for a new estate, in this case a master-planned community that has been marketed to affluent home buyers. We draw inspiration from Max Weber's interpretive methods of studying social action to understand the purpose and meaning that individuals attach to action and place, and through the lens of Karl Mannheim's sociology of culture (Weber et al. 1991; Remmling 1961). Our argument is developed from interviews with key informants familiar with the development of Brads Crossing. Interviews were conducted with employees of the local Council, the development corporation that has established Brads Crossing and experienced urban and social planners with expertise in the development of master planned communities. Interviews were augmented with our own observations of Brads Crossing, and with reference to relevant demographic data.

The demography of Brads Crossing differs significantly from adjacent suburbs in the City of Playford in the northern region of Adelaide. The unemployment rate for South Australia is currently at 7.1 percent but the rate for Playford is more than double that figure at 15.64 percent (ABS 2014, City of Playford 2014). Playford is the site of a large General Motors Holden auto plant that will close in

2017, contributing to a general decline in manufacturing employment in the area. Brads Crossing has been marketed to upmarket home owners and unemployment in this estate is likely to be significantly closer to the state average than for northern Adelaide. Marketing material for homes sold in Brads Crossing indicate that the area has been developed for upwardly mobile young people, suggesting that the residents have a different socio-economic profile to residents of adjacent working class areas of Playford, characterised by predominantly social housing and high levels of poverty. The developer of Brads Crossing, has sought to ascribe an 'exclusive', upmarket identity to the area to distinguish it from surrounding suburbs and improve home sales. Homes marketed as 'exclusive' in Brads Crossing are priced to exclude buyers whose price range is more suited to homes in nearby working class suburbs. The 'exclusiveness' of Brads Crossing in this sense is strengthened by the cost and style of housing in this area and the different demography of this estate to those surrounding it. Hence, the newly built and expensive looking Brads Crossing neighbourhood could easily appear to accommodate an enclave of people with differing social and economic circumstances from those in nearby communities. Brads Crossing is also surrounded by a half wall that physically separates it from adjacent areas. While not strictly a gated community it has many of the attributes. This is an estate that is segregated to an extent from surrounding suburbs by the upmarket identity ascribed to it by developers and by the cost of buying a home in this estate. Demography and identity might provide an understanding of how the residents of an area assign meaning to themselves and the place in which they live, but also to the understanding assigned to the place by outsiders with implications for how the place is used and related to other places.

Many variables shape human perceptions of a place in a given spatial location (Degen et. al., 2010; Rose, Massey, 1991; Simonsen, n.d.). Place as a concept is constituted by socially constructed ascriptions of identity. Identity of place helps in shaping human perception of a place, both in terms of what constitutes that place, as well as what the place is representing. Furthermore, the identity of a place is strongly interlinked with identity attributed to the demography of an area, which may be further defined by income, age, ethnicity, class or other variables (Warr, 2005; Avramov, 2002).

Space and Place

Understanding the concepts of space and place, and how the two areas are related to each other, is of great importance when referring to the concept of identity, following onto the identity we later associate with a place. Yi-Fu Tuan refers to the word place as meaning “[...] primarily two things: one’s position in society and spatial location” (Tuan, 1996: 445). This definition of the word allows us to see the concept as two avenues, which are so frequently combined to describe spatial locations of

a city or town; ultimately resulting in the description of the persons or community identifying with that place.

Using the concept of space as a container for place (Thrift 2009: 94) suggests that space shouldn't be seen as passive but as something that "[...] arises out of hard and continuous work of building up and maintains collectives by bringing different things [...] into alignment", allowing for the concept of place to be formed within it. Expressed differently, the configuration of space emerges from what we do within it, which in turn is what helps us construct and reconstruct our understanding of space (Massey, 1991: 70). Nevertheless, these concepts of space are often regarded as something of a specific shape or form; instead Tuan describes it to be formless; "space is formless [...] except for the sites that 'stand out'" (Tuan, 1996: 445). That being said, the potential place within the space could be seen to be the site that 'stands out'.

When these concepts are looked at from a more personal level, how human beings relate to places and spaces, we can often find ourselves relating or identifying with areas that 'cater to the eye'. Tuan notes these to be often seen as public symbols (Tuan, 1996: 447), such as large monuments and attractions which are easily identifiable by anyone. Although, a majority of places are not to be seen as public symbols and are therefore visually unobtrusive to those who do not "[...] evoke affection" (Tuan, 1996: 447) to them, thus those who do evoke affection towards these places may regard them as a field of care within Tuan's writing. The concept of a field of care, attests to the notion that humans find themselves creating an anchorage in things and places, somewhat of an emotional attachment (Tuan, 1996: 452). Nigel Thrift argues that places affects humans and provides them with cues to memory and behaviour, "In a very real sense, places are a part of the interaction" (Thrift, 2009: 92), implying the change in our behaviours depending on the place and how we act in those places. For example, religious places, cafes, parks and our homes, are all places where we may act differently in different circumstances. Emotional attachment to a place cannot only be seen as a field of care, but a place of personal importance to an individual for their own reasons.

In conjunction with Tuan's original definition of place as 'one's position in society', it can be seen that one can relate their own personal identity from this abstract sense of place (Katz, 2009: 238). Ultimately, the depiction of sense of place can be seen as "the subjective feelings people have about places, including the role of place in their individual and group identity" (Castree 2009: 155).

Identity and Demography

Space and place are intertwined with the concepts of identity and the ascribed demography a place may have or is given. Demography can be described as the study of population “[...] size, composition and distribution across place – and the process through which population changes” (Thomas, 2007). Demography can be used to help assess the economic status of certain groups of population, more specifically within this study, certain groups of population within one spatial location. As place is constant and the meaning of one place is ever changing due to the people using it and ascribing their own emotions towards it, demography is an important variable in defining the identity assigned to a place.

Demography and identity are closely related to the idea of understanding a place and the population uses the area. Fundamentally, “identity can be defined as the sense that people make of themselves through their subjective feelings based on their everyday experiences and wider social relations” (Knox and Marston, 2004, 508). Essentially, place and space are a key component from which humans derive their own dimensions of identification. But, with these concepts, a place cannot be ascribed one identity due to the ever-changing nature of the opinions of the demography in and around that place. The identity that one group of people ascribes to a place could ultimately be different to that of the people residing there, and vice versa. The positivity and negativity of these identities can also be linked to the classification of demography, which is living within these places, in some cases creating social polarisations.

Social polarisation between groups of people physically located in close proximity to each other can result in two different communities living in the same area, divided by the new and the old. This feeling of otherness can be seen as a “[...] shared sense of identification, interests or belonging at a particular geographic scale” (Katz, 2009: 237). Although, these divides with a number of people geographically located within the same area or an idea that constitutes a ‘community’ due to social polarisation, can be seen to be “[...] associated with, excluding or embracing particular identities” (Katz, 2009: 241). In this sense, the demographic profile of communities living in an area, attests to the identity, and ultimately to the inclusive or exclusive nature of the population. That identity and exclusion might also be shaped by economic factors.

Social exclusion and Gated Communities

Economic changes, for example the loss of manufacturing, can restructure urban landscapes. Moreover, there is evidence that communities in areas experiencing de-industrialisation experience

economic, social and political marginalisation (Barnes 2011). This process can lower land values or create static or falling home prices creating opportunities for developers and gentrifiers. Developers in particular may seek to develop and market Master Planned estates in areas affected by deindustrialisation to a different, gentrified consumer. The gentrified consumer are likely to be attracted by cheaper housing but also threatened by unfamiliar neighbours. 'Exclusive' semi-gated Master Planned estates can provide security to gentrified consumers or, where the sense of difference or threat is less evident; there are other, subtle ways of separating communities to maintain the appeal of a new housing estate to targeted consumers.

Gated communities in this sense can be classified in three categories based on the motivations of their residents. First are the lifestyle communities, where there is a desire for security and separation to safeguard leisure activities and amenities within or because of the frailty of residents. For example, retirement communities and golf and country club residential resorts (Blakely and Snyder 1997). A second category is a secure zone, where the fear of crime and outsiders provides a reason for living in a secure environment. Security zones can include new or existing neighbourhoods fitted with gates or barricades. This may include gated and secured inner-city high rise apartment complexes, or suburban estates where gates attempt to wall out nearby crime. Then there are also 'exclusive' communities marketed to an 'elite'. The gates may be physical, symbolic or both and symbolise distinction and prestige. The idea of this community is to create and protect a secure place on the social ladder. Gated communities like this can include enclaves for the rich, or 'exclusive' Master Planned estates for the affluent or upwardly mobile (Blakely and Snyder 1997). In each case, developers are likely to wish to induce a sense of community in homogenous, secure neighbourhoods, which will, of course, help sell homes for developers. Home sales are the developers business and a motivation for creating a community. That motivation might not extend to surrounding suburbs. The matters above should be considered in the context of the discussion of Brads Crossing that follows.

Brads Crossing

In July 2010, the developer submitted to Playford Council a request for a Development Plan Amendment, to assist them to proceed with their plans for Brads Crossing. The area has since been rezoned to accommodate the development of Brads Crossing. The intention and vision behind the development is to

[...] develop Brads Crossing as a community, not only with ongoing local economic capacity in terms of job creation and wealth generation, but one which makes a significant contribution to the regional economy of Playford (Brads Crossing developer, 2013).

Master Planned communities such as Brads Crossing have been described as a “romanticized concept of the traditional village community” (Bounds, 2000; 455), one of social interaction and security, bringing social harmony to our lives (Gwyther, 2005; 57). Brads Crossing has been marketed as such and these concepts can be seen in the plans for the project. Much of the design qualities within Brads Crossing revolve around public open space, and the village centre; “[...] with its own Village heart and a warm sense of community spirit [...] belonging to this exclusive neighbourhood” (Brads Crossing developers website, 2013). The village centre is home to national supermarket chain, Woolworths and various other retail shops.

As discussed earlier, the developer of Brads Crossing, has sought to ascribe an 'exclusive', upmarket identity to the area to distinguish it from surrounding suburbs and improve home sales. Homes are marketed as 'exclusive' in Brads Crossing and are priced to exclude buyers whose price range is more suited to homes in the surrounding socially disadvantaged suburbs. Marketing for home sales at Brads Crossing suggests that the suburb is designed to be ‘prestigious’, ‘community spirited’ and an ‘exclusive neighbourhood’. The 'exclusiveness' of Brads Crossing in this sense is strengthened by the cost and style of housing in this area, which by itself precludes people who cannot afford to live there.

Home sales in Brads Crossing have been affected by the economic contraction in northern Adelaide. Many of the initial 1,500 long-term jobs and 530 short-term jobs in the area flagged by government planners have simply not materialised but the estate has begun to develop. A private Christian school, Brads Crossing Christian College, has been included into the development. With the capacity to educate 700 students, using an area previously allocated as a public green space as the school oval. This school is to be located inside the walls of the Brads Crossing development. Students living outside of Brads Crossing will be required to enter into the development to attend school. It is difficult not to perceive as a ‘Brads Crossing’ school only, due to its name and the physical location inside the walls of the master planned community. The school was forecasted to be opened in early 2014, which it has done so without the school buildings completed. The 6 students enrolled at the college are now attending classes in the developer’s sales office.

At a glance, several other attributes of the area seem to be of a nature very different from what is found in the adjacent communities. The visual appearance of Brads Crossing also suggests difference from the rest of the region, most notably in the modern architecture and green landscaping. Brads Crossing is, moreover, largely segregated from the suburbs adjacent to Main North Road and Craigmore Road in Playford by a half wall that encloses the estate and by road barriers detaching Brads Crossing from the surrounding suburbs. The area is hence separated by both physical and psychosocial barriers to outsiders from adjacent suburbs. The development assumes a 'welcome to paradise' layout as you enter, past the developer's display name and down the tree lined roads. Once inside the development, the streets are lined with manicured median strips and homes which could be easily confused for brand new display homes, with the prices to match. Specifically, in a social context, a 'closed' area like Brads Crossing seems to "[...] support the exclusion of those who cannot pay" (Atkinson, 2008: p. 6). With advertising techniques that have become principle methods of selling Master Planned communities, Brads Crossing is advertised as an 'exclusive neighbourhood' with a 'warm sense of community', and despite the wall and other barriers, is meant to fit cohesively with the surrounding areas. Nevertheless there is an evident gap between the 'old' and the 'new' suburbs, the former including Munno Para and Smithfield Plains located opposite Craigmore Road. The Main North Road, a five to six lane road plus median strip, presents a notable barrier between the Brads Crossing residents and the Smithfield Plains residents, as does Craigmore Road between Brads Crossing and Munno Para.

Brads Crossing is separated from surrounding suburbs by appearance, physical barriers and by the socio-economic profile of the people who live there. This separation has the potential to inhibit the development of a sense of community between the residents of Brads Crossing and those of adjoining suburbs. To specify, a sense of community might develop between groups of different identity, if these groups are situated in the same place, rather being co-located in adjacent suburbs but physically and socially separated. The identity of place, and thus sense of community tends to shape social relations in a housing estate between residents, as well as with other communities but this is difficult to achieve if communities do not share a common space and are physically separated by barriers. Ideas of otherness or dissimilarity rising from a lack of interaction and mutual understanding between different groups may lead to polarisation, creating disconnected communities with differing identities. Perceptions of otherness or dissimilarity of the people on the other side of the wall offer little reason to inspire any social relations, and thus a sense of community, between two areas. Hence, it is difficult to understand the marketing claims of a developer that asserts an 'exclusive' residential development will also fit cohesively with

surrounding areas when the developer and associated urban planners have taken care to create a separate community.

'Exclusive' suburbs like Brads Crossing that tend to privatise public space, whether physically or mentally, and "[...] promote little social cohesion and is seen by those outside as unnecessary and divisive" (Atkinson, 2008: p. 5) fuelling "[...] increase[d] social separation and [...] broader social inequalities" (Atkinson, 2008: 6). At the current stage of development, Brads Crossing might offer a sense of community to residents within its walls but do little to offer either amenity or a sense of cohesion to marginalised residents of surrounding suburbs physically and socially separated from the 'exclusive' residents of Brads Crossing. This estate seems also to be example of what Blakely and Snyder (1997) referred to as a gated community created to provide and protect a secure place on the social ladder for upwardly mobile people. The gates in this sense may be physical, symbolic or both but are primarily about symbolising distinction and prestige rather than physical security. As such the amenities of these communities are only marginally more likely to be accessible to outsiders, with a different identity from less advantaged adjacent suburbs, than a fully gated and secure zone. As Barnes (2011) has suggested, developers are likely to continue to seek profit by constructing Master Planned communities on cheap land in de-industrialising regions and marketing these estates to upwardly mobile gentrifiers. As our case study of Brads Crossing suggests, new Master Planned communities such as this present both physical and more subtle barriers to less affluent outsiders who seek access their amenities. That is, new Master Planned estates like Brads Crossing are likely to offer little value or amenity to the residents of surrounding areas in northern Adelaide who are confronting the loss of traditional industries, rising unemployment and the entrenchment of social disadvantage.

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