

Inclusive New Urbanism: As It Applies to Golden Country Homes Subdivision in Alangilan, Batangas City (Results from a Qualitative Study)

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ABSTRACT

Golden Country Homes Subdivision in Alangilan, Batangas City is undergoing a rapid and unregulated transformation from a conventional residential subdivision into a mixed-use neighborhood district. Triggered by the expansion of Batangas State University and the establishment of the Knowledge, Innovation and Science Technology (KIST) Park as a Special Economic Zone, the subdivision has experienced significant population influx, land-use conversion, and infrastructural strain. This study examines the applicability of New Urbanism principles as a framework for guiding this transition toward an inclusive and sustainable urban form. Employing a multi-phase qualitative methodology including ethnography, discourse analysis of governing policies, grounded theory, descriptive statistics, and phenomenological inquiry the research analyzes socio-political dynamics, demographic shifts, spatial conflicts, and emerging urban patterns within the subdivision. Findings reveal that while Golden Country Homes already exhibits several characteristics aligned with New Urbanism such as walkability potential, mixed housing typologies, and institutional proximity challenges persist in parking regulation, open space provision, inclusivity, and governance adaptation. The study argues that structured implementation of inclusive New Urbanism principles, including tactical urbanism strategies and environmentally responsive planning, can reposition the subdivision as a balanced neighborhood district rather than a fragmented urban enclave. The research contributes to discourse on small-scale urban transformation in rapidly urbanizing Philippine subdivisions.

Keywords: New Urbanism, Neighborhood district, Inclusive, Mixed-use

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

New Urbanism emerged in the United States as a planning movement advocating walkable, mixed-use, environmentally responsible, and socially diverse communities. Over the past decades, it has influenced global urban design discourse by challenging conventional suburban sprawl and promoting human-centered development patterns. Its principles emphasize connectivity, diversity, neighborhood structure, public space prioritization, and environmental stewardship.

Golden Country Homes Subdivision in Alangilan, Batangas City presents a unique case of unintended urban transformation. Originally conceived as a conventional residential subdivision, it now functions as a hybrid urban environment characterized by institutional expansion, commercial proliferation, and increased migration. The presence of Batangas State University and WestMead International School, along with the development of the Knowledge, Innovation and Science Technology (KIST) Park as the country's first university-based Special Economic Zone, has intensified socio-economic activity within and around the subdivision.

This rapid transition has produced a dual reality. On one hand, the subdivision now exhibits urban vibrancy, economic opportunities, and walkable access to daily needs. On the other hand, it faces congestion, parking disputes, land-use conflicts, diminished open spaces, and governance limitations under traditional homeowners' association structures.

Golden Country Homes is no longer functioning purely as a private residential enclave; it is evolving into a de facto neighborhood district. However, this evolution is occurring without a coherent urban framework. The absence of structured planning mechanisms risks fragmentation, exclusion, and spatial inequity.

Problem Statement

The central issue addressed in this study is the absence of a guiding urban framework to manage the transformation of Golden Country Homes from a residential subdivision into an inclusive and sustainable neighborhood district.

Specifically, the study investigates:

- How New Urbanism principles can guide the subdivision's emergence as a balanced urban node.
- What constitutes an acceptable urban image for a subdivision transitioning into a neighborhood district.
- How inclusiveness can be established amid demographic diversity and institutional-driven growth.

Objectives of the Study

This research aims to:

- Evaluate the positive impacts and promises of New Urbanism principles in Golden Country Homes.
- Identify an appropriate urban image and social pattern for a subdivision evolving into a neighborhood district.
- Develop an inclusive urban framework responsive to demographic diversity and institutional influence.
- Examine governance and socio-political gaps affecting equitable urban transformation.

Significance of the Study

This study contributes to the discourse on small-scale urban transformation in Philippine subdivisions experiencing institutional-induced growth. While New Urbanism has been widely examined in planned developments and large-scale urban regeneration, its applicability to organically transforming subdivisions remains underexplored.

For Golden Country Homes, the research provides a framework to:

- Balance residential and commercial functions.
- Address infrastructure strain.
- Enhance environmental sustainability.
- Foster inclusive governance mechanisms.
- Strengthen community identity amid demographic shifts.

More broadly, the study presents a model for subdivisions across rapidly urbanizing cities where educational, commercial, and institutional expansion redefines traditional residential boundaries.

LITERATURE REVIEW

New Urbanism and the Neighborhood as a Planning Unit

New Urbanism advances a model of development structured around walkability, mixed land use, human-scale design, and environmental responsibility. At its core is the concept of the neighborhood as a spatial unit defined by a center and an edge, typically within a walkable radius. Rather than dispersing residential, commercial, and civic functions across segregated zones, the movement promotes spatial integration where housing, workplaces, retail, institutions, and public spaces coexist within proximity.

The neighborhood district model emphasizes five recurring principles: (1) a clearly defined center and boundary; (2) compact scale; (3) mixed housing and activity types; (4) interconnected street networks; and (5) prioritization of public spaces and civic structures. These principles are particularly relevant to subdivisions transitioning from mono-functional residential enclaves into mixed-use districts.

Golden Country Homes increasingly mirrors aspects of this framework. Institutional anchors such as Batangas State University and WestMead International School function as activity generators. Commercial establishments have emerged along primary streets, and residential typologies have diversified from single-family homes to apartments and dormitories. Yet these transformations remain largely unstructured, lacking intentional spatial hierarchy or coordinated design.

Inclusivity, Governance, and the Role of Policy

Urban inclusivity extends beyond physical accessibility; it encompasses socio-political participation, economic opportunity, and equitable distribution of resources. Case studies from cities such as Malmö illustrate how coordinated governance structures can reduce socio-economic disparities through collaborative planning, housing integration, and stakeholder engagement.

Within the Philippine context, subdivisions are typically governed by homeowners' associations operating under Republic Act No. 9904 and related subdivision regulations. While these frameworks emphasize coordination with local government units, they were primarily designed for stable residential communities rather than rapidly diversifying urban enclaves.

Golden Country Homes demonstrates a governance gap: its demographic transformation driven by student migration and institutional growth has outpaced the adaptability of its homeowners' association structure. The subdivision's regulatory tools are insufficient to address land-use conversion, parking conflicts, and mixed-use expansion at the scale currently occurring. Thus, inclusivity requires not only spatial design interventions but also adaptive governance mechanisms.

Nature-Based Planning and Environmental Resilience

New Urbanism incorporates environmental stewardship as a foundational element. Nature-based neighborhood planning integrates green infrastructure, permeable surfaces, and open spaces into urban form to mitigate flooding, enhance livability, and sustain ecological balance.

Golden Country Homes, characterized by increasing impervious surfaces and reduced open space, faces emerging environmental stress. Vacant lots and creek-adjacent areas present opportunities for ecological integration through parks, linear greenways, and community-based environmental initiatives. The subdivision's edge conditions particularly along the ravine and creek boundary could function as environmental buffers while strengthening neighborhood identity.

In rapidly urbanizing environments, the absence of protected green space often results in long-term infrastructural vulnerability. Therefore, incorporating environmentally responsive planning strategies is not merely aesthetic but preventive.

Tactical Urbanism and Incremental Intervention

Tactical urbanism offers low-cost, community-driven interventions to address immediate spatial challenges. Temporary street painting, flexible public spaces, and participatory beautification projects demonstrate how incremental actions can catalyze broader urban transformation.

Parking disputes within Golden Country Homes illustrate the potential of tactical approaches. Rather than unregulated signage and informal obstruction of street frontage, organized street demarcation and pedestrian delineation could reconcile vehicular demand with walkability objectives. Tactical strategies align with the subdivision's demographic composition, which includes a large student population capable of active participation in community-based improvements.

Incremental interventions are particularly suitable in contexts where large-scale redevelopment is financially or politically impractical.

Gentrification, Migration, and Subdivision Transformation

Institutional expansion frequently triggers demographic shifts resembling early-stage gentrification processes. As higher-density populations relocate to previously low-density areas, property values increase, land-use patterns change, and socio-cultural dynamics shift.

Golden Country Homes has experienced a significant rise in student boarders and migrant residents, altering its original residential character. While economic vibrancy has increased, concerns regarding displacement, exclusivity, and infrastructural strain have emerged.

Unlike classic top-down redevelopment, the transformation within the subdivision is semi-organic, driven by institutional gravity rather than deliberate commercial revitalization. This distinction positions the subdivision as a hybrid case neither purely gentrified nor fully revitalized but undergoing adaptive pressure without coordinated planning guidance.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopts a multi-phase qualitative research design supported by descriptive statistical analysis. The methodological framework integrates ethnography, discourse analysis, grounded theory, phenomenology, and demographic profiling to examine the spatial, social, and governance dynamics of Golden Country Homes Subdivision.

The selection of multiple qualitative approaches reflects the complexity of the subdivision's transformation. Rather than isolating physical planning variables, the research investigates lived experiences, policy narratives, behavioral patterns, and infrastructural realities as interconnected phenomena.

The study was conducted within the physical boundaries of Golden Country Homes Subdivision in Alangilan, Batangas City, with particular attention to institutional zones, mixed-use corridors, residential clusters, open spaces, and subdivision edges.

Phase 1: Ethnographic and Discourse-Based Inquiry

The first phase employed ethnographic immersion. As a long-term resident familiar with the subdivision's social environment, the researcher conducted sustained observation of everyday activities, spatial conflicts, seasonal population changes, and informal governance practices.

Ethnographic methods included:

- On-site observation of parking behavior, pedestrian flow, and public space usage.
- Visual documentation of built forms, signage, and vacant lots.
- Informal conversations and semi-structured interviews with homeowners, business operators, and student residents.

Discourse analysis was applied to relevant policy documents, including subdivision regulations and national laws governing homeowners' associations. The objective was to examine how legislative language frames collaboration between subdivisions and local government units, and how such frameworks align or fail to align with the realities of a diversifying community. This phase revealed a tension between existing regulatory structures and the subdivision's evolving urban function.

Phase 2: Grounded Theory and Descriptive Statistics

The second phase incorporated grounded theory to interpret recurring behavioral patterns and socio-spatial dynamics observed during fieldwork. Rather than testing a predetermined theory, the study allowed thematic categories to emerge from observed interactions, demographic shifts, and built-environment adaptations.

Complementing qualitative interpretation, descriptive statistical analysis was conducted to establish a demographic and infrastructural profile of the subdivision. A building inventory was compiled, documenting occupancy type and estimated number of occupants per structure.

Findings indicate:

- A total of 208 documented structures.
- An estimated population of approximately 2,292 occupants.
- 54% of buildings classified as single-family residential houses.
- 26% classified as apartment-type dwellings.
- The remaining structures consisting of mixed-use and commercial functions, alongside two institutional anchors.

Population analysis further indicates that approximately 60% of residents are student boarders and migrants, while only about 25% are long-term homeowner households. This demographic imbalance significantly influences land-use conversion, street activity intensity, and governance dynamics.

The quantitative profile supports the qualitative observation that Golden Country Homes has transitioned from a stable residential subdivision into a high-density, institution-driven neighborhood district.

Phase 3: Phenomenological Analysis

The final phase employed phenomenological inquiry to understand how different user groups experience the subdivision. Attention was given to:

- Homeowners' perceptions of loss of exclusivity.
- Students' temporary attachment to place.
- Business operators' economic motivations.
- Community members' responses to parking conflicts and spatial negotiations.

Phenomenological analysis emphasized the lived experience of transition. Holiday-season observations, for example, revealed drastic reductions in population when students returned to their hometowns, temporarily restoring a quieter residential atmosphere. This cyclical fluctuation highlights the subdivision's hybrid identity simultaneously residential and transient.

The integration of ethnographic immersion, grounded interpretation, statistical profiling, and experiential inquiry enabled a comprehensive understanding of Golden Country Homes as an evolving urban microcosm.

RESULTS

Institutional Gravity and Demographic Decomposition

The expansion of Batangas State University and the establishment of the Knowledge, Innovation and Science Technology (KIST) Park have significantly altered the demographic structure of Golden Country Homes. Originally designed as a low-density residential enclave, the subdivision now accommodates a predominantly transient population composed of students and migrant renters.

Field documentation indicates that approximately 60% of occupants are student boarders, while long-term homeowner households comprise only about one-fourth of the population. This shift has resulted in intensified housing subdivision within individual lots, vertical extensions of existing structures, and conversion of single-family homes into boarding houses and apartment units.

The subdivision now functions as a spillover residential district for nearby institutions rather than a self-contained homeowners' community. The institutional presence operates as an urban magnet, accelerating land-use conversion and densification without coordinated spatial planning.

Mixed-Use Intensification and Emerging Urban Form

Commercial establishments have progressively integrated into the subdivision fabric. Small retail shops, food stalls, service businesses, and boarding-related enterprises occupy former residential units, particularly along primary circulation roads.

This transformation has produced a mixed-use environment characteristic of New Urbanist neighborhoods. Daily needs are accessible within walking distance. Pedestrian activity has increased, and informal social interaction occurs along street frontages.

However, the intensification lacks spatial hierarchy. There is no formally designated commercial corridor, civic square, or neighborhood center. Instead, commercial uses emerge opportunistically, creating uneven distribution and occasional incompatibility with adjacent residential units.

The absence of design guidelines results in inconsistent façade treatments, unregulated signage, and incremental encroachments onto sidewalks and roadways. While vibrancy has increased, spatial order has diminished.

Parking Conflict and Street Negotiation

Parking congestion represents one of the most visible consequences of densification. Streets originally dimensioned for low-volume residential traffic now accommodate multiple parked vehicles, delivery motorcycles, and ride-hailing services.

Observed practices include:

- Informal reservation of curbside spaces.
- Placement of movable barriers.
- Tensions between homeowners and renters over frontage access.
- Reduced pedestrian safety due to narrowed carriageways.

The subdivision's street network, while connected, was not designed for current vehicle volume. Without regulatory recalibration or spatial reconfiguration, streets have become contested territories rather than shared public spaces.

Nevertheless, the grid-like layout presents potential for tactical urbanism interventions such as painted pedestrian lanes, designated loading zones, and time-regulated parking demarcations. These low-cost strategies could restore balance between vehicular demand and walkability.

Open Space Deficiency and Environmental Opportunity

Golden Country Homes contains limited formal public open spaces. Vacant lots and creek-adjacent areas remain underutilized despite their potential ecological and social value.

Increased impervious surfaces from structural extensions and paved frontages heighten concerns regarding drainage and microclimatic heat accumulation. The subdivision's ravine and creek boundary could serve as environmental buffers, linear parks, or biodiversity corridors if integrated into a neighborhood-scale green framework.

Currently, open spaces are residual rather than intentional. Without structured environmental planning, long-term resilience may be compromised.

Governance Limitations and Inclusivity Gaps

The subdivision remains governed primarily by a homeowners' association structure originally intended for homogeneous residential communities. The demographic and functional diversification of Golden Country Homes exceeds the scope of conventional association governance.

Students and transient renters have limited participation in decision-making processes. Commercial operators operate within regulatory gray areas. Collaboration with the local government unit occurs inconsistently.

This governance mismatch creates fragmentation. Rules designed for stability are applied to a dynamic environment. The result is reactive enforcement rather than proactive planning.

DISCUSSION

The findings position Golden Country Homes as a transitional urban form neither purely residential nor fully institutional, neither formally planned mixed-use nor entirely informal.

Reinterpreting New Urbanism in a Philippine Subdivision Context

Golden Country Homes already exhibits several attributes aligned with New Urbanism:

- Walkable proximity to institutions and daily needs
- Mixed housing typologies
- Connected street grid
- Active street frontages

However, these characteristics have emerged organically rather than through deliberate planning. The absence of a defined neighborhood center, protected public spaces, and coordinated architectural guidelines limits the realization of a coherent district identity.

In the Philippine context, where subdivisions often operate as privatized enclaves, the transformation into semi-public neighborhood districts presents both opportunity and tension. The case demonstrates that New Urbanist principles may arise informally when institutional gravity induces density and diversity. Yet without structured guidance, inclusivity and spatial harmony remain fragile.

Inclusivity Beyond Physical Design

Inclusivity in Golden Country Homes extends beyond housing diversity. The demographic composition reflects economic and educational mobility. Students from various provinces integrate into the subdivision's daily life, generating economic opportunities for homeowners who convert properties into rental units.

However, inclusivity also requires governance representation. Transient populations lack institutional voice. Commercial operators function without integrated planning oversight. Long-term homeowners experience perceived erosion of exclusivity.

An inclusive framework would require:

- Collaborative planning between the homeowners' association and the local government.

- Formal recognition of mixed-use corridors.
- Participatory mechanisms involving renters and business operators.
- Clear yet adaptable design guidelines.

Tactical Urbanism as Transitional Strategy

Large-scale redevelopment is neither economically nor politically feasible within an occupied subdivision. Tactical urbanism provides a pragmatic pathway for incremental improvement.

Designated pedestrian markings, painted intersections, shared-space demarcations, and temporary parklets could redefine streets as communal spaces rather than contested parking zones. Community-led greening initiatives could transform vacant parcels into pocket parks.

These interventions align with the subdivision's youthful demographic and foster participatory stewardship.

Environmental Integration and Long-Term Sustainability

As densification continues, environmental integration becomes essential. Protecting creek edges, enhancing permeable surfaces, and establishing small-scale green networks can mitigate ecological stress.

New Urbanism's environmental dimension emphasizes integration of nature into everyday urban life. For Golden Country Homes, this could redefine subdivision identity not as an overcrowded spillover zone, but as an adaptive, environmentally responsive neighborhood district.

CONCLUSION AND PLANNING IMPLICATIONS

Golden Country Homes Subdivision exemplifies a form of unplanned, yet inevitable urban evolution driven by institutional expansion. What began as a conventional residential enclave has transitioned into a high-density, mixed-use neighborhood district shaped by migration, educational infrastructure, and economic opportunity.

The study demonstrates that while several characteristics of New Urbanism have emerged organically walkability potential, housing diversity, and mixed-use activity these developments remain fragmented due to governance limitations and absence of structured planning.

Rather than resisting transformation, the subdivision would benefit from intentional recalibration guided by inclusive New Urbanist principles. Planning implications include:

- Formal designation of mixed-use corridors to concentrate commercial activity.
- Implementation of tactical urbanism strategies to address parking and pedestrian conflicts.
- Protection and development of ecological buffers and pocket parks.
- Governance restructuring that incorporates renters, students, and commercial stakeholders.
- Collaboration between subdivision leadership and the local government unit to align regulatory mechanisms with evolving realities.

Golden Country Homes is not an anomaly but a prototype. Across rapidly urbanizing Philippine cities, subdivisions adjacent to universities and economic zones are experiencing similar pressures. This case illustrates that adaptive planning frameworks grounded in inclusivity, environmental stewardship, and incremental intervention can guide such communities toward coherent neighborhood district identities rather than fragmented urban enclaves.

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