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Gated communities: definitions, causes and consequences

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Gated communities became an 'object of study' in the 1990s as social scientists observed their growth in several cities; they are now a feature of the urban landscape in most cities around the world. The expansion of gated communities has led to prolific research, examining different aspects of this type of residential development and providing evidence from case studies worldwide. This paper reviews how gated communities are conceptualised according to the literature and identifies the main factors influencing their development. It also considers spatial, economic, political and social consequences of the development of gated communities. These elements should be taken into account by planners and policy-makers to minimise their negative impacts and maximise the positive consequences of a residential option that is likely to be part of the urban landscape for a long time.

1. INTRODUCTION

The growth of gated communities in several cities in the 1990s attracted the research interests of social scientists. They are a contested 'object of study' among academics and policy-makers, with some highlighting their advantages and others pointing out their disadvantages. It is difficult to remain neutral to their impacts since they are now a feature of the urban landscape in most cities around the world, and they serve to highlight values and opinions about urban life and city development. This article tries not to take a position against or in favour of gated communities, but simply discusses the main arguments in the current debate. The paper first examines the existing definitions of gated communities before moving on to consider the causes of their appearance and analyse the consequences of their growth.

2. DEFINING GATED COMMUNITIES

When analysing gated communities, there is usually lively discussion in relation to the two words that form the concept. Should they be called gated communities when gates are always open and there is no controlled access? Is community the most appropriate concept to use, considering that these type of residential developments do not always seem to encourage 'community' within their walls? In response to this, some authors prefer to use concepts such as 'gated residential developments' or 'condominiums', as will be explained later. This article, however, uses the most frequently used phrase 'gated communities'.

There are several definitions used to conceptualise the phenomenon of gated communities. While it is true that some features are context specific, it is useful to have a common understanding of what they are or what they are not, and therefore it is relevant to review their main features.

In *Fortress America*, the first published book focusing solely on gated communities, Blakely and Snyder (1997) explain

Gated communities are residential areas with restricted access in which normally public spaces are privatised. They are security developments with designated perimeters, usually walls or fences, and controlled entrances that are intended to prevent penetration by non-residents. They include new developments and older areas retrofitted with gates and fences, and they are found from the inner cities to the exurbs and from the richest neighbourhoods to the poorest.

This is a wide characterisation of gated communities since it takes into account not only new settlements built with gates and fences (Figure 1), but also old neighbourhoods that have been closed as a consequence of increasing urban insecurity. This is the reason why these researchers consider gating-up as a social phenomenon that involves not just affluent families but society as a whole. Blakely and Snyder go further, acknowledging the possibility of finding gated communities targeted at poor residents. This, however, is highly contested since this social group could not afford living in neighbourhoods with certain services and infrastructure as commonly found in gated communities. Some of the cases referred to by these authors are poor neighbourhoods that became closed due to urban insecurity. However, these would not be considered gated communities by many researchers on the subject, thus highlighting the difficulties encountered in the absence of a unique definition.

In *City of Walls*, Caldeira (2000) gives a more comprehensive definition of gated communities, known as 'closed condominiums' in Brazil. A closed condominium is

a development of multiple residences, mostly high-rises, invariably walled and with security-controlled entrances, usually occupying a large area with landscaping, and including all sorts of amenities for collective use. In the last decade they have become the preferred residence for the rich ... The enclaves tend to be socially homogeneous environments. People who choose to inhabit these spaces value living amongst selected people (considered to be of the same social group) and away from the undesired interactions,

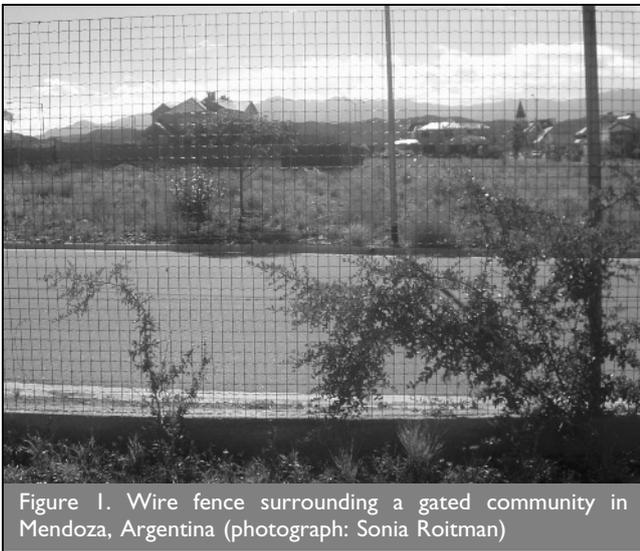


Figure 1. Wire fence surrounding a gated community in Mendoza, Argentina (photograph: Sonia Roitman)

movement, heterogeneity, danger, and the unpredictability of open streets.

While Caldeira mentions similar features of these communities to those of Blakely and Snyder, she adds other attributes such as the social homogeneity of residents, the existence of services and amenities for the use of people inside and the autonomy that these places could command since they could be 'self-contained'. The social homogeneity of gated communities is achieved by their high land and housing prices, as well as maintenance fees that act as filters. This makes them socially homogeneous internally, with different gated communities targeting different social groups regarding ethnicity, religion, class and, possibly, interests and values. According to Caldeira, high quality and a great diversity of services and amenities are offered inside gated communities in Brazil to satisfy residents' demands. She notes

In addition to being distant, secluded, and secure, closed condominiums are supposed to be self-contained worlds. Residents should be provided with almost everything they need so that they can avoid public life in the city.

This idea of 'self-contained worlds' opens a line of argument concerning two issues. First, to what extent can gated communities really be isolated from society or from the services provided by the city? Second, to what extent can their residents self-segregate from other social groups or the society as a whole as a consequence of living in a 'self-contained world'? According to some scholars, it is impossible for gated communities totally to detach from society. Amin and Graham (1999) support this position, arguing that

no physically bounded community can ever completely withdraw from the city which surrounds it. No place – even a high-security prison – is ever relationally isolated completely from its surroundings. The relational ties and connections that gated communities have with the rest of the city that surrounds them merely change.

Thus, gated communities are not isolated, but in some countries they are related to other gated communities or particular services. Judd (1995) identified the existence of 'clusters of gated communities', while Graham and Marvin (2001) refer to 'secessionary networked spaces' that combine built spaces and networked infrastructures for affluent citizens. Svampa (2004)

argues that gated communities are not isolated, but articulated with different kinds of services, schools and consumption and recreation places. According to Svampa (2001) (all quotations originally in Spanish have been translated by the current author)

the peculiarity of gated communities is that they assume a configuration that affirms, from the beginning, social segmentation (from a differentiated and restrictive access), reinforced later by the multiplying effects of the specialisation of social relations (a constitution of social frontiers more rigid each time).

Social exclusivity and social segmentation are also thus important elements to be considered when analysing gated communities.

Atkinson and Blandy (2005) define gated communities as

walled or fenced housing developments, to which public access is restricted, characterised by legal agreements which tie the residents to a common code of conduct and (usually) collective responsibility for management.

This definition identifies two new attributes: the existence of a code of conduct that rules life within the limits of the residential complex and the neighbourhood's government, which implies particular responsibilities and rights. McKenzie (1994) also emphasised the role of homeowners associations as the governing body in such settlements and the importance of the code of conduct and monthly fees paid by residents.

Most definitions emphasise the physical elements of gated communities, linking spatial analysis to social consequences of gated communities. Other elements – such as the type of housing (low-density single-family houses or high-rise buildings), location (suburban phenomenon or located in central areas), socio-economic status of residents (exclusively targeted at affluent and middle-class groups or at all strata) and their emergence as closed settlements since their inception – are not always considered or have produced disagreement (as highlighted by the socio-economic status of residents). With regard to the type of housing, the single-family house is the preferred option in gated communities in some countries such as the USA and Argentina (Figure 2), while many gated communities elsewhere (e.g. Brazil and China) contain high-rise buildings. This type of housing is more commonly found in central urban areas (e.g. the gated community shown in Figure 3, which is located near the 'City' in East London).

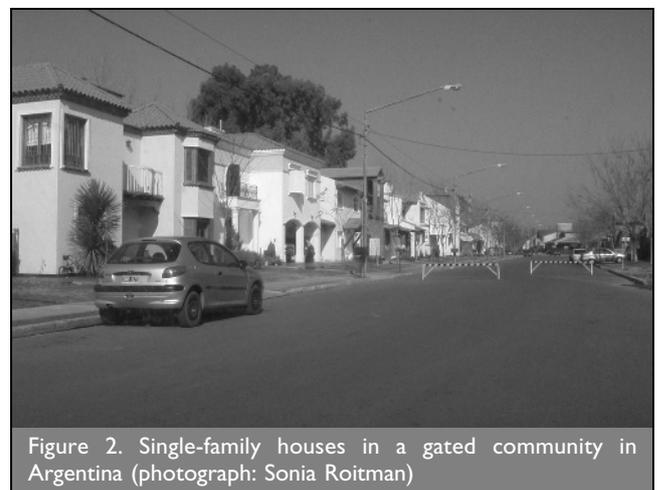


Figure 2. Single-family houses in a gated community in Argentina (photograph: Sonia Roitman)

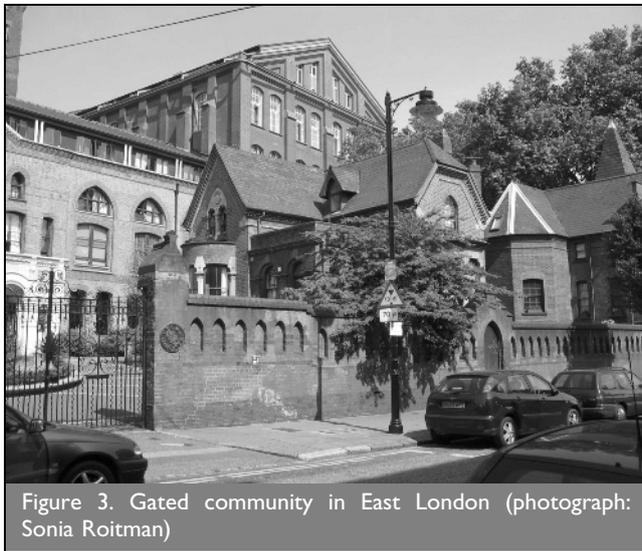


Figure 3. Gated community in East London (photograph: Sonia Roitman)

Studies on housing design or the typology of housing in gated communities are sparse and this would be an area for further research. In the limited literature, Ballent (1999) analysed the evolution of housing characteristics in gated communities in Buenos Aires. According to Ballent, the first houses were small and rustic as they were only used at weekends, but became larger and of higher quality construction when families moved there permanently. Dou (2009) examined housing typology, layout and amenities in gated communities in Beijing.

The voluntary aspect of living in a gated community is an element that is missing in all previously reviewed definitions. This refers to the voluntary choice that families make when they decide to live in this type of neighbourhood (Roitman, 2008). This factor should thus play an important role in the definition, raising questions such as: Did residents take a conscious and free decision by choosing this type of settlement? Could they have chosen differently?

Considering all the features mentioned by several authors, this article suggests the following definition of gated communities (Roitman, 2008).

Closed urban residential settlements voluntarily occupied by a homogeneous social group, where public space has been privatised by restricting access through the implementation of security devices. Gated communities are conceived as closed settlements from their inception and are designed with the intention of providing security to their residents and prevent penetration by non-residents; their houses are of high quality and have services and amenities that can be used only by their residents, who pay regular compulsory maintenance fees. They have a private governing body that enforces internal rules concerning behaviour and construction.

Finally, it is important to mention that the expansion of gated communities as a residential option over the last two decades has led to a diversification of this 'object of study'. Whereas gated communities appeared to be originally targeted at affluent residents, developers have more recently built some gated communities for the middle classes; these might not have the top-quality residences or sport the same infrastructure, but they have the elements previously examined. This diversification of gated communities means that there is a typology of gated communities that considers three main types in the USA:

lifestyle communities, prestige communities and security zone communities (Blakely and Snyder, 1997). In the case of Argentina, there are six or seven types according to different authors – 'clubes de campo', 'closed neighbourhoods', 'garden-towers', 'farm-clubs', 'nautical-clubs', 'mega-projects' and 'condominiums' (these condominiums, however, are not the same as the Brazilian condominiums) (Roitman, 2008; Svampa, 2001). Bearing in mind all the elements that characterise gated communities, having a clearer definition of the concept allows for a better understanding of the causes of their development.

3. CAUSES OF THE ARRIVAL OF GATED COMMUNITIES

Several factors have influenced the expansion of gated communities. For a systematic analysis, they can be divided into structural and subjective causes.

3.1. Structural causes

Structural causes influencing the development of gated communities can be organised into two themes. The first relates to globalisation of the economy, which leads to growing urban social inequalities, the processes of advancing social polarisation and an increase in foreign investments. The second theme is more specific and concerns the withdrawal of the state from the provision of basic services, which results in (among other effects) a rise in urban violence and the privatisation of security. The former appears to be the most common justification for moving to a gated community.

Globalisation of the economy has had profound effects on urban social fabric and the city structure. According to Sassen (1994)

the impact of global processes radically transforms the social structure of cities themselves – altering the organization of labor, the distribution of earnings, the structure of consumption, all of which in turn create new patterns of urban social inequality.

Economic globalisation influences the real estate market and produces 'a massive increase in foreign and domestic investment in luxury commercial and residential construction' (Sassen, 1991). In the case of real estate activity, Sassen (1994) noted 'the retreat of many real estate developers from the low- and medium-income housing market who are attracted to the rapidly expanding housing demand by the new highly paid professionals and the possibility for vast over-pricing of this housing supply'. This social group demands residential areas with high quality services and infrastructure, and gated communities thus become an option for this high-income group.

Foreign investments spread foreign tendencies. Gated communities, considered a common feature of the urban landscape in the USA, have become a frequent element in other cities as developers export this urban model. In his analysis of gated communities in Buenos Aires, Thuillier (2000) mentions the introduction of the 'American way of life'. Janoschka and Glasze (2003) view gated communities as 'the diffusion of a successful real estate product' and explain that 'in developing countries, gated communities are part of the image of the international and modern elite and are commercialised as part of this 'global culture''. The expansion of gated communities also shows the

great influence that developers and investors can exert on planning and how the media have an important role in disseminating this lifestyle (Caldeira, 2000).

As mentioned earlier, there is much discussion in relation to the socio-economic level of gated community residents. Some researchers reject the link between social polarisation and the rise of gated communities, arguing that it is not only the elite who move to gated communities but also citizens with middle-income salaries (Janoschka and Glasze, 2003), while others mention the existence of gated communities for low-income households (Blakely and Snyder, 1997; Smith Bowers and Manzi, 2006). However, as Svampa (2004) explains, gated community residents are usually 'successful groups': highly skilled workers who have been able to adapt to the new conditions of the economy and can afford to pay for the services provided in gated communities.

Gated communities, as the literature shows, appear as a spatial response for particular social groups to globalisation processes. This is related to the second structural theme that refers to the rise of urban violence and privatisation of security as a result of state withdrawal from the provision of basic services, in this case mainly public security. Economic restructuring and the implementation of neo-liberal policies have resulted in many countries having to cut back on government functions. Reductions in the supply of basic services such as health, education, housing, employment and security has left large population groups without these public provisions. Accompanied by wealthy citizens' ability to produce their own private solutions (e.g. the creation of gated communities (Janoschka and Glasze, 2003) or privatisation of security), this challenges the state's previous monopoly of legitimated use of force (Caldeira, 2000).

Although it has not been widely analysed, the explosion of gated communities is also related to the lack of human and financial resources faced by governments, and local governments in particular. With insufficient resources to carry out all necessary assessments and controls on private sector activities, occupied gated communities with no final planning permission and increased lobbying on policy-making processes are becoming common (Thuillier, 2005).

The withdrawal of the state from the provision of security has led to an increase in violence in many cities (Dammert, 2001) and thus the privatisation of security (e.g. fences, guards, alarms and gated communities). These two structural reasons for the worldwide spread of gated communities are essential to an understanding of the 'forting-up' phenomenon. Nevertheless, it is important to consider that not all urban residents choose to live in a gated community, which indicates that subjective causes are also relevant.

3.2. Subjective causes

Subjective causes of the expansion of gated communities are considered as resulting from individuals' desires, interests, viewpoints and opportunities. There are five main subjective causes suggested in the literature

- (a) increased fear of crime
- (b) a search for a better lifestyle

- (c) desire for a sense of community
- (d) a search for social homogeneity
- (e) aspirations for higher social status and social distinction within particular social groups.

3.2.1. Fear of crime. According to the literature, this is the main driving force behind the multiplication of gated communities. Fear of crime, which refers to citizens' *perception* of crime, constitutes an individual's response to an increase in urban crime. It is related to state withdrawal from security provision. If citizens feel insecure and consider the state is not able to provide security, those who can solve this problem by private means move to safer places such as gated communities. Blakely and Snyder (1997) show how fear of crime results in increasing 'gating-up' as an apparent solution to crime even when it is not related to an actual increase in crime figures. Wilson-Doenges (2000) argues that there is not always a direct correlation between increasing crime rates and increased fear of crime. The latter appears overemphasised in comparison with actual crime rates.

3.2.2. Search for a better lifestyle. This refers not only to security, but also to better living conditions. Gated communities are advertised in the real estate market as places different from the city where it is possible to have closer contact with nature as well as larger houses and plots and access to social amenities. They represent a 'green lifestyle', 'doors to paradise' (Svampa, 2001) and the 'anti-city' because 'the underlying philosophy implies that there is a paradisaical order within their limits, whereas there is chaos outside' (Cabral Barajas and Canosa Zamora, 2001). According to these researchers, gated communities offer the possibility of achieving a greener and better lifestyle that is *different* from the urban lifestyle despite being located in urban areas. However, the achievement of a truly better life quality does not always happen: some gated communities do not possess large green areas and are located in dense urban areas.

3.2.3. Achieving a sense of community. Community 'includes a sense of mutual responsibility, significant interaction, and cooperative spirit' (Blakely and Snyder, 1997). Discussion on 'community' and 'sense of community' has received important attention in the gated community literature because it is part of the wording of the concept and also raises the question of whether or not a 'decline of community' has led to their increase. Gated communities appear in the literature as places that encourage a sense of community in the context of a decrease of community in city life. As Wilson-Doenges (2000) notes

The decline in sense of community has sent Americans searching for this lost prize. Developers and marketers of communities see this need and are attempting to meet it. One way to do this is to develop gated communities.

Low (2003) agrees with the notion of a 'lost prize', writing

Gated community residents are interested in 'community', but a specific kind of community that includes protecting children and keeping out crime and strangers whilst at the same time controlling the environment and the quality of services. The 'community' they are searching for is one imagined from childhood or some idealized past.

3.2.4. *Search for social homogeneity.* This is related to search for a sense of community. Low (2000) examined what happens when particular areas of a city suffer a change in social composition to become mixed neighbourhoods. According to Low, 'many interviewees mentioned the changes in the social composition of the surrounding areas [of their formerly 'open neighbourhoods'] as a primary motivation for moving [to gated communities]' (here open neighbourhoods refer to non-gated neighbourhoods). Svampa (2001) noted the importance that gated community residents in Argentina give to homogeneity in terms of age and economic level of fellow residents. Arizaga (2005) explains that contact among peers reinforces social identity and makes the difference with 'the other' (who is outside the walls) more explicit. According to her, the closure and social homogeneity of the gated community are essential to providing a place that protects against a world that is always changing.

Social homogeneity is preserved in gated communities mainly based on a socio-economic level. Some communities place implicit and explicit restrictions on ability to buy a plot; many gated community residents associations reserve the right to accept or refuse a new member (McKenzie, 1994; Rojas, 2007; Svampa, 2001). Class (or socio-economic level) appears to be the most important dimension to keep residents in or out. However, ethnicity and religion also play an important role in demarcating the characteristics of certain gated communities. In Argentina, some prestigious gated communities ban Jewish residents and, as a consequence, gated communities for only Jewish people have been built (Rojas, 2007; Svampa, 2001). In South Africa and the USA, social homogeneity is also achieved through race segregation. Age is also becoming a relevant dimension for differentiation in the USA, with several gated communities targeted at retired residents who have particular needs and interests (Blakely and Snyder, 1997).

3.2.5. *Search for higher status and social distinction.* Some move to such neighbourhoods as it offers social prestige, among other 'benefits': they 'provide the cachet of exclusive living' (Blakely and Snyder, 1997). Walls and security devices are not just physical elements – they also provide status and distinction. Caldeira (2000) calls this situation the 'aesthetics of security', arguing that 'the more ostensibly secure and enclosed the property, the higher its status'. Svampa (2004) considers living in gated communities within a group of distinction strategies such as practising exclusive sports, having membership to selected clubs and attending exclusive schools.

It is hoped that this analysis of the structural and subjective causes of the development of gated communities will allow for better comprehension of the process of 'forting-up'. The two types of drivers, which are interrelated, provide a clear base from which to survey the consequences of the spread of gated communities.

4. CONSEQUENCES OF THE RISE OF GATED COMMUNITIES

Gated communities constitute a complex urban phenomenon and their development has provoked different types of consequences, which have received considerable academic attention. Their rise has positive and negative effects that can be analysed according to the sphere they influence: spatial, economic, political and social.

4.1. Spatial effects

The most important positive effects on urban space identified in the literature are the provision of services and infrastructure to areas formerly not well equipped (Salcedo and Torres, 2004) and the creation of spaces with high environmental quality (Cabrales Barajas and Canosa Zamora, 2001). Negative impacts include the closure of streets, the hindrance of emergency services (Landman, 2000), fragmentation of urban space and loss of a liveable urban centre (Low, 2003). Gated communities encourage the use of private cars and discourage pedestrian and cycle mobility outside the limits of the development (Landman, 2008).

4.2. Economic effects

The economic impacts of gated communities refer chiefly to effects on housing and land markets and on the local economy. The attraction of new services and infrastructure for gated community residents can improve the local economy (Sabatini and Salcedo, 2005) and increase property values (Lemanski, 2005). Gated community developments create low-skilled jobs (Salcedo and Torres, 2004; Svampa, 2001) and increase tax revenues for local governments (Le Goix, 2005). They work as 'economic clubs' that provide more efficient services to be collectively consumed by their residents (Webster, 2001). However, they can also have negative economic consequences such as potentially less revenue because some gated communities refuse to pay taxes to the local government if they are not getting the services (McKenzie, 1994). Monthly charges for maintenance and security also imply higher costs for residents (Landman, 2000). Finally, the presence of gated communities can reduce property values in non-gated surrounding neighbourhoods (Le Goix, 2005).

4.3. Political effects

The most significant positive political effects are the exercise of political participation and civil engagement within the gated community (Lang and Danielsen, 1997), and fewer responsibilities and problems for local governments (Cabrales Barajas and Canosa Zamora, 2001). Some authors have noted the political and economic advantages for gated community residents as they can organise the provision of services and shared consumption agreements following the economic theory of clubs (Foldvary, 1994; Lee and Webster, 2006; Webster, 2001).

However, Blakely and Snyder (1997) found that gated communities do not always increase participation. Moreover, McKenzie (1994) noted that some homeowner associations function as corporations run by managers whose main objective is the protection of property values. Gated communities also reinforce private laws known as 'covenants, conditions and restrictions' (Judd, 1995; McKenzie, 1994). Caldeira (2000) mentions the privatisation of public spaces through the use of walls and fences that prevent public access and the undermining of the concepts of democracy and citizenship because

among the conditions necessary for democracy is that people acknowledge those from different social groups to be co-citizens, having similar rights despite their differences. However, cities segregated by walls and enclaves foster the sense that different groups belong to separate universes and have irreconcilable claims. Cities of walls do not strengthen citizenship but rather contribute to its corrosion.

The undemocratic character of gated communities is also noted in the literature. Covenants, conditions and restrictions, which in many cases are very intrusive, rule life inside a gated community (Blakely and Snyder, 1997; Judd, 1995).

4.4. Social impact

Social consequences are probably the most often discussed effects within the literature on gated communities. Some argue that gated communities encourage a sense of community (Arizaga, 2005), especially in developments with important sport amenities because people there share more activities. However, many scholars have questioned this. For example, studying gated communities in Johannesburg, Beall *et al.* (2002) found 'in neither case, in our research, was there much evidence of a sense of deep community resulting from proximate living'. Lang and Danielsen (1997) state that 'the walls are there to sharply delineate status and provide security, rather than signify a collective understanding amongst equals'. There thus seems to be no agreement in the literature on whether gated communities contribute to the enhancement of a sense of community or not. In this sense, Smith Bowers and Manzi (2006) proposed use of the term 'gated residential development' rather than 'gated community' as 'it does not carry the same weight of sociological baggage'.

Within the negative social consequences of gated communities, the literature mentions

- (a) stimulation of social tensions between the inside and outside
- (b) the elaboration of 'otherness' as dangerous
- (c) encouragement of urban social segregation.

The emergence of gated communities may bring about social tensions between gated community residents and neighbours from surrounding local areas. These conflicts relate to the closure of streets, the privatisation of space and the provision of services in the area (Roitman, 2008). Class differences might also be a driver for conflicts. As noted by Pile *et al.* (1999) 'the visible exclusiveness of such neighbourhoods intensifies resentment against them, and against the people within them'.

Gated communities can create a symbolic barrier between residents and non-residents by emphasising social differences between the two groups. 'The other' – considered as the one who lives in the surrounding area – might be underestimated or thought of as potentially dangerous (Low, 2003). Lang and Danielsen (1997) argue that people develop a sense of very hard lines and divisions between inside and outside and between their peers and others based on the explicitness of social differences in terms of class or ethnic belonging between the inside group and the outside communities.

Finally, some research considers the fostering of urban social segregation, particularly through the construction of physical barriers that prevent interaction between inside and outside social groups. Blakely and Snyder (1997) note that

gated communities have created a new housing option for some of us, but they have also created a new societal dilemma for all of us. The purpose of gates and walls is to limit social contact, and reduced social contact may weaken the ties that form the social contract.

According to Caldeira (2000) there is

a new pattern of spatial segregation where different social groups are again closer to one another but are separated by walls and technologies of security, and they tend not to circulate or interact in common areas. The main instrument for this new pattern of spatial segregation is what I call 'fortified enclaves'.

Low (2003) argues that gated communities contribute to segregation because

during periods of economic decline and social stress, middle-class people become anxious about maintaining their social status... Social splitting offers a strategy that is reinforced by cultural stereotypes and media distortions, allowing people to psychologically separate themselves from people who they perceive as threatening their tranquillity and neighbourhood stability. The walls and gates of the community reflect this splitting physically as well as metaphorically, with 'good' people (the good part of us) inside, and the 'bad' remaining outside.

It seems that there is a relationship between gated communities and segregation that can be explained through the social practices, opinions and values of their residents, but at the same time the features of gated communities also influence this relationship. It is also relevant to consider that segregation might not only be an intended, but also an unintended consequence of the spread of gated communities as their residents do not pursue this effect (Roitman, 2008).

Some scholars argue that gated communities do not contribute to segregation, but change the *scale* of segregation. As noted by Sabatini and Cáceres (2004)

The multiplication of gated communities that is taking place in Chilean cities is equivalent to a diminishing of residential segregation in a large spatial scale and, simultaneously, to an intensification of segregation in a reduced spatial scale. This reduction of the segregation scale takes place when gated communities are built in the low-income periphery.

In many countries, especially in Latin America, gated communities are located in areas inhabited by poor residents and thus affluent residents are dispersed throughout the city: 'the too rapid interpretation that makes equivalent the appearance of gated communities with an increase in spatial segregation overlooks the fact that physical distances between social groups have been reduced in these areas of the urban periphery' (Sabatini and Cáceres, 2004). According to Salcedo and Torres (2004), spatial proximity allows poor citizens to integrate with gated community residents based on market relationships like employment opportunities or service provision. Manzi and Smith Bowers (2005) argue that gated communities located in deprived areas of London 'help to reduce residential segregation'. Research carried out by Alvarez (2005) in Montevideo, Uruguay, found that 'gated communities have not increased residential segregation in this city'. According to this study 'residents of gated communities are a very homogeneous group in age, family stage, and class' and

already existing social and residential segregation facilitates the move to gated communities. Gated communities in Montevideo are more similar to other processes of affluence segregation than many would assume. For residents, moving to a gated community implies more a rise in their already high degree of segregation than a qualitative rupture with the city.

This review has demonstrated that the social consequences of gated communities create controversy and many contrasting arguments exist in the literature.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This paper has reviewed various definitions of gated communities. Different authors highlight different features, making this research topic problematic because it is difficult to know if different researchers are studying similar gated communities or not. This discourages any potential comparative study. In this sense, a clear definition of these types of residential development is necessary before any consideration can be made of their impacts or their relation to planning.

The analysis of the reasons for the development of gated communities given in this paper serves as a point of reflection and provides justification for some of their features; it also makes a good starting point for understanding their impacts. Most of the analysed causes are phenomena or trends occurring in most cities, and this explains the multiplication of 'gating-up' around the world.

The spatial, economic, political and social effects of gated communities reveal the complexity of urban development and the inter-relation between these effects evidenced in urban planning. Unsurprisingly, the literature on the subject indicates both positive and negative effects of the spread of gated communities. Some authors have noted improvement of local economies, the creation of low-skilled jobs, more efficient management of collective private services and the creation of spaces with high environmental quality. However, with regard to their negative effects, gated communities have been found to fragment and privatise urban space, foster the use of private transport, undermine the concepts of democracy and citizenship, and encourage social tensions and segregation.

Planners and policy-makers should bear in mind all the consequences – both positive and negative – when considering planning permission for such developments and act according to what is needed in a particular city area. It is also important to realise that gated communities represent a marketing opportunity for developers and private investors who tend to focus on their positive impacts and avoid doing something to try to minimise the negative. Gated communities will probably be part of the urban landscape for a long time: they are encouraged by the private sector and demanded by particular social groups who see them as their 'only housing option'. It is therefore essential to try to minimise their negative impacts and maximise their positive consequences.

Above all, planners and policy-makers should try not to take any position against or in favour of gated communities – they should be in favour of equitable and sustainable urban and social development.

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