Fear and segregation: Anxiety Beyond Gated Communities. The Costa Rican case.

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Introduction

Spatial segregation is one of the main consequences of building gated communities (Blakely & Snyder, 1997; Caldeira, 2000; Low, 2004; Roitman, 2010). However, their physical features might also contribute to rising tensions between those on different sides of the wall. Caldeira (2000) stands that the closeness between gated communities and marginalised groups in Latin America has provoked 'fortified enclaves' promoting the separateness instead of integration. This essay explores how elements of gated communities' edges might exacerbate the exclusion feelings already in place by residential segregation, and how those reactions are linked to fear of crime in neighbouring communities.

Gated communities as residential developments arose in the United States in the early 1980s (Blakely & Snyder, 1997) and Latin American cities in the late 1990s (Castells, 1999; Coy, 2006). The emergence of gated communities in Latin America results from several factors; Coy (2006) attributes both external and internal driving forces. As external reasons, Coy mentions structural conditions such as neoliberalism, globalisation and privatisation; whilst internal forces might be status, lifestyle and security. In this regard, fear of crime might be one of the most important reasons for the tremendous success of gated housing areas.

Safety is an essential concern in most of Latin American people. This region holds the highest rates of homicides worldwide (Chioda, 2016). The fear discourse has also been part of the political rhetoric from the 1990s, fuelling people anxiety even more (Huhn, 2017). In this context, gated communities have been seen as 'shelters' against criminality; Caldeira (2000) holds that those walled enclaves and the increase of private security are legitimised by fear discourses that perpetuate stereotypes about undesirable people. Tensions based on distrust towards the immediate environment might provoke the same feeling in turn, this time coming from the communities outside the wall.

Central America is one of the most violent areas in the world; however, it is not homogeneous in their figures. Countries such as Costa Rica, Panamá and Nicaragua have lower rates of homicides than the rest. Although the overall victimisation rate in Costa Rica has diminished from 2008 (INEC, 2015), gated communities have been proliferating. This trend has started to fragment the city, physically and socially, creating isolated places into the urban fabric. This essay's argumentation is based on data collected through eight case studies within the Greater Metropolitan Area of Costa Rica. The findings

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suggest a deep residential segregation and exclusion feelings in most open neighbourhoods beside gated communities. The outcomes show pre-existing fears fuelled by isolated landscapes and uncertainty about who lives behind those walls.

Fear of crime and built environment

Fear of crime has profound impacts on quality of life. It affects social cohesion and the experience of the city. This feeling is defined by Ferraro and LaGrange (1987, p.72) as a 'negative emotional reaction to crime or the symbols associated with crime'. However, fear of crime is a complex phenomenon, which involves different dimensions and factors such as incomes level, gender, education, ethnicity, age and attachment to the neighbourhood (Gray et al. 2011). Some of those factors are also affected by the built environment and urban design decisions.

Some authors have suggested the manipulation of physical space to prevent crime. Newman (1973) through his concept 'Defensible Spaces', points out that buildings' configuration and urban design can help to surveillance. In his view, the community becomes a guardian encouraging territoriality feelings. Besides, the Situation Prevention Thesis (Clarke, 1983; Crawford, 1998) supports the idea of reducing the opportunities for crime through informal community vigilance, the introduction of barriers, and use of Closed-circuit television (CCTV) and physical alterations. In both cases, the presence of strangers is avoided, and neighbourhoods are under community control.

However, those guardianship's principles affect the permeability of the city. Minton (2009) holds that the 'Defensible Spaces' are the reason why gated communities and *cul de sac* have been spread across the United States and Britain since 1970. She argues that those views encourage the idea of strangers as a source of danger; therefore, the tension between the absence or presence of unfamiliar people affects the dynamism of the city. Jacobs (1961) highlights the importance of bringing different types of people altogether. She points out that a successful city is where people feel safe among strangers. Sennett (2018:126) stands those preconceptions about strangers just because 'they are incomprehensibly strange' degrades the ethical character of the city'. He highlights that living within a diverse group has the power of reducing the feeling of insecurity and frustration because there is no clear image of who is the enemy. Sennett suggests that turning walls in membranes allows the interchange inside-outside, stimulating the casual mix among residents and making contact less confrontational.

Walls and segregation

This growth of gated communities in Latin America might be explained as an answer to social conflict and violence in cities; however, these developments also reflect new lifestyles emerging under the globalisation process (Coy and Pöhler, 2002). Under this perspective, developers are seen as providers of both safety and familiarity (Blakely and Snyder, 1997).

In Latin America, safety policies in residential areas have increased differentiation barriers; paradoxically, rising the segregation and creating exclusion's spaces (Carrion, 2008). This situation is also present in the suburbs, where poor and rich are next to each other but separated by a wall (Roitman and Phelps, 2011). Costa Rica has had a significant increase in the number of gated communities. Most of them have been created under the condominium scheme, an ownership system with individual dwellings within a shared land with common areas. From 1990 to 2017, the rise of the built area under

this category increased from 5,2% to 25,2% (Programa Estado de la Nación, 2018). Although this figure does not mean that all those developments are walled, it represents the current trend. A report from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) highlights that the widespread of unsafety feelings have altered people behaviour in Costa Rica 'They live in a condominium rather than open spaces, put razor wire around what was once an open garden.' (PNUD-Costa Rica, 2005:4).

In Costa Rica, gated communities are mostly concentrated in the urban region; Pujol et al. (2011) suggest that within Greater Metropolitan Area, social segregation has climbed steadily in places where gated communities are located. The planning system has different rules for open residential developments and gated communities. Open neighbourhoods supply land for public parks and streets, whilst gated communities can keep the entire property for themselves without providing any public space. Although local governments could include rules in their municipal planning codes to revert that situation, their response has been slow; furthermore, the national planning system has many drawbacks for adapting to change quickly (Barrantes-Chaves, 2019). This situation reduces the number of open spaces per inhabitant and areas for sharing within the city.

Many traditional open neighbourhoods have started to be surrounded by gated communities. Those neighbourhoods are very diverse; they may be either low or high incomes. Many authors have suggested a positive association between fear of crime and income inequalities (Franklin et al. 2008; Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009; Vieno et al. 2013). In this regard, the cases selected for this research combine different types of poverty ranges and poverty levels.

Figure 1. Gated community' wall next to one of the case studies, Costa Rica.
Source: Author

Recording the spatial tensions

The urban tensions are not always evident, making challenging their research. Fear of crime is a multi-factorial phenomenon and spatial tensions might exacerbate that feeling, but not necessarily in the same intensity per community. The study is based on neighbourhoods from different poverty's ranges within the Greater Metropolitan Area of Costa Rica; the eight case studies are neighbourhoods next to gated communities. They were selected randomly according to the indicator of the unfulfilled needs (NBI)[2]. The NBI is a poverty measure from the Costa Rica census. It encompasses four elements: housing, educational level, health and access to goods and services; when a dwelling holds 4 NBI means the highest level of poverty whilst 0 NBI represents no poverty.

The data collection was carried out through walking interviews, focus groups, in-depth interviews and observations. Mobile research methods where the researcher walks along with participants in their familiar environments have been increasing (Evans & Jones, 2011), Carpiano (2009) called this type of method as 'go-along'. In Costa Rica, UN-Habitat introduced the 'Safety exploratory walks' (ONU-Habitat, 2013) to explore people's perceptions about fear of crime. They defined them as short urban routes, previously defined and carried out by the community, in which participants express their thoughts about their community's safety.

Evans and Jones (2011) suggest using Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to track and visualise the walking interviews. In this study, the walks were tracked with a Global Positioning System (GPS) and synchronised with an audio recorder. Besides, each participant was provided with individuals maps with stickers to explore the intensity of fear.

Figure 2 shows an example of outcomes obtained from walking interviews in one neighbourhood. Map 1, shows an image made from gathering the individual maps with stickers given to each participant. Map 2, introduces a Talk's track map, which results from information gathered from the audio-recorded, transcribed and coded through software for qualitative analysis (Nvivo), and then georeferenced using the comment's time on the GPS' track as a link. Map 2 shows some codes from the categories Community relationships and Built environment; however, multiple maps about different themes were created; for instance, victimisation, drugs, feelings or sounds.

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[2] The unfulfilled needs known as NBI by its acronym in Spanish [*Necesidades Básicas Insatisfechas]* is a Costa Rican poverty indicator elaborated by the National Institute of Statistics and Census (INEC).
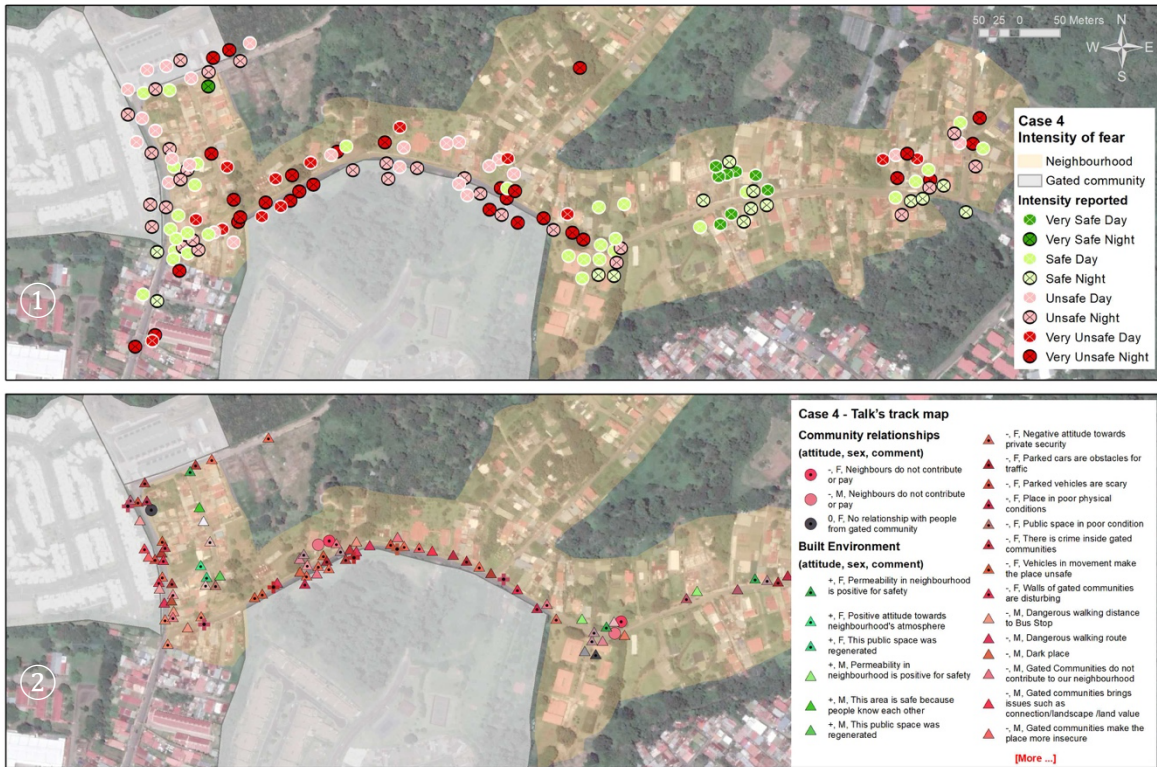
Figure 2. Example of outcomes from walking interviews for one case study in Costa Rica (legend from the second map does not include all the icons).
Source: Author's elaboration. Aerial photograph: Google, Maxar Technologies, 2018.

This methodological approach contributes to understand the spatial dimension of many tensions between people from open neighbourhoods towards gated residents. For example, features of the built environment such as high walls from gated communities exacerbate exclusion feelings in non-gated neighbours; those perceptions are further explored through focus groups. Furthermore, non-participant observations and in-depth interviews with local authorities enable triangulating some data. Yin (2014) has highlighted the relevance of multiple sources and data triangulation to increase the reliability of case studies.

The outside: tensions beyond the gate

Residential segregation

Residential segregation was found in seven of the eight cases. People from non-gated neighbourhoods do not have community ties with gated-residents nearby. They believe that gated residents do not care about their welfare or community, except for the wealthiest neighbourhood (0 NBI). In that case, people from the gated communities nearby were part of the community organisation and contributed actively and economically to the neighbourhood's affairs. Also, this was the only case with a permeable barrier between gated and non-gated communities.

Teenagers from communities within the highest and middle ranges of poverty were reached through focus groups. It was found that they reproduced the same spatial segregation patterns than adults. Despite having an extensive network of friendships beyond their own neighbourhood, teenagers manifested not having friends within the gated communities nearby.

The edges between gated communities and open neighbourhoods were mostly walls. As mentioned above, the only exception was the wealthiest neighbourhood; in that case, the perimeter was permeable (railings) but keeping access restrictions. During the walking interviews, the gated edges (mostly walls) were associated with feelings of fear. They were described as isolated and dark places; facilitating crimes such as muggings, drugs' traffic, abductions or sexual assault. Neighbours highlighted the large size of those gated developments, many of them were more extensive than nine hectares –six of the eight cases. This situation forced people to walk long distances along their edges for their daily routines such as take the bus or take their children to the local school. In fact, many bus stops were located just next to the wall; those bus stops were considered dangerous by the participants due to isolation and lack of natural surveillance, especially during the night.

Walls and preconceptions

As a result of residential segregation, non-gated residents have created their own notion about who live in gated communities. They express preconceptions about gated residents; for instance, participants believe gated neighbours do not identify themselves with the community needs because maybe they come from another place out of the town. The income level of those people also causes concern among neighbours; for instance, many participants think they are wealthy people, which is an issue for their neighbourhood because gated communities might be a target for criminality. Some participants believe that it might be difficult for offenders to enter into the gated development due to sophisticate safety systems; therefore, criminals could choose to commit crimes in their neighbourhood instead.

People mainly from the middle and the highest poverty ranges mentioned that closed condominium residents might be involved in illegal business, putting their neighbourhoods under threat. This situation was highly worrying in neighbours from the community in highest poverty, who felt anxious about these criminal networks as they believe their young people are vulnerable and easy targets to be recruit by organised crime. On the contrary, the communities with higher incomes had less negative preconceptions about the gated residents. Some of those participants had met people from the gated community, although not necessary there was a friendship tie. The opinion about those residents was not linked to organised crime; they described them as working people from middle to upper-middle class. Beyond the physical barriers between neighbourhoods and gated communities, prejudgments result from uncertainty about who live behind the walls; increasing pre-existing fears and rising the tensions between the inside and outside.

Tensions around the drug's conflicts

Central America was a region beaten by armed conflicts during the late 1970s and 1980s; war was one of the leading causes of death and concern (Sandoval, 2015). The region's fragile situation and its strategical location triggered different political issues that later facilitated drug traffic, using the Central American isthmus (Costa Rica included) as a bridge from South America to North America. Currently, during this transfer, some quantities of drugs remain in the country as payment for dealers or local consumption (Palma-Campos, 2018). In this regard, drug conflict is a phenomenon attached to the urban

fabric and easily traceable by community members. During the walking interviews, the participants identified the places where they believe those transactions are taking place; such as public spaces and private areas.

Across the eight case studies was identified at least one drug issue per neighbourhood, mainly drug's sale in 'small scale' (See Figure 3). The places where this situation happened were consistently ranked as unsafe areas; some of them were located inside the neighbourhood on streets without contact with gated developments. However, in five of eight cases, the drug's sale took place next to the gated community's wall, in the public space. As shown in Figure 3, the diversity and intensity of those conflicts are concentrated in communities with high poverty. That might explain why those residents blame people from gated communities to be involved in organised crime. On the other hand, the case with the highest incomes also has drug conflicts; however, this community has a particularity; their residents are leaving their homes in the neighbourhood to move on into gated communities, abandoning their large dwellings. This situation causes worry to them because they believe those big houses are being rented by people connected to organised crime.
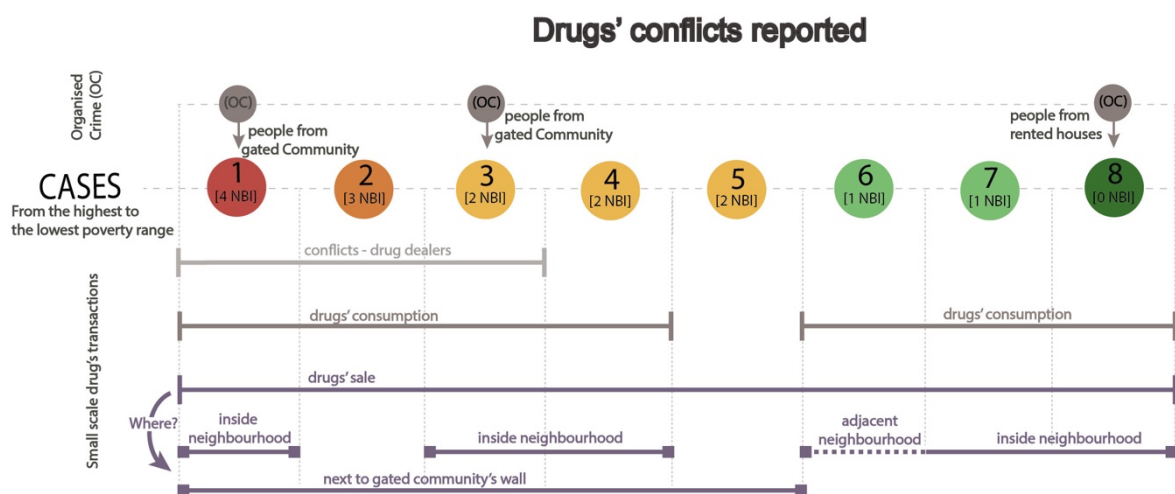

Figure 3. Participant's perceptions about drugs' conflicts in their communities
Source: Author's elaboration

Overwhelming growth, involuntary enclosure.

As noted earlier, gated communities in Costa Rica are expanding quickly. Within the Greater Metropolitan Area, they are embedded into the urban fabric, next to established neighbourhoods. The residents from those places in rapid expansion expressed their discontent about the situation. For instance, those neighbourhoods surrounded by at least four gated communities larger than one hectare said they felt 'wrapped' by those developments. This sort of involuntary enclosure seems to rise the exclusion feelings and fuel resentments among non-gated residents; they expressed a feeling that their community has been taken by strangers who live in their own fortifications. In the absence of spaces for sharing and mixing, the anxiety towards those strangers is even more significant.

A common complaint was the lack of contribution from gated communities to the neighbouring facilities, especially regarding the supply of public spaces such as parks and streets. Besides, they pointed out how the significant surface covered by those developments makes communication among neighbourhoods difficult. Pujol et al. (2011) stand that gated communities have risen the drawbacks in the Costa Rican road system, which also has affected traffic congestion. In this regard, the high traffic volume was cited as an important issue in most of the cases. Considering that bus stops were mainly located next to gated communities' walls, the heavy traffic works as a 'second wall' increasing fears during waiting times. In general, in those neighbourhoods where the amount of gated communities is growing faster, there is a discontent towards local government's controls and regulations. Non-gated residents think the planning rules are not strong enough to control the size, connections with the urban fabric and supply of facilities for neighbouring communities. In this respect, the participants mentioned that gated communities cover extensive areas without supplying any street, obstructing contact with other neighbourhoods.

A general complaint, especially in the 2NBI and 3NBI groups was the discomfort during the construction process of gated communities. They emphasised how those operations damaged the neighbourhood infrastructure, which was built with community funds in many cases. Those tensions raised when they realised the lack of interest from the gated community's administration to make reparations, which were finally made after the community leader's pressure.

Distribution of fear of crime

The general distribution of fear of crime in neighbourhoods has variations according to the poverty levels. However, in most cases, the intensity of fear increased when the walk was approaching the gated community's wall, mainly during the night. As mentioned, fear of crime is a complex phenomenon; there are psychological, demographic and environmental factors involved; therefore, each case study has its own nuances. For instance, those cases without community parks showed higher levels of fear inside the neighbourhood than those with recreational areas. Community ties and spontaneous appropriation of public spaces influenced also safety perceptions. Despite the differences among cases, it can be concluded that gated communities' physical structure produces an emotional response in neighbouring communities, and this response can be exacerbated by residential segregation.

Final thoughts

The tensions from open neighbourhoods towards gated communities are fuelled by feelings of exclusion and distrust. The residential segregation has provoked fears towards the unknown; people from gated communities are seen as strangers who belong somewhere else. The exception to this was the wealthiest community, where the gated community's edges are soft, and people from there are involved in communal issues. In this case, the levels of trust work in both directions, unlike than the rest.

Local governments in Costa Rica have not reacted quickly to control features of gated developments, such as size, edges and configuration. As a result, there are 'islands' of dwellings embedded into the city, without any permeability towards their neighbours. This slow response is noticed by non-gated residents, who see themselves as victims of the local government inefficiency with a small room for acting to prevent the issue.

Although gated communities have been advertised as 'shelters' against crime; their effects on perceived safety have been overlooked, mainly the consequences for those living outside the gate. The externalities over their peripheries are rising fears and tensions, which is intensified by income inequality.

Acknowledgements

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