GATED PORTO ALEGRE: A STUDY OF THE CHANGING SOCIAL AND SPATIAL RELATIONS IN THE BRAZILIAN METROPOLIS

by Rodrigo Alves Capelani

Gated communities (GCs) play an increasing and changing role in social segregation and spatial segmentation of Brazilian cities, perhaps changing general Brazilian urban structure as a whole. Literature on larger Brazilian cities highlights the development of isolated GCs at the urban periphery, driven by increasing public fear. But not all GCs follow this pattern, and it’s not entirely clear why residents choose these communities, or what new social patterns may result, especially for a metropolis such as Porto Alegre. Based on semi-structured interviews with both residents and non-residents of gated communities in the metropolitan area of Porto Alegre, this study aims to answer the following questions: Why do people live in gated communities, and how do gated communities impact urban social interactions? Results suggest that these new urban features bring a new way of urban uses by different classes, privatize public spaces and services, and change social interaction between classes.
GATING PORTO ALEGRE: A STUDY OF THE CHANGING SOCIAL AND SPATIAL RELATIONS IN THE BRAZILIAN METROPOLIS

A Thesis
Submitted to the
Faculty of Miami University
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
Department of Geography
by
Rodrigo Alves Capelani
Miami University
Oxford, OH
2010

Advisor________________________
(David L. Prytherch)
Reader________________________
(Bruce D’Arcus)
Reader________________________
(Marcia England)
Reader________________________
(Thomas Klak)
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gated Communities as a Social Spatial Phenomena</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Study Location: Why the Metropolitan Area of Porto Alegre?</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methods</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Results: A Changing Geography of Urban Life in MAPA</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Varying Gated Landscapes</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Motivations for Gated Communities Development</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Resident Experiences</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Non-resident Experiences</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion: Social and Spatial Meanings of the Gated Communities</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Thoughts</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 20

# LIST OF FIGURES / MAPS

Map 1 7  
Map 2 9  
Map 3 12  
Map 4 14  
Picture 1 16  
Picture 2 17  
Picture 3 18  
Picture 4 19  
Picture 5 25  
Figure 1 15
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I'd like to thank... The Department of Geography, Miami University. My Advisor, Dr. David Prytherch and committee members: Dr. Bruce D’Arcus; Dr. Marcia England; Dr. Thomas Klak. My Colleagues of the Geography Department.
INTRODUCTION

How does one define paradise? Where can one find peace, safety, health and leisure? It is difficult to find simple answers to these questions. Brazilian mega-cities such as Sao Paulo have been witness to a high rate of violence for a number of years\(^1\). Due to considerable social inequities, the police forces in such cities have seemingly been unable to provide security equitably for the population as a whole, as suggested by Sabatini (2003) and Janoschka (2006). Even in Porto Alegre, where crime levels are not as high as the aforementioned cities, many people feel threatened by crime. Literature on gated communities suggests that class inequality creates different responses to this increasing fear of crime (Caldeira, 2000; Hidalgo, 2008; Ueda, 2006). The elite may seek to lock themselves within gated spaces in which access to various amenities provide a new way of living whereas the poor may be forced to utilize much less sophisticated security methods for protection and rely on the state to provide basic public needs. GCs represent a new urban structure within Brazilian space, mostly present in the periphery of large cities like Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. However, for each city gated communities have different meanings and social implications. Cities like Porto Alegre, which has not met the same rise in urban violence as other mega-cities, may have different processes leading to the building of GCs and subsequently different social implications. Few studies had focused on the social significance of gated community development, particularly the interactions between different classes in regions such as the metropolitan area of Porto Alegre (MAPA). It is the fourth largest metropolitan region in Brazil with almost 4 million inhabitants\(^2\) and is home to 37% of all the inhabitants of the state of Rio Grande do Sul (RS)\(^3\). Yet little research has been conducted on gated communities in MAPA.

The increase in both population and economic development in Brazil accompanies a fragmentation and segregation of general Brazilian metropolitan space. Urban space throughout Brazil is well known for its center-periphery structure; areas in which the elite tend to live in the comfortable city center while the poor tend to live in slums deep in the periphery. But current literature suggests that the upper class has been

---

1 Oliveira (2005) points that from 1991 to 2000 on average, Brazilian cities (with more than one million inhabitants) had an increase in murders, from around 30 in 1991 to 51 murders by 100,000 inhabitants in 2000
2 IBGE (Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics) 2007.
changing its territoriality by looking for new places of settlement that offer security, presence of nature and increased social status (Caldeira, 2000; Ueda 2005).

From Beijing to Buenos Aires, London to Johannesburg, gated communities can be found in practically every city within the contemporary world (Tella and Guerra, 2002; Roitman, 2003; Raposo, 2006; Pow, 2007). Known as barrios cerrados or urbanizaciones privadas in the Spanish speaking countries of Latin America and condomínios fechados in Brazil, the literature suggests that GCs alter urban, social interactions and fragment urban structure. Yet, much of the research on gated communities in Brazil has been focused on metropolises like Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo, where fear of crime has driven GCs development at the urban periphery. Smaller and perhaps safer metropolitan areas such as change throughout MAPA appears to exhibit distinct patterns, and the motivations and experiences of residents and neighbors of GCs in MAPA are not entirely clear. In this study I seek to expand the knowledge of gated communities in Brazil by answering the following questions: “Why do residents of RS live in gated communities?” and “How do gated communities impact urban social interactions within the city?”

The field work for this thesis was done in MAPA during the summer of 2009. To better understand the perspectives of residents and non-residents towards GCs, as well as identify new trends in social relations between different classes, I interviewed residents of different kinds of GCs, as well as people who work inside yet live outside of the protective gated areas. Findings show that all interviewees, regardless of status or economic standing, wish to have a safer, more peaceful way of life. And though patterns of such development are perhaps more complex in Porto Alegre, where gated communities have been constructed in a variety of urban settings, residents remain preoccupied with categorizing (or evaluating stereotypes of) who should be feared, where they should not go, and who they can trust. The results suggest the elite in Porto Alegre – like residents of larger Brazilian cities -- are keenly aware of the government’s inability in providing basic public needs, such security and healthcare, to all its citizens. And like those cities, the building of gated communities appears to result from and produce trends towards further privatization and fragmentation.
GATED COMMUNITIES AS A SOCIAL-SPATIAL PHENOMENA

Even before the adoption of neo-liberal development strategies, one of the basic principles of Latin American cities has long been the strong polarization of urban space. “Differentiation in social status was heavily bound to residential localization within the city; therefore, the space was used as a mechanism of exclusion” (Villaça, 1998, p, 143). Urban space was divided in two polarized sectors: the rich city centers and the poor peripheries (Sabatini, 2003, p. 20-21). Villaça (1998, p, 141) states that one of the main characteristics of the Brazilian metropolis is the spatial segregation of classes into their own neighborhoods. However, according to him, the Brazilian metropolis is more complex than it was twenty years ago, when the center-periphery model was enough to describe its patterns of segregation and social inequality. This tendency during the last two decades has been that the wealthy population is abandoning the city center, choosing to migrate into the suburbs, disrupting the previous urban structure. In other words, we now have the appearance of two different peripheries: a rich one (signified by infrastructure improvements and many additional services) and a poor one (with few or no infrastructure improvements and limited services and resources) (Ueda, 2005).

The new structure of the urban fabric has overwhelmed the former structure, where the “rich” and the “poor city” were clearly separated (Hidalgo, 2007, p. 367) within urban space, perhaps, previous ways of interaction between classes may change, as well, in this new urban scenario. The spatial distances, which were used to isolate classes, are now shorter; yet social inequality may be more evident due to walls. Therefore these new trends in urban social interactions appear related to the gated communities’ physical barriers.

Caldeira (2000, p. 254) states that transformations have arisen from a combination of processes: “the reversal in demographic growth; the economic recession; deindustrialization; the improvement of the periphery, combined with the impoverishment of the working classes” and the widespread fear of crime that has made the middle and upper classes seek more secure forms of residence out of the city center. Moreover…

As a consequence of the neo-liberal withdrawal of the state, urban governability fell more and more into a crisis during this period and urban violence problems increased rapidly. Therefore, the demand for supposedly secure forms of living increased (Coy, 2006, p. 125).
The elite’s movement towards suburban areas has produced new urban structures characterized by walls and private security systems: the gated communities which may have different styles and services. And the emergence of gated communities appears to be a response to a specific conjuncture of economic, political and ideological systems articulated in a social formation. Thus, “different social classes live closer to each other in some areas but are kept apart by physical barriers and systems of identification and control” (Caldeira, 2000, p. 254). Sibley (1995, p. 91) in studying the relations between the self and the other stated that: “a fear of difference is projected onto spaces comprising the home or locally which can be polluted by the presence of non-conforming people, activities or artifacts”. Villaça (1998) observes that when the poor come to live in the city center the elite move to the suburbs. This may be because “feelings about others, people marked as different may also be associated with places” (Sibley, 1995, p. 9). This situation increases what Svampa (2004) called a “social gap”. This occurs when a smaller section of a population controls the greatest portion of that society’s overall wealth. An imbalance is created in which the smaller controlling population (called “winners”) establishes the standards for the whole society. This minimizes the ability of the less powerful majority (called “losers”) to purchase, create, or utilize anything other than what is provided them by the state, services which in most case lack in quality, being one reason why the elite look for private services such as education, health and security.

Faced with the present situation in high-crime Brazilian cities like Rio de Janeiro, real estate agents and developers offer one response: fortified enclaves (Caldeira, 2000), appearing as a housing solution for the ‘winners’, leaving the ‘losers’ to exclusion (on the other side of the wall), with high walls, video cameras, and watchtowers; living in and around these little “fiefdoms” has become the overall response to the increasing urban violence rates (Ueda, 2006, p. 235). This new concept of developing public spaces with limited public access may only perpetuate the segregation and fragmentation of urban space. Living in a gated community, being free of urban problems, became a way of life nowadays and is encouraged by the work of advertisers and real estate agents. According to an important part of the literature (Andrade, 2003; Caldeira, 2000; Coy, 2006; Sposito, 2006), the spreading of gated communities in general, and especially in Brazilian urban space, is closely related to two factors: globalization and the rise of insecurity in the city. Coy (2006, p. 122)
classifies these processes in two intrinsically related forces: External Forces (globalization, privatization and neo-liberalism) and Internal Forces (status, security and lifestyle). They represent a new way of living, which, according to Caldeira (2000 p. 264), articulates five basic elements: “security, seclusion, social homogeneity, amenities, and services. The image that confers the highest status is that of an enclosed, fortified, and isolated residence”.

The new urbanization process presents two similar aspects, according to Tella and Guerra (2002, p. 321): “the social processes that boost it and its repercussion on the territory”. This dynamic presents distinct spatial patterns, which have different characteristics from one place to another and therefore, the urban developers promote a social-spatial segregation process since few citizens have access to quality housing. In other words, most of the housing units being built are designed for the elite who have resources to pay for most of the amenities offered by the developers.

Valenzuela Aguilera (2002, p. 31) states that the contemporary city presents particular spatial patterns and urban configurations, which are related to social and economic polarization that came from structural policies to the liberalization of the urban market. The social perception of threat becomes a function of the security mobilization itself, not crime rates (Davis, 2006). Davis states that the designers of malls and pseudo-public spaces attack the crowd by homogenizing them to keep out any of the “undesirable” citizens. Therefore, “security becomes a positional good defined by income access to private ‘protective services’”; moreover, “fear proves itself” (Davis, 2006, p. 224), i.e., “there is the actual crime rate and then there are the residents’ perceptions of safety, usually referred to as fear of crime” (Wilson-Doenges, 2000, p. 599).

Moreover, some authors go further and argue that there are available evidences suggesting “that in Brazil the risk of violent crime is unequally distributed in different geographical areas and social groups. Murder rates are highest at the periphery of large urban areas” (Landman, 2002). It is in these regions that the problems of poverty, unemployment and lack of adequate housing and basic services, including health, education, transportation, and security are most acute. It suggests that the elite have never been equally unsafe (as compared to the poor) within Brazilian urban space. Understanding what impacts GCs have in this new urban scenario is important to identify new trends in social relations between different classes within the metropolis,
as well as to identifying how different classes perceive and use this changing urban space.

**CASE STUDY LOCATION: WHY THE METROPOLITAN AREA OF PORTO ALEGRE?**

Gated Communities have been a reality for over two decades in large urban centers (Sao Paulo, Rio de Janeiro) and constitute a growing market in metropolitan areas, like Porto Alegre, in the last decade. Moreover, the MAPA was selected to do this research because it has had a different pattern of urbanization, as stated by Villaça (1998) and Mammarella (2004); the population of this region has had a socio-economic integration pattern which is somewhat different as compared to other Brazilian Metropolitan Areas. The building of GCs in the region is relatively new when compared with other cities in Brazil and in Latin America. Thus, it is important to study how gated communities impact regions like MAPA which does not have the same levels of criminality as Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. For example, in 2000 the number of murders in Porto Alegre was 39.5/100,000 inhabitants, whereas in Sao Paulo it was 64.82, Rio de Janeiro 56.51, and Recife (97.55) had the highest level\(^4\) among the state capitals.

---

According to Barcellos and Mammarella (2004) the region has experienced new patterns of housing since the 1980s. The poorest build irregular houses in the periphery while the elite live in apartment buildings in traditionally “rich” neighborhoods close by the city center. Also during this time period, the city center has begun to lose its function and devaluation has begun. The authors also used the 2000 census to conclude that by that year, 80% of all residences in rich neighborhoods were represented by apartment buildings being designed with them in mind. In the meantime, there is an ongoing process of the building of gated communities in the metropolitan area, since the turn of the century 750 gated communities have been approved in Porto Alegre⁶, most of them are under construction or are already built. And, although the supply has grown the demand is even greater. Moreover, according to a local real-estate website, about to 15% of sales of properties in Porto Alegre in 2008 were residences in gated communities. The company also states that these “developments meet a repressed public’s demand”⁷ by consumers who were looking for better life quality. Although MAPA is Brazil’s fourth largest, and gated communities have become an important part of urban growth and change, more research is needed to determine how the patterns of

---

⁵ Organized by the author.
gated community development may be distinct both spatially and socially, why some residents choose gated communities, and what the impacts are on neighborhood social relations.

On map 2 one can notice the location of 240 gated communities in Porto Alegre (the number correspond to a research by Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul in 2007) including one of the studied GCs: Recanto do Guarujá. The master plan for environmental urban development of Porto Alegre recognizes the existence of nine regions within the city, with distinct urban characteristics, “being different faces of the city”; most of the gated communities in the city of Porto Alegre are located in ‘isolated’ macro zones (Aguiar and Ueda 2007), Garden City for example (southern Porto Alegre). It is in this region of Porto Alegre, which boasts such outstanding features as the presence of single-units homes in the midst of nature that developers are finding to be good places for building gated communities such RG. The origin of these small gated communities may represent the intention of urban developers towards bringing some of the principles of large GCs into the city or “urban” environments built far from the actual city center. Gated Communities built in this region bring a feeling of living close to the city but in actuality being far from its threats because they are built in an area surrounded by nature yet also somewhat urbanized. Yet, gated communities tend to be located far from the city center (represented by the ‘Radiocentric’ City zone).
Three cities were chosen to apply the interviews, each of which reflects the varying geography of urban development in MAPA: Gravataí, Porto Alegre and São Leopoldo. Moreover, most of the gated communities are located within these three cities.

Porto Alegre is the capital, largest city and economic and political center within the region. Since its industrialization Porto Alegre has developed a clear pattern of urbanization emanating from city center northward, connecting the city to other

---

9 Adapted from Ueda and Aguiar (2007).
metropolitan city centers and other Brazilian metropolises by specific highways, namely BR116 and BR101. The industrial development outside of Porto Alegre, following the direction of other cities, gave rise to urban sprawl with differing structures/formats toward the classic center periphery which characterizes most Brazilian cities (Villaça, 1998), due to industrial growth in other metropolitan cities. This intense commerce between Porto Alegre and the growing Germanic towns was primordial to its unique “polycentric” pattern, although the elite maintains the same centralization patterns when it comes to housing. Since the 1940s and 1950s, urban regulation has forced the poor to move out of the city center due to high land costs. They have moved to places where they could find cheap land without basic modernized infrastructures far from the downtown locals.

Gravatai (located to east of Porto Alegre) was selected due to its growing economic relevance, the city is home to important companies (such as GM); but also by the presence of two mega-projects the Paragem of Verdes Campos and Alpha Ville Gravatai. This city has had many developments and most of residents living here come from Porto Alegre.

Sao Leopoldo (located to north of Porto Alegre) is an important cultural and economic city within the Vale dos Sinos region (sub-region within MAPA). Sao Leopoldo has a particular characteristic, both the town’s elite and the poor population used to do their shopping in the city center, more precisely on Independência Street or Rua Grande (as it is known). This street focused most of the city’s business, as well as banks and some private and public schools. However, after the recent opening of the mall, the elite have not used the street for their shopping. The private school located in this street has moved away, going to another neighborhood. Thus, Rua Grande is not a place for class interactions anymore and one can notice that GCs are not the only features which contribute to the spatial fragmentation of urban space. This mall represents another urban feature which may contribute to class homogeneity.

---

9 Sao Leopoldo and Novo Hamburgo, which were growing as industrial cities within the MAPA.
METHODS

The main goal of this project is to identify why the elite are choosing to segregate themselves and how GCs impact social relations within urban space. Thirty-two opened-ended interviews have been applied to residents from GCs, people who work within them, and people who live in neighborhoods surrounding their walls\textsuperscript{10}. These interviews were done in three different gated communities. They are \textit{Paragem Verdes Campos} in Gravatai (ten residents and three employees), \textit{Recanto do Guarujá} in Porto Alegre (five residents and five non-residents), and \textit{Reserva Morro do Espelho} in Sao Leopoldo (five residents, two non-residents and two employees\textsuperscript{11}). Residents were interviewed in their house; workers at their job location; and non-residents at their houses or in public spaces, e.g., parks and local stores. The studied cities are located on map 3 and on map 4, one can notice the location of the three studied gated communities.

\textsuperscript{10} 20 residents and 12 non-residents (4 of them were workers) have been interviewed.
\textsuperscript{11} The employees from this GC live in a neighborhood near by it.
Interviewing residents is a method previously used by many scholars (Blandy, 2003; Caldeira, 2000; Low, 2001; Roitman, 2003; Svampa, 2001) in studying urban segregation because it allows the researcher to understand the process based on their informants’ knowledge/perceptions of the realistic effects of the GCs. In other words, face to face interviews allow the interviewer to understand what motivations people have when choosing to live in GCs, as well as what kind of interactions and feelings residents and outsiders have, or not have, within urban space. Since this research tries to

---

understand how gated communities are structuring social relations within contemporary Brazilian urban space, I found it important to apply the interviews equally to both residents and non-residents because it allows better analysis of different classes’ perceptions about this changing urban space. I also find it important to mention that names used in this thesis are not the real names of the interviewees in order to keep their identities confidential.

Two main questions were used to start the interview:

- Why do you live in this gated community?
- How does living in a gated community impact your relationships with fellow Porto Alegre (or Gravataí or São Leopoldo) residents?

Other questions came up during the interview such as, “How long do you take to go to work” (to uncover commuting time during their daily travels, e.g., work or other places (shopping malls, clubs, school, etc).

For the interviews with neighbors of the GCs, I have chosen people that were already living in the area when the gated community was built. Those people have a feeling of “life” before and after the construction of the GC. Local residents were asked:

- How have the GCs changed the way you live in the city?
- Do you know anyone that lives inside the GC? What is your relation with him/her?

As for the residents, the questions described above were used as introductory to an open discussion, prompting further questions and answers developed from these ongoing interviews. The workers were asked similar questions, however I focused on finding out where they live and how they feel about working at a gated community.
Map 4 - Studied gated communities, urban population and main high ways within MAPA
RESULTS: A CHANGING GEOGRAPHY OF URBAN LIFE IN MAPA

Varying Gated Landscapes

As mentioned before, three gated communities were selected from three different cities in the metropolitan area of Porto Alegre: Paragem dos Verdes Campos (PVC) in Gravataí, Recanto do Guarujá (RG) in Porto Alegre, and Reserva Morro do Espelho (RME) in São Leopoldo. Each reflects a different pattern of urban development and each is situated differently within MAPA’s urban structure.

Paragem dos Verdes Campos (PVC) is located in the city of Gravataí, on the BR101 highway that connects Porto Alegre to the north coast of the state. PVC is currently one of the two of the largest GCs in the metropolitan area (both in area and number of residences).

![Figure 1 - Location of PVC](image)

BR101 road was built in 1985 and divided a rural property in two properties, thus the owners decided to divide one of its side (150 hectares) in 731 single detached units, firstly they intended the properties to be used as weekend country houses. However, in 1998 some residents decided to make these properties their permanent address and the gated community was created. Among the amenities provided in the gated community are a restaurant, a gym, sport courts, and an artificial lake. Nowadays the Paragem is still surrounded by rural areas and a GM factory across the highway. Neither the distance from Porto Alegre nor the proximity to GM seems to be undesirable to the residents and real estate agents, as one can notice on the following ad:

13 Also called Free-Way.
Paragem - located in front of Complex Automotive General Motors - is equivalent to a paradise surrounded by green areas on all sides, with direct access to the Freeway. Perfect to families seeking to escape from the violence and pollution of the city, but do not give up the comfort provided by modernity\textsuperscript{14}.

Security is strict. For example, visitors must stop at the gate. This is beneficial because they are required to give information pertaining to their visit in the gated community. After that an authorization must come from inside including a valid ID to gain access into the gated area. After a picture has to be taken (of the visitors and their car) access may be granted into the gated community and will be monitored and guided by the security workers to the chosen location. When I was there, I had to leave my car in their parking lot and was then driven to the houses in which the interviews were conducted. Controlled environments are the general premise for such provisions pertaining to security and tranquility and are one of the main services provided by these gated communities. Moreover, I was not allowed to take any pictures from inside the gates; however they did allow me to use pictures accessed directly from their website, shown below:

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{image1.png}
\caption{Picture 1 - Aerial view of three PVC’s houses\textsuperscript{15}}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{14} Retrieved from: http://emparagem.com/localiza%E7%E3o.htm. Translated by the author.

\textsuperscript{15} Source: http://www.paragendosverdescampos.com.br/condominio/fotos.php
Recanto do Guarujá (RG) is located in the southern region of Porto Alegre, a medium class neighborhood. This gated community is a suburban gated community, exactly due to its urbanized location and relatively proximity to the city center. These gated communities, although located primarily in suburban areas and/or distant from downtown, provide very favorable conditions for the rapid shifts (Sposito, 2006, p. 192). Recanto does not have as many amenities as Paragem; instead it has a pool, a playground and an assembly room where neighbors’ meetings and parties are hosted, for security proposes it has cameras, walls and electronic fences. The only worker is a gatekeeper who works only during week days. No private security companies work for them. The houses are attached to each other, which is not a bad characteristic according to most of the residents. As one can notice on picture 3, the houses are very close to each other and they have narrow roads.

Picture 2 - Aerial photo of PVC. At the top of the picture is the GM factory.16

Finally, *Reserva Morro do Espelho* is located within 3 miles from Sao Leopoldo’s downtown in an extremely wealthy neighborhood. It is actually a neighborhood with three GCs; therefore Sao Leopoldo does not have the same suburbanization process as other Brazilians cities like Porto Alegre. The reason may be the availability of open spaces in central areas for building large projects such *Reserva*. RME has thirty single houses, parks, green area and sport courts.

There are three other GCs built in Reserva’s neighborhood (and a fourth being built, and they are all in the same block sharing walls. In Picture 4, one can notice RME’s construction site and on the back of the image another GC. These GCs have changed a prior green area, but they actually say that they are selling green spaces- a safe way of living close to nature.
Motivations for Gated Community Development

But why do residents of MAPA choose to live in such environments? This research used semi-structured interviews of these gated communities to better understand the motivations for living in these emerging types of urban spaces in the metropolitan area. Below I tabulate and categorize the various responses to this straightforward interview question.
On the graphic above one can notice the main reasons residents pointed to the question: “why living in this GC”, it is organized in six categories: security; sport and leisure center; privacy; life quality; nature, freedom/security for children. Although the method used was not helpful for quantitative analysis of the data, the answers to the questions were so similar that allowed for some categorization. These categories reflect the reasons stated by the residents during the interviews, most of them pointed two or more reasons to living there, however after their discourse I would ask for the one they consider most important. Therefore, these numbers reflect all the interviewees’ most important reason for moving to a gated community.

**Accessibility** - Accessibility was not cited as the most important reason by any resident, although it was present on some responses, as mentioned by Paulo (PVC resident), “sometimes it is faster driving from Paragem to Porto Alegre than it was when I was living in the capital, due to the Freeway” that connects the GC to Porto Alegre. Thus, accessibility plays an important role when one decides to come to the GC, Paragem residents said that the transit in Porto Alegre is horrible, and now they do not have to deal with it every day. The GC’s manager said that after the construction of GM the accessibility to Paragem became easier, due to a viaduct built close by it, making it

---

17 Main reason pointed by the interviewees for living in a gated community
easier to leave and enter the road that connects the GC to the highway. Unlike to what occurs in GCs built in urban spaces it is not possible to have access to these suburban GCs without long daily journeys and travel times between place of residence and other places of interest (work, study, leisure, religious and social life etc). Even gated communities located in more urbanized areas seem to be valorized by its accessibility, which is the case of Recanto do Guarujá, Carlos (RG resident) used to live in a small town, but the company he works for has transferred him to work in Porto Alegre, he chose this GC because it had a good price and location, accessibility was good enough for him and his wife. She uses public transit for commuting, as well as other residents; however the main transport is the car.

**Security** - The main reason for moving to a GC is security, which in some gated communities can be very sophisticated, including walls, cameras, chips on the resident’s cars and armed guards. As Paragem’s president states “The walls surrounding the gated community and the guards patrolling the internal streets 24/7 is a guarantee of peace of mind to residents”. Marcos (PVC resident) says that he feels so safe inside the walls that he leaves the door of his house unlocked, he also says that he allows his son to play outside his house and on the streets, something he did not do in the past: “I know that if something happens to him while playing on the streets any neighbor or guard will help him out, if we were still living in Porto Alegre my son could be robbed or kidnapped”. He also states, “I know we are not 100% safe here, but we are 100% safer than when living in the city”.

**Children safety** - Not having to worry about your children playing outside is another good reason for moving to a GC. As Paula (RME resident) says “We lived downtown at an apartment, and I just didn’t want my daughter trapped as she were in a cage, I wanted her to have the same childhood I had, playing wherever I wanted. Then we figured that moving into here would be better for her, and of course for us, for our family”. In moving to a GC residents believe they are getting back a peaceful life from the past, which they have lost with the increasing crime and pollution rates.

**Privacy** - Privacy is an important advantage related to gated communities, and sometimes related to security, as one Reserva resident mentioned “I do not like people knocking at my door all the time, and I did not want to live at an apartment building, thus moving to RME was the best option”. The RME’ architect, who is also the president of this GC, mentioned that Reserva gives one everything s/he needs, because it is safe and comfortable, you can leave and keep the doors unlocked, something that
you could not do even in an apartment building, according to him. Other gated communities, such Recanto do Guarujá, do not have sophisticated security systems and their houses are attached to their neighbors’, although as Carlos (RG resident) says “at first I thought it would be a bad thing the houses being so close, for privacy reasons, however it is an advantage, because it is good for security reasons, if our neighbors listen to something or see something they can call the police or even help us quickly”.

*Green Space* - Nature or “green areas” is also a new and growing concept related to the new way of living provided by these GCs, which was found to be an important feature offered and appreciated by most residents when choosing a gated community for residence. The pollution of the city center encourages the elite to move to cleaner places, far from downtown. “Waking up listening to birds is way better than listening to buses and cars” (Carla, PVC resident). Gated communities ‘offer’ a new way of living, a lifestyle based on better life quality, living surrounded by green areas in safe environments.

*Resident experiences*

In addition to exploring resident motivations for choosing to living in a gated community, this study analyzed the social experiences and social relationships that accompany development of gated communities, from the perspective both of residents and non-resident neighbors.

Residents pointed to many reasons for moving to a gated community, as mentioned in the previous section. And they have similar feelings towards experiencing the city and the GC. The interviews point to a higher appreciation of this suburban way of life, another resident has mentioned that he feel like living in an American suburb, he has been many time to the States therefore he seems to feel comfortable making the comparison. Maria, one of the Paragem residents, said that she does not remember when she last had been to Porto Alegre, because she has everything she needs inside the gated community. She also mentioned that her husband works in Porto Alegre, but he doesn’t care to travel every day.

*Resident to Resident Relationship* - When asked about the relationship with other residents, interviewees of Paragem said they have a good relationship. Paragem, for example, hosts events to residents to get together and get to know each other, Flavia (PVC resident) says that “PVC is like a big family; there is no way to live here and feel
lonely”. However, as some said they still have better relationships with friends outside the walls. Although, residents from *Recanto* said that there is some rivalry among residents, one resident have mentioned that residents from one side of the gated community do not really relate to residents from the other side. Pedro (RG resident) said that it happens because “they (residents from the other side) envy us because we have better relationship and we barbecue every weekend”.

Residents, like Maria (PVC resident), have good social interaction with their gated communities’ residents, she mentioned that she tries to avoid going to Porto Alegre, especially because she made friends, and she has everything she needs; I asked her about her children, and she said they live in Sao Paulo, so there is no need for going to Porto Alegre.

*Residents' experiences with their surroundings* - Social interactions with the neighborhood are limited, *Paragem*’s residents, for example, have no social relations with the surrounding neighborhood because the area outside its walls is mainly rural (but also industrial, if considering the GM’s factory). Carlos (PVC resident), said that he used to shop in some local markets about 5 miles from the GC in Gravatai; however he prefers to shop in shopping malls in Porto Alegre, for safety and comfort reasons. Plus, she also states that the recently opened restaurant is another reason for staying here, “you do not even need to go out for eating anymore”, and this is good, according to her. Thereby, most of the residents, almost 90% of them, state that they do not feel like leaving the GC, they do so because they still need to work outside the walls and use services not provided by the gated community.

Even residents of suburban gated communities, like *Recanto do Guaruja*, which is located within an urbanized region also, also have limited social interaction with their surroundings, they tend not to use local amenities, even the public park located in front of the GC is avoided. According to the residents from RG the neighborhood is relatively safe, but they prefer to shop at malls and supermarkets. Daniel (RG resident) states that most of the streets that surround the GC have guards which give safety feeling even for those living inside the gates while driving outside the gated community area. They like living in this part of town because they are close to the Guaiaba Lake, few residents use its edge for jogging, and they agree that Guaiaba is not a good place for swimming due to its pollution. Thus, they do not use public spaces in the neighborhood, even though they valorize the presence of nature in the area. The only residents that have more intense social interaction with the outsiders are the ones from *Reserva Morro do Espelho* in Sao
Leopoldo, because, as mentioned before, the area surrounding this GC is an upper-class residential zone. Thus, there is good relationship between people from the neighborhood with people from the GC (some residents came from this neighborhood actually).

For security purposes gated communities hire private companies, however it is not the case of Paragem, whose security men are hired by its manager to work for the GC. For Paulo (PVC resident) it is a great advantage of this GC, because people are more trustworthy when you know them and their background, thus the workers can provide better service.

Some residents have had bad experiences living in the city center, five interviewees have got robbed or being part of some kind of urban violence. Maria (PVC resident), for example, mentioned that before moving to PVC she lived at Moinhos de Vento (a rich neighborhood in Porto Alegre) in an apartment building, she felt safe living there, however “I like jogging and I couldn’t do so inside the building, I used the park instead, although I once got robbed while jogging. Then I talked to my husband and we decided to move out of Porto Alegre and come to PVC”. Alex (PVC resident) came to this gated community two years ago, he said he lived in the south region of Porto Alegre where he got robbed many times (it is perhaps important to mention that most of Porto Alegre’s GCs are being built on the region he mentioned), and he says that back in the 1980s they did not need so many security features, but now single walls do not provide enough security. “Prior to moving to PVC I don’t remember the last time I had chimarrão (traditional gaucho tea) with my friends in front of my house; but now we can do it again”. The public-opened streets became a place of fear and unknown people are to be feared as well.

Non-residents

Among the non-residents I have interviewed were gated-community employees and residents from the surrounding neighborhoods. Employees were two maids and three security guards.

Workers’ perspective - Interviewed security guards work for Paragem and live in Gravatai, relatively close by the GC; however they do not use public transit for commuting to the GC (because it does not exist). Paragem provides a bus which takes the workers to and from the GC. One of the guards told me that it would not be worthwhile living too far from the GC, since it would be harder to getting to work. But
accessibility plays an important role when one chooses to live in a GC; for those who do not have a car public transit is still a reason for going to one place to another. Moreover, there is no interest of residents for a public transport to get to the GC, since they have a car, and their workers may use the bus provided by them to get to work. The job is relatively easy, according to Pedro who has been working here for two years, “there is not much going on, and all we have to do is driving around making sure that everything is okay”. He also states that he had the option to join the city’s fire service, although salary at PVC was better and job easier. The interviewed maids work for Reserva in Sao Leopoldo, they live in a poor neighborhood close by the gated community, they state that it is good to work in RME because it is close by their houses (about 1.5 miles); therefore they do not need bus, and can walk to their jobs. They also work for some residents in the neighborhood of the GC; they do not see many differences in working out and inside the GC, despite for the easier access in the houses out of the GC.

Non-residents - The other interviewees are non-residents from Porto Alegre and Sao Leopoldo. As mentioned before, the neighborhood surrounding Recanto do Guarujá is mostly middle class. They feel relatively safe living in this region of Porto Alegre but also mention that it is because of their security apparatuses such as gate houses, walls and fences (traditional ways of protecting themselves). In the picture below we can see two different kinds of gate houses: one attached to the wall (on the very left of the image) and another standalone gate house.

Picture 5 - A gate house in Porto Alegre; also note the walls and electronic fences.
Fear has brought about a “necessity” to defend themselves from the feared ones. This is not only the elite attempting to protect themselves by using security systems but also the medium and lower classes used by them- each one as modern as their resources can afford to provide. Residents living outside RG have their own security apparatus. They say they feel as safe as possible due to these additions provided.

Non-residents experiences – When residents from Recanto’s neighborhood were asked how was living there prior to the building of the GC in comparison to nowadays most of them said that life has not really changed, if so it is better now because that “abandoned area is not used for hosting potential drug users or thieves”, as mentioned by a resident.

Outsiders and residents - According to Lucas (Recanto resident) being neighbor to a gated community has no expressive meaning, and they would live there if they could afford a house in there. Small grocery stores owners mention that the GC’s residents do not shop at their local business at all, as already mentioned residents prefer to shop at malls and supermarkets, they usually do not use public spaces in that neighborhood as well, such parks. Residents from Reserva do not see many differences on before and after the GC was built, the main advantage however is that they “got rid” of an abandoned area which could be used for drug users or other criminals. There seems to be a closer relation among non-residents than residents to non-residents from the gated communities, especially casual meetings during the weekend, and the use of the public park by their children during weekends.

The interviewees from Sao Leopoldo live an upper-class residential zone. Thus, there is good relationship between people from the neighborhood with people from the GC (some residents came from this neighborhood actually), there is a lower class neighborhood close to which some residents both from the GC and surrounding area had little social relationship, despite a few workers who live there. Shopping, both for residents and outsiders are done downtown in the only shopping mall in town, despite the poor population, who also uses downtown for shopping, however they do not shop at the mall, because they consider that place not to having affordable goods; in building places not affordable for lower classes is another way of segregating the space; the mall is a public space, but accessibility is defined by class. Few of the upper-class ‘outsiders’ would live in that GC, other already bought or are thinking of buying a unit in the neighboring GC which is being built.
DISCUSSION: SOCIAL AND SPATIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF GATED COMMUNITIES

Gated communities bring a new way of living the city. It means that new social and spatial interactions are structured by new physical barriers. As suggested by this study, GCs in the metropolitan area of Porto Alegre are not being built only in the periphery, but also in urbanized areas or even close to the city center. However, they all appear to express the same desire by the elite to segregating themselves, protecting themselves from a chaotic urban space. Among their amenities are sports courts and swimming pools, where the children can play without any risk. They tend to be located away from busy centers especially in mega-cities; however, as argued in this study the location of gated communities, especially in smaller cities (like Sao Leopoldo), is tied to distinct reasons, and sometimes, being close to the city center, but especially by rich neighborhoods, is something to be considered when building such developments. Furthermore GCs seem to have become a ‘fashion’ style of housing, because first built as a housing solution for the elite, and now being an option for medium-classes as well, residents from Recanto do Guarujá, for example, do not have the same socioeconomic pattern as residents from the other two studied GCs. Besides, the number of gated communities has risen considerably in the region since the begging of this century.

The spatial distribution of social groups in the MAPA points to the existence of social and spatial segregation in the city, since it allows the identification of socially homogeneous areas, appropriated by upper classes and spaces where proximity between different classes does not mean social proximity; the latter being represented by gated communities. Residents tend to avoid the city outside; they tend to use all the amenities and services provided by the gated community.

“The self-segregation of the upper class – which has the social control in the Brazilian city - by evacuating areas already densely populated or by appealing to the recreation of a ‘citadel’ pattern, is leading to fragmented cities” (Ribeiro and Lago 2004, p. 115), where the interaction between different classes is almost impossible due to the presence of physical and social barriers. The choice of the rich and growing portions of the middle class, to living in gated communities, increasingly more self-sufficient, constitutes an evidence of this social fragmentation since it promotes isolation, including physical, from the other. Urban segregation can be understood as a dialectical
process, to the extent that the segregation of one causes the segregation of others (Villaça, 1998).

Residents tend to see the city as an unsafe place, because it seems to be prevailing chaos: social heterogeneity, free access and degradation (Caldeira, 2000). On the other hand, gated communities have controlled access and a homogeneous population, and are a safe refugee within a chaotic urban space. And, gated communities are not the only place the elite can find homogeneity and peace, there are other places like malls in fancy restaurants and other semi-privatized spaces where the presence of “the other” is avoided. There is an attempt by real estate agents to creating a semblance of a safe urban lifestyle by building gated communities. Evoking symbols of country life, such as green areas, parks and woods, symbols of privacy and safety with the walls and security cameras. Moreover, the walls also allow the possibility of moving away from the aggressive and hostile inhabitants of cities, i.e. the poor. In other words, residents change “the comfort of the city (center) for the comfort of the gated communities (proximity to nature)” (Andrade, 2003). Furthermore, GCs express a way of approaching a social life, with children playing in the streets and chimarrão in the afternoon with neighbors. Following these changes in urban social space -- such as geographies that create new centralities, spaces of consumption and gated-housing systems -- the new spatiality tends to cancel prior prerogatives such as neighborhood relations (Heidrich, 2007). Gated communities increase spatial fragmentation and social segregation in closing residents to living amongst equals and privatizing public spaces.

Another point observed during this research is that residents do not have total independence from the city they fear, because gated communities do not offer all the services they need; however, residents do not use services in the surrounding neighborhood, and do not mind traveling twenty or so minutes to get what they need or to go to work. It indicates that although GCs tend to be closed to the world outside their walls residents are not totally segregated. However, there is an ongoing process of fragmentation of urban space by the separation of both elite and lower classes.

Gated communities bring many changes to urban and social structures in the metropolitan area of Porto Alegre, fragmenting spaces and dividing classes. But also they express an increase in segregation. The elite’s fear of crime and the real estate developers wish for profit helps increase the number of GCs in the region; yet, current situation points that urban space is becoming clearly divided by class.
The metropolitan area of Porto Alegre has had a rapid increase in the number of gated communities in the last years, part of a global phenomenon of privatization and segregation of urban spaces. In MAPA, gated communities can be located in different regions and bring different significances to neighborhood social interactions. This study sought to better understand what motivations for living in gated communities, and what impact gated communities have in social relations between different classes through 32 semi-structured interviews with residents and non-residents of three gated communities in Porto Alegre. Gated communities represent a new use of urban space, because they are generating an increasing social barrier between different classes. When the elite decides to isolate themselves from the city they are denying public spaces by privatizing them, in controlling access and its use only for people who are economically similar. This will form the fortified enclaves defined by Caldeira (2000, p. 258) as places that value what is private and restricted while they devalue what is public and open in the city.

Moreover, it seems that the production and the reproduction of urban space is the result of social relations between classes (Ueda, 2006), the elites are concentrated in areas endowed with the best infrastructure, isolating themselves from problems of the city center, creating a socio-spatial segregation. In meeting the demand of the elite for better life quality, real estate agents build gated communities equipped with the most varied amenities, proving the elite with services the State cannot provide in quality. The urban space is increasingly a place where the private states and imposes itself at the expense of public, where social homogeneity is valued. It seems clear that the desire of the elite is to have access to safe housing away from poverty and insecurity of large cities. This phenomenon follows an international process, where a fragmented and segregated urban landscape is being structured.

Ensuring an environment that provides security and peace is met by a steady job of closing themselves to what is outside the walls, carried out with the aid of staff, facilities or security procedures and separate rule that of the city. However, it is worth mentioning that the same people who ensure their safety come from the same class as the elite fears and try avoiding.

The current situation increases segregation, as observed during the field work for this thesis, few interactions of the residents with the surrounding neighborhood,
even with the city. The residents avoid using public and open spaces because they fear the different, people from outside the walls are viewed as threats to be avoided and watched by their security apparatus. Today’s sense of insecurity and fear in cities are part of the process of disconnection of the elite in the process of integration, as it encourages the adoption of individualistic and self-protective behaviors, which emphasize the devaluation of public spaces throughout the city. These practices are present in the search of segregated housing patterns, such as gated communities with which the elite want to protect themselves from the ‘urban disorder’ (Caldeira, 1997). Furthermore, this new urban scenario brings many consequences to social relations of the built environment. There is an ongoing process of devaluing public spaces and increasing exclusiveness and privatization which seems be the elite’s wish in this new urban environment. This new urban trends are making the city a space dived by social status, where a poor and a rich city is being clearly mapped.

In the end, after analyzing the interviews and based on the literature, I believe that the ongoing process of fragmentation and segregation within MAPA is tied to a national process, although it may not be a new phenomenon, since Brazilian urban space has always been segregated. Therefore, the gating of MAPA is introducing a new urban feature (gated communities) which contributes to the privatization of public spaces and services, as well as the isolation of different classes, a minority living within walled-protected areas and a majority living outside. Yet, as the separation between classes no longer takes place through neighborhoods, but by each urban lot, “gated communities may be located anywhere in the city” Heidrich (2007). The elite no longer need to live in the rich neighborhood to feel safe. Thus, gated communities can be built in isolated urban areas, upper-class neighborhoods or even in lower-class neighborhoods.

The metropolitan area of Porto Alegre is becoming a fragmented space; gated communities appear as the residential response to this new urban space. Privatization and social homogenization seem to be the most evident consequence of GCs. Further studies in gated communities may consider the changes in consumerism that this new city brings, as this thesis suggested elite and lower classes are becoming separated by spaces of living, but also one can notice that shopping and leisure spaces are following this separation of classes. The question for the future is: where and for whom will shopping and leisure centers be built?
BIBLIOGRAPHY


