

Peripheral urbanity in closed and gated communities in Latin America¹

Secure gated residential developments

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The enclosure of residential areas is a process that can be seen in all large metropolises and the boom observed in what we refer to here as «gated communities» is one of the most controversial urban trends of our time. The institution of this form appropriation of living space reflects processes known variously as «suburbanisation», «rurbanisation», «exurbanisation» or «periurbanisation», according to geographical context and interpretation. Whatever the case, these terms refer to the migration of the middle classes to single-family housing developments located in outlying, often rural, areas surrounding metropolitan areas. This trend is particularly pronounced in large northern cities. These processes are often underpinned by the notion of «the sprawling city». In Latin America, however, «peripheralisation» is the notion that has emerged most strongly through dependency and marginality theories since the fifties and sixties. This phenomenon highlights marginalisation and, more recently, polarisation processes (rather than a growing middle class) in the occupation of certain, highly segregated, areas lying on the edges of cities.

The «peri-urban housing estate» is a paradigm of urban life that is generally characterised by low-density morphology, with the personal vehicle as the predominant means of transport and with most people living in single-family homes. In France, for example, it can be regarded as a «spatial expression of an increasingly middle-class society» (Jaillet, 2004, p. 60) and a certain rejection of otherness. In Latin America, the 1990s saw a new rise in the peripheral urbanisation of the middle classes and, following the US model, collective fencing became a prominent feature of the landscape. The spread of gated communities at the edges of the metropolis or in its interstices is based on principles that can hardly be considered as new. The housing estates that found favour with the upper-middle classes in the 1950s-1970s were located in areas just as thinly populated and the justifications and models were basically quite similar. The car allowed the development of alternative lifestyles to those adopted in the central-city². Closure reveals

processes which, though already well established, were (and remain) relatively inconspicuous as far as the rest of society is concerned. In fact, these processes are not unique to the remote suburbs, although spatial distancing does have quite specific effects on social distancing.

The paradigm of closed communities in the US has had an impact on closed and gated communities elsewhere, leading to uniformity where there was a wide variety of options available on the market. The terms «gated community» in the United States and «country» in Argentina, for example, generally conjure up an image of a ghetto for rich suburbanites who barricade themselves behind gated walls and refer to a uniform lifestyle which includes a certain cultural determinism and dictates values and modes of behaviour. The media and real-estate agents have done much to promote this image³. Authors who are critical

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2. Current research into upper-middle class, open suburban estates from the 1960s in Mexico City is beginning to confirm this.

3. The widespread use of the term *gated community* came about as a result of the pioneering work of Edward Blakely and Mary Gail Snyder (1997) in reference to residential communities with private security services and a certain degree of political autonomy that have developed particularly in the southern United States. Some people might consider that this term should be reserved for prestige and lifestyle communities (for gay people, senior citizens, etc.), which do not, in fact, exist in Latin America.

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Nordelta, Buenos Aires, advertisement

(Donzelot, 1999) of this notion of an «emerging town» (Chalas, Dubois-Taine, 1997) often claim there is little, if any, density of contact there. Today's «anti-gated communities» positions have no doubt inherited some aspects of the «anti-suburbs» positions in vogue in the early 20th century in England – and later in the United States – and conveyed in the writings of intellectuals such as Lewis Mumford and Herbert Gans, etc. (Ziegler, 2005). These critics point to the dullness of suburban life, the middle-class (*bourgeois*, *clase media*) values of their residents, their individualism, their «sameness» and their rejection of otherness.

In Latin America, too, gated communities are seen as the result of globalisation, increasingly inspired by urban models from the United States. They are regarded as artefacts with no history and no «urbanity», or urbanity lacking in cohesion. They are ghettos fuelled by the extreme selfishness of the upper-middle classes, lending prestige to their inhabitants' chosen isolation and desire to live among their own kind, and reflecting a return to a community model and exacerbated individualism⁴. For those sharing this view, the inner city is the contrary of this process of segregation. It is a cosmopolitan environment where an intensely urban lifestyle is cultivated and where exchange with others is constant.

Contemplating the spread of these stereotypical viewpoints which denounce the urban model (on peri-urban model in this case) and which, for want of empirical – and ethnographical – studies, reproduce a form of academic jargon (Pillai, 1999), we raise the following questions: are

upper-middle class households who choose to live in closed and gated communities necessarily precipitating the demise of the compact city? Does migration to these remote residential areas automatically imply the disintegration of all social ties with the «outside» in favour of a withdrawal to harmonious, intense relations «inside»? Does individual life experience stemming from the metropolitan experience of Latin American residents reflect a genuine emancipation?

To find answers to these questions, we studied a comprehensive survey of upper-middle class households, with a particular focus on women, residing in large concentrations of gated communities in Barra da Tijuca (in the west of Rio de Janeiro) and in the north (the towns of Pilar and Tigre, in particular Nordelta, Argentina's «private city») and south-west (Esteban Echeverría and Ezeiza) of Buenos Aires⁵. We started off by considering their individual experience, what they felt and what they told us and then, based

4. The individuation of the daily routines of the residents of metropolises is largely driven by the upper-middle class, whose consumption patterns inspire some urban developments (shopping centres, leisure parks, secure complexes, specialised shopping strips and so on).

5. The last count put the number of «closed communities» (called «urbanizaciones cerradas» in Argentina) at 600. Ninety per cent of these are located in the metropolitan region of Buenos Aires, housing 200,000 people with a total of 50,000 houses. They cover a total area of 320 square kilometres, which is a little over one and a half times the area of the city of Buenos Aires (taken from the Buenos Aires daily newspaper, *Clarín*, 4 March 2006).

on our findings, studied relationships with the metropolis in everyday life and possible connections between individualism and community building.

We posit that urbanity and its various «paradigms» are supported by ideologies and models promoting ways of life and lifestyles that are produced not only by the public authorities and economic players, but also by the individuals themselves in their choice of residence. This type of model should be seen as a means of interpreting reality and a guide to individual action (Lévy, Lussault, 2003), rather than something that determines practices in social and cultural terms. Also, the use of the terms «community» and «lifestyle» tends to create uniform social representations of a product which, in fact, breaks down the clientele into ever narrower segments, taking into account household income levels and a host of other factors that distinguish one individual from another.

Peripheral urbanity: urban forms and individualism

«Urbanity» refers at one and the same time to a type of space *and* a collective approach to urban life (Gervais-Lambony, 2003). Mind-sets, social networks, behaviours and customs are modelled by the experiences that individuals and communities have in the urban/metropolitan environment and the awareness they have of them: copresence, anonymity and mobility and centralised consumer patterns, etc. Spatial forms, i.e. densities, the ratio of vacant to occupied areas, of built-up areas to public spaces, plot patterns and landscape all play an active part in developing individual and collective approaches to urban life (Lévy, 1999) and in identifying areas as urban (metropolitan). Urbanity thus brings with it lifestyles that spring from the relationship between representations forged by discourses, the models of cities proposed by promoters and the public authorities and praised in the media, advertising and publicity brochures, and the day-to-day experience that individuals have of the metropolis, experience that is fashioned by what they have encountered in real life, their perceptions, their habits and routines and their degree of mobility. *Citadinité* (belonging to a city) is made up of individual activities and representations that forge a metropolitan experience, influenced not only by whether the place of residence was imposed or freely chosen, but also by the degree and form of commitment to city life and participation in collective decisions. The city, seen as «the fruit of daily interaction [...] between material form and city society» (Dorier-Apprill, Gervais-Lambony, 2007, p. 7), with intricately forged links between urbanity and experience of the city, raises the crucial issue of relations with others in a city environment.

The «city» created in the outlying middle-class suburbs exhibits reproducible material forms that can be easily trans-

posed from one place to another. Peripheral shopping centres recreate an urban atmosphere and can be considered as meeting places, albeit with a greater degree of social uniformity and functional specialisation than in the central city. In Barra da Tijuca and Pilar, there is little alternative to the shopping centre and most facilities are concentrated along the motorway. The day-to-day life of the residents of closed and gated communities does mainly evolve around networks of nodes polarised by the motorways and main roads, like the *avenida das Américas* in Barra da Tijuca, a shopping strip several kilometres long, and the Panamerican Highway in Pilar. When residents do go to the centre, whether it is everyday for work or on a more occasional or even exceptional basis, they focus mainly on the large shopping facilities or central shopping areas, such as *Puerto Madero* in Buenos Aires, or else malls also located on main roads like *Avenida Insurgentes* in Mexico City or *Avenida Libertador* and *Avenida Figueroa Alcorta* in Buenos Aires. Some go to the theatre or main libraries, others like to go to their local market or grocer's even if it is in a working-class neighbourhood (some residents of São Conrado, for example, go to Rocinha), the proximity of which sometimes causes fear because of a lack of familiarity.

Of course, the central districts of the Latin American compact city offer a broader spectrum of city experience as, notwithstanding the changes these districts have undergone, they remain the focal point through which workers and residents transit and the place where activities are concentrated. This cannot be said of the metropolitan fringes, where the division of space according to social criteria and functional specialisation has been taken to its limit. In central cities, however, or even in central districts, malls are just as concerned to attract the custom of passing motorists as that of local residents. Another phenomenon is the mushrooming of towers in the centre, with top-of-the-range equipment and private security services, set back from the road at the heart of very spacious island sites. Unlike their European counterparts (at least in their typical, ideal paradigm), Latin American central cities have completely incorporated large-scale shopping facilities. Are the everyday habits of upper-middle class residents on the edges of cities really so different from those of people living in the centre? All of us go to a shopping centre at one time or another, whether it is from inclination, out of necessity or through lack of choice, or just to go to the cinema. Are social boundaries necessarily physical? Let us consider the example of Marcelo, a former resident of Palermo, an old district of Buenos Aires that underwent intense gentrification in the 1990s, and who now lives in one of the districts of Nordelta. Marcelo says that he had trouble accepting the idea of going to live in the «closed city». He made the decision, he said, when he realised that living under lock and key in Palermo with people like himself had taken away any hope of coming into contact with people that were different. Of course, fencing off the residential commu-

nity reinforces forms of social aggregation, especially in districts that deliberately exclude others. It elicits much clearer reactions in Buenos Aires, where the central city has largely developed on an «open» European-style urban pattern.

When people move from the «centre» to a closed residential community in an outlying suburb, the remoteness of their former homes modifies the boundaries of their social life. This distance, combined with their arrival in areas that were not very built up originally, often with poor amenities and sometimes not so familiar, forces households to organise themselves, develop mutual assistance with others like them and build a degree of material and emotional security in the neighbourhood. In Latin America, households that have often lost a vital resource in their daily lives – the family – build new networks of relations based on affinities which, here as elsewhere, change with activities at different stages of life, either inside the residential community – or street or building – or outside. Peer sociability is closely linked to sporting activities and, for mothers, to their children's school. It is also expressed in networks formed with residential communities of a similar social class through inter-country or inter-condo tournaments. The largest of these residential communities offer a whole range of activities, including chess tournaments, all sorts of gym classes, language courses, tennis, golf and swimming. The small closed, private residential communities are excluded from these forms of sociability, especially when they have no facilities. In this case, children do sport at school or in a club outside the community. Households could almost completely do without the central city.

Yet although the socio-spatial fabric of the residential community enhances proximity and «community spirit», it does not necessarily make for a greater density of relations among neighbours. The presumed uniformity of the residents gives way to other forms of belonging and internal divisions (age, gender, residence time, etc.). As observed in the upper-middle classes elsewhere, circles of acquaintances in these residential communities have many, often ambivalent, modes of experience, ranging from the occasional small favour imposed by geographical remoteness to genuine friendships and from an acceptable distancing of bad neighbours to a controlled *rapprochement* with good ones (Lehman-Frisch *et alii*, 2006). Based on the concept of moral minimalism (Charmes, 2005), cordial but superficial relations are often limited to the ritual «good morning, good evening». The neighbourhood remains a hierarchical social space with a place for individualism: although the notion of proximity is enhanced, people do not know their neighbours, which points to rather weak social ties. In this respect, the return to a certain concept of «civility» experienced by many residents of gated communities (people greet each other, children play in the street, etc.) does not necessarily create a «community spirit» based on a sense of belonging to the same group and on mutual

support. The community is something that is aspired to rather than experienced. It is often a dream that is shattered by the arguments and conflicts among neighbours that tend to occur in this type of controlled environment. The residents of closed, peri-urban communities do not lead a genuine «community» life on a day-to-day basis, nor can it be said that they are the most individualistic, even if individualism can be fostered by this way of life (Jaillet, 2004).

The city and attitudes to otherness

Residential communities – especially when closed – propose a local social order created by collective control and generally governed by rules and regulations that can interfere with the most personal aspects of daily life. It is clear that many residents have fled the «disorder» of the central districts, which they considered too cramped and, in some cases, «in decline», for another sort of lifestyle offering a better quality of life, far from the pollution, traffic congestion, insecurity, «push and shove» and noise of the centre. These negative images of the city are often closely related to people's perception of the risks they run in the centre.

One retired couple, who have been living in Barra da Tijuca for a long time, admit that they only «take the tunnel» two or three times a year – and some years, not at all – for they feel it is risky to go «outside» or «in the street». These city dwellers are sometimes seeking a new type of rural life but in most cases they want a new form of urban life, with «new» ways of living in the city that stem from «new» ways of building it. These evoke an urban existence filled with nostalgia, an «imaginary district» (Lacarrieu, 2002), rather than a traditional city, in its spatial forms (a «village-like district» or small town from the past) and its social forms (the «civilising» civility of good manners)⁶. Although the dangerous city, as people imagine it, is rooted in an experience of the city, it is reinforced by the media and promoters, etc.

Peri-urban housing – and the gated community is no exception to the rule – is no doubt more able to meet the requirements and live up to the expectations and personal aspirations of middle-class families: more space, a more countrified way of life, security and a fulfilling family life. Security is a *leitmotiv*, even if it is not necessarily the chief motivation behind the choice of residence, which is dependent on geographical context and cultural background. According to Alain Bourdin (2005), security, like other terms that create a common language where terms are interchangeable (exclusiveness, style, better quality of life,

6. The New Urbanism movement in the United States, which has influenced the design of many North and South American gated communities, is entirely based on this idea.



Jörg Ploger

Entrance to a country with a golf lawn and other services, La Molina, Lima

nature, easy access to central areas, preservation of property value, increased living space), is used to justify choices that are actually more to do with personal and family values than with ways of life. Many residents of the peripheral gated communities of Buenos Aires thus described their move as something they had done resignedly, something they had been forced to do, an adaptation to «new», «external», circumstances of city life (insecurity, disorder, etc.). The contrast between open and closed environments reflects views of the gated community that are expressed in the same hackneyed expressions (ghetto and so on): «it's not that I preferred a closed residential community. I used to live in an open district and loved it. I didn't find the idea of shutting myself away in a ghetto that appealing. It's just that given the current state of affairs in Argentina, I feel that, as I have small children, it's not such a bad thing, at least for the first few years.» (Paola, Nordelta). Liliana, who lives in a *country*, says that, «life in the countryside means lawns and sunshine, peace and quiet and the assurance that nothing's going to happen if the children play out in the street, it means not being scared of getting kidnapped, knowing the children can play football in the neighbourhood [...]. Things are just like when we were kids.»

The fact that the security argument has to be considered alongside other factors that are just as significant, lessens the danger in the residents' eyes but certainly does not eliminate it entirely. The gated community on the outskirts, with its guarded entrances, collectively limits the risks when society is unable to do so, but it does not make social life completely predictable. In Buenos Aires during the 2001-2002 crisis, poor people put their hands through the fences to ask for bread or work, which made quite a few residents feel uncomfortable. The search for peace and quiet, which

is not unique to upper-middle class peri-urban populations, is often a motive that not only conceals various forms of individualism, but also difficulties in relating to otherness and, in the most extreme cases, a refusal to share space and accept differences, even though the market is creating a growing number of differences both inside and outside the residential communities. The dwindling quality of the environment fuels complaints about the drawbacks of life in the «dense» city, although there is often a very thin line between environmental complaints («I can't stand the noise, people jostling you in the street») and social complaints in disguise («I leave the beach to those who have no other choice», the implication being «I prefer the pool at my condominium»). Neighbourhood conflicts, publicised by community administrators, are often indicators of people distancing one another. The discrimination shown to people with a different lifestyle inside the residential community (for example, people who ride a bicycle, people who are not catholic, etc.) puts an even harsher spotlight on social conformism and fear of the other because it is directed within the community and not outside it. The wall is the concrete expression of the collective fear of others.

Women: caught between emancipation and imposed peripherality

These ordered utopias have been singled out time and again as creating victims among adolescents and generating various forms of «rudeness». Adult women provide a much clearer illustration of the ambivalence of social individua-



Informal closure in a low middle class neighbourhood street, Chorrillos, Lima

Jörg Pöge

tion in remote peripheral areas in that they are supposedly autonomous. They do not form a unified group and their habits differ according to their history, their residential background, the status of their activities, etc. In Buenos Aires, however, the style of the woman *country* resident has constantly been used to promote closed, gated communities, seeking to standardise images and urging people to adopt a city way of life consistent with the urban model available to this group. Nonetheless, belonging to one social group does not preclude claims to belonging to other, possibly conflicting, groups, especially at the top of the social ladder (Lahire, 2004). Nor does it interfere with the individual's decision to comply partially, completely or not at all with the urban model concerned. The relationship individuals have with the metropolis is no longer simply a matter of «lifestyle», social position or household income, but increasingly to do with the improved status of differences exploited by the market. While these differences break lifestyles down to the scale of the individual (Bourdin, 2005), they are paradoxically levelled out in social representations. Thus, even if households make the individual choice to live in a closed, gated community that is compatible with their overall family aspirations, they do not always entirely identify with the model of the private peripheral city, nor are they always happy with the results of their choices, something that is hard to admit for people who only recently became home owners. Some women are quite content with this city, which fulfils their expectations, and move back and forth easily between career and domestic life (even if a home help is often essential to achieve this). Mara, for example, says she went from being an «all-out *Porteña*» to an «all-out *Nordeltea*»⁷, while other women have trouble reconciling the two and claim to suffer from what they see as a «lack of urban lifestyle» in these residential communities and in these shopping-leisure centres built for and

around the car. Although these women chose this lifestyle, for it seemed to offer them what they (or their husbands) wanted, they have become disillusioned. The remote suburban housing estate, whether open or closed, is a woman's world, organised around family and social values, where men are remarkable by their absence. For them, the estate is a «dormitory» and, for the most part, they only put in an appearance at the weekend.

It has to be said that generalised mobility is an imposition and a myth, including for the upper-middle classes. Even in the gated communities, distance can be an obstacle. For households do not all necessarily purchase a second car when they move out to the edge of the city. Even if residential mobility – moving from the central city to the metropolitan periphery or moving within the metropolitan area – follows residential trajectories, the family may no longer be so close on a day-to-day basis (Dureau, 2000; Capron, 2006), except in the rare cases where children and parents move closer together (a phenomenon observed particularly in older residential communities). Some surveys (Lacarrieu, Girola in Capron, 2006; Svampa, 2001) indicate that women's employment often suffers from the move to the outskirts. Some mothers manage to find a job they can do from home (architecture, decoration, selling clothes or ready meals, language courses, etc.)⁸. Context, whether it is the move from the centre to the outskirts, the stage in the person's life cycle, or the economic crisis in Argentina, may only partly explain this withdrawal into domestic life, which affects the spatial patterns and individual experience of the city that some women have.

When they have no relatives living nearby and the household has no second car, non-working women may feel cut off from things, especially in the remotest suburbs. They feel as if they are «suffocating», they feel «stifled» and suffer from living in such a remote environment, especially if they used to live «in town» and were used to going out and/or working. Lidia, a 36-year-old wife and mother of two, was a hyperactive senior executive. Since the family moved to a gated community in Pilar, she has become a full-time mother. Her husband, an executive at the Esso multinational firm, now brings in all the household's income. She has mixed, paradoxical feelings about the situation. Of course, she has all her time to herself, but is afraid of the

7. *Porteño* is the name given to the inhabitants of Buenos Aires. *Nordeltea* refers to the residents of the «private city» of Nordelta.

8. Other research relating to middle-class, open residential communities from the 1960s (Tarres, 1999) or closed, «social interest» communities of the early 21st century (Jacquin, 2006) in Mexico City, stress that women are the protagonists in these peripheral, middle-class areas.

9. More than half the women questioned by Maristella Svampa (2001), who interviewed 72 of them: half according to Mónica Lacarrieu and María Florencia Girola, who met them before and after the crisis that hit Argentina in 2001.



Christoph Schäfer / Park Fiction Archiv

Barra da Tijuca, recent improvements, Rio de Janeiro

intellectual void experienced by women in this environment. She feels that she's been left on the sidelines, out of things (she's not even connected to the Internet). In Buenos Aires, the psychoanalysts' waiting rooms are full of these women who have every reason to be happy, but who suffer from a persistent feeling of loneliness and «emptiness». These feelings may not be unique to their social category, but they are exacerbated by isolation, distance and enclosure. The life they lead is a long way from the «lifestyle» they had imagined. Everyday life in the outskirts of the city implies a sometimes difficult adjustment to the conditions imposed by remote location, while withdrawal into local life does not lead to anchorage in the residential area. Some people find that the uniformity of lifestyles and routines and always mixing within the same social circles becomes hard to bear, for there is not much choice when it comes to going out.

The daily routines and movements of non-working wives follow spatial patterns that are very different and far more restricted than those of their husbands, who sometimes commute 150 kilometres a day. Wives spend the day taking the children to school, doing the food shopping and maybe going to the local shopping centre for a coffee with their friends.

Some women, driven by curiosity or need, have managed to go a little further in other neighbouring areas, especially when they have their own car. Others concentrate on building up the household's social network, getting to know other people like themselves to exchange small favours or to break out of their isolation, trying to obtain more and better facilities for the neighbourhood and devoting time to charitable organisations. In Nordelta, charities are institutionally channelled through the Nordelta

Foundation, where the self-designated «volunteers» are committed to helping the neighbouring poor districts. Pensioners have moved closer to their children and grandchildren.

Some of them miss their former life in the city and find it difficult living so far from the centre. Others, like Dora, who lives in a Nordelta apartment, are still very active and go on seeing their friends in the city, while appreciating the proximity of their children.

The intensity, scale and variety of these women's metropolitan lives show that there is clearly more than one way for women to live in a gated community. Some withdraw into themselves, others put down local roots, others become involved in community life, others are hypermobile – with various combinations of all these styles.

The individualism of peri-urban life may have its costs in psychological terms, though these can be explained not only by the confinement or isolation of this type of life (Coutras, 1996), but also by the difficulties encountered in trying to empower individuals. In many parts of the world, individuals have become more empowered, while, as Anthony Giddens (1990) and Ulrich Beck (2001) pointed out, the varying degree of decline observed in the major social and political institutions (Catholic church, traditional political parties, family, etc.) that organised and lent structure to everyday life and regulated society from Mexico to Argentina, has led to solitude and uncertainty. It has helped propagate a feeling of ontological insecurity (Giddens, 1990) that is far more than just fear of crime. It is also related to the fact that individuals do not all have the same ability to control their environment. Upper-middle class gated communities are the setting for these phenomena and the women who live there are in the front line.

Fragmented forms of urbanity

We may wonder whether enclosed housing is exclusive to the middle classes¹⁰ or a general trend in the metropolises, both in central districts and in outlying areas, regardless of its degree and the variety of forms it may take¹¹.

In Latin America, «peri-urbanity», a paradigm of upper-middle class, «peripheral urbanity» on the edges of the metropolis, represents a choice of lifestyle that is not essentially anti-urban, although it does differ from the compact city and, more importantly, develops in response to change. Housing supply in peripheral areas therefore adapts to demand (more floor space per person), life cycles (as the inner-city market does not always meet family requirements in terms of cost and space) and individual tastes, values and interests (family life, preservation of property values). More especially, it increasingly adapts, in the broadest sense of the term, to the middle classes' demand for physical, material, economic and social security. Although peri-urbanity implies distance, it does not mean that people who make this choice necessarily adhere to the model of city proposed, nor does it automatically lead to a more community-oriented social life within this type of housing complex. The uniform urbanity of upper-middle class residential communities can mean that individuals, depending on their

past histories, lead a more mediocre city life, with isolation being exacerbated by enclosure.

Gated communities help to promote sprawl and «urban fragmentation» in a first-time buyers' market which offers little alternative to enclosure anyway. The individualisation of the behaviours of upper-middle class households has some impact on the rest of the metropolis, particularly in democratic terms. Closed, gated communities contribute to the emergence of fragmented forms of urbanity that challenge and affect physical and social cohesion with the rest of the city. But is that only the case in upper-middle class peri-urban areas? The search for physical and material tranquillity is a trait shared by much of the middle class and, here as elsewhere, could be a sign of a rejection of otherness.

10. Nearly all social strata protect themselves, either by closing off secondary roads, or by choosing (freely or not so freely) to live in a gated community. Huge social housing developments with perimeter fencing are now mushrooming in the outskirts of Mexico City (Jacquin 2006).

11. In Toulouse, for example, Bruno Sabatier (2000) shows that the facades of buildings put up in the 1990s are set back further from the pavements. The scale and precise effects of enclosing the residential community, however, vary according to context.

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