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Author (s)	Guadalupe Miliàn and Michel Guenet
Address	Guadalupe Miliàn Ph.D. Benemérita Universidad Autonoma De Puebla, Facultad De Arquitectura, Puebla, Mexico and Michel Guenet, Ph.D., Professor Université de Montréal, Institut d'urbanisme Montréal, Canada
Telephone	514 343-2373
Fax	514 343-2338
Mobile	
E-mail	Michel.guenet@umontreal.ca & mmilian@hotmail.com
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GATED COMMUNITIES IMPACTS IN THE FUNCTIONALITY AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT IN PUEBLA, MEXICO

Abstract:

Gated Communities phenomenon appears in the city of Puebla, Mexico, during the seventies. All along 2000 we have done a fieldwork, with a team of research students of our master program , finding 916 gated communities. The residential forms, with different dimensions and particular specifications, are localized all around the city, even in the central area, the peripheries and besides the interurban roots of Puebla's agglomeration. As that another cities, those gated neighbourhood are habited especially by high or medium classes; in Puebla 30.7% are addressed to lowest groups that accessed at this places by social credits. In this paper we present a typology proposal based in the impacts that one gated community or a system of gated communities (constellations) produces in the functionality, services and urban development of their environment and even in the whole city. For this analysis we have focus especially three variables: environment quality (urban network, land uses, predominant type of mobility (vehicular or pedestrian traffic) dimensions of the gated communities and institutional concerns (government) in the area implicated.

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Introduction

In the last decades, in various cities around the world, a new style of residential structure has emerged. Its most distinctive characteristics are walls or fences that enclose -throughout its perimeter- the residential areas, separating housing and streets from urban dynamics; and particular attention must be placed in its controlled access, preventing free transit to nonresidents.

Specialists from diverse and often contradicting perspectives have interpreted this phenomenon. One interpretation puts emphasis in the *internal dynamics*, highlighting apparent advantages or inconveniences that affect their inhabitants. The other interpretation is oriented towards the *external dynamics*; their impact on urban and social environment.

Using the agglomeration of Puebla (Mexico)¹, in this work we display how, beyond apparent benefits or burdens these areas can affect their inhabitants, these modalities of residential organization negatively affect urban structures. The absence of an institutional control lacks a global vision of the city and its future developments. Consequently, a proliferation these residential assemblies have ensued, threatening the operation of the city. This means that the negative consequences not only affect the most vulnerable groups (despite being the most affected) but they also *fragment*, *disconnect* urban sectors. They *disorient* transit, *strangle* future development, and create highly *insecure* zones –which are evident when the periphery of the city of Puebla is covered, where these communities are most likely found-, they affect the entire city. As such, this *chaos* emerges as a true social aggression.

Thus, more than a quantitative analysis, or the discussion of previous definitions of “gated communities”, our object of study concerns all enclosed residential areas, identifying the implications to the territory. Even when they don’t count with legally constituted organizations or written codes, we consider that enclosed communities form part of a trend towards “selfgovernment” that shows disdain towards the norms that rule the city as a whole. In a similar fashion, the enclosing, independently of the differences that are adopted to restrict the access to the residential areas (from gates closed at night to sophisticated ineludibly mechanisms), are an impediment to free transit and the continuity of urban layout. This subordination to the global and

1 The city of Puebla is the fourth Mexican metropolis, with a population of approximately 1,500,000 inhabitants: the agglomeration surpasses two million and the metropolitan area accounts for 3.5 million.

truly public, represented in the communities, invite to be thought as aggression, another form of segregation.

A brief reflection upon the complexity and difficulties surrounding the study of gated communities and the most relevant tools in this investigation are discussed. The presentation of the results is organized in the following terms: at first, we will describe the characteristics of gated communities; followed by a discussion of the communities within its external relations and the impact they have on the territory. We open this section with a brief spatial analysis of the structures that compose the agglomeration of Puebla, and we illustrate the importance of gated communities on urban expansion. Under this platform we develop a typological proposal of the *systems* or *constellations* that result from the emergence of communities in the diverse structures of the city, and the impact they produce to each structure. The last section summarizes the attitude that authorities keep towards the emergence of this residential modality and the characteristics and guidelines that rule the interior of these enclosed areas. Our conclusions are presented at the end of this paper.

1 Gated communities, a new phenomenon: problems for its definition and study

As it is well-known, residential areas enclosed through fences or walls, with more or less controlled access, have been present in many societies, as a product of special or traditional circumstances.

In the last decades, in diverse cities of the world, a *new* phenomenon has emerged: the so-called “gated communities²”. Specialized literature has defined its essential elements: a) Predominately residential areas, isolated by wall or fences, b) access to the sector and use of its spaces and collective services are controlled, c) they count with a formal administration and are recognized by law. Far from being isolated or exceptional cases, such as the ones mentioned previously, these areas are a modality of residential structuring *linked to the city*, a new *sociospatial phenomenon* that takes an increasing toll on the *social integration*, on the *administration of services*, and on the *urban layout*.

Discussion about this topic, growing since the 90s³, rears diverse and contradictory interpretations. From a social perspective, fragmentation, polarization of groups, changes in lifestyle and the weakening of the solidarity of urban society stand out (Frants, 1999; Thuillier, 1999), and the low contribution they provide to social wellbeing (Townshed, 1999; Leisch, 1999). Wehrheim (1999) and Winfield (1999) highlight the duality of “security”/“danger”. Against this, Lacarrieu (1998:10) provides two examples (Mexico City and Buenos Aires), identifying “private

2 Davis (1990), uses this notion and offers an analysis for the city of Los Angeles

3 In December 1999 an International Workshop took place in Hamburg, Austria: “Gated Communities as a

Global Phenomenon”; in 2002 the second workshop took place in Mainz. Also in 2002 a conference took

place in Guadalajara, Mexico.

3

neighbourhoods” as one of the many manifestations of the *local* that indicates “a new form of citizenship that links the claims to difference and a better quality of life”.

From a more urban vision, Wehrheim (1999) and Frants (1999) question the privatization of services and public spaces, and the changes in urban landscape that result from these new residential structures. Canclini (1996)⁴ even proposes new categories: *semipublic* or *semiprivate* in reference to collective spaces. Monnet (1996: 18), in reference to Los Angeles, California, affirms: “...there is no public space... only collective spaces of flow (urban highways) and community spaces of identification (places of daily life, including businesses)”. Even though Monnet does not mention gated communities as such, he gives us an interesting clue to reflect upon the impact that these areas can provide in the restructuring of cities. Through the observation of gated perimeters, in contrast with blocks, lots, streets, houses and public infrastructure that traditionally give form to the city, covering the routes that connect to urban dynamics –mostly highly transited arteries–, this model, composed by *collective flow spaces* and *enclosed community spaces* of identification is truly alarming. Without a doubt, we can affirm an *extremism* of tendencies towards fragmentation and loss of urban space⁵. And remembering the critique that Pellegrino (1998: 152) makes of the models of urban agglomerations based on networks, we could even venture into saying that with these urban modalities “the destiny of civilization is at stake”⁶.

Looking through the perspective of literature we could hypothesize that certain urban structures are in process of transformation, in terms of administration and space, with a trend towards acute fragmentation⁷. On the one hand, we witness the progressive emergence of groups of inhabitants (“micro-governments”) that acquire power and take decisions over urban aspects (public by definition) over the interests of society. On the other hand, the conformation of enclosed property, both semi public (semi-urban?) that takes precedence over the global function of cities.

The consequences are especially negative in southern countries. As it is well known, socio-spatial fragmentation and the loss of urban space are accompanied by strong economic polarization, and a weak institutional platform. Finding irregular settlements next to gated

communities is a common occurrence. These are characterized by low construction standards
4 Canclini displays with diverse examples in the changes in the concept of public and private concepts when being operated in the contemporary world; showing diverse instruments of inclusion and exclusion that operate nowadays, warning that they are not always of spatial nature.

5 Both tendencies are concerns dating back to the seventies: Rossi (1971), Muntañola (1973, 1996), Cullen (1974), Aymonino (1975), Krier (1981), Augé (1994), Pellegrino (1994, 1998), among others.

6 In this text, Pellegrino makes a critique of G. Dupuy's (1991) proposal of basing urban agglomerations in traffic networks. He presents an interesting reflection about the obstacles imposed by networks, and in a wider vision, on the possibility of establishing contacts and spontaneous human interactions, which take place in the traditional "city of the inhabitants".

7 The terms used reinforce this idea: "closed communities", "exclusivity ghettos", "excluded ghettos", and "security towns".

4

and a high deficit in basic services (water, plumbing and paved streets)⁸. And, in this context, the action of individuals (grouped in communities) take in their hands the administration of services and the appropriation of parts of the city in exclusive terms, implies that the most economically challenged population experience more difficulties reaching minimum levels of wellbeing, including the possibility of transportation (they lack automobiles and public transportation is expensive and deficient).

In the case of Puebla, walls and diverse security methods have allowed the insertion of closed layouts, even within the core of traditional semi-rural populations located close to the city. This causes an alteration in their economic and cultural lifestyles, causing the future exodus of its founding population. In a similar fashion, closed properties are not limited to high-income groups. The model has been adopted by real estate promoters as the "only" way of responding to the needs of different social groups. As such, we witness a high proliferation of closed areas, of multiple dimensions and with different levels of formalization in their administration, which emergence has caused a lack of instruments of territorial order. In certain sectors this is generating a true *chaos*: circulation blocks, lack of continuity in streets, disconnection between urban sectors, and insecurity. Finally, the collective spaces of flow (the "urban highways" of Monnet) in Puebla add dirt roads and old rural streets, lacking any facilities.

As such, a question should be made: is this the emergence of new ways of social integration, or new ways of segregation that worsen mechanisms of elusion? Is it valid discussing the validity of citizenship –as proposed by Lacarrieu-, or the conquest of power with the capability of being translated into aggression? Are we witnessing a new residential mode, among others, or witnessing the emergence of an urban form that has undesired effects for the global structure of the city?

To answer these questions, we decided on a notion that can cover all residential areas in the agglomeration since January 2001. Our presentation goes beyond quantities and adherence to conventional concepts; it seeks to reveal a process we consider dangerous to urban life. In other words: how, and under what conditions do gated communities contribute to the chaos mentioned previously.

The term "*gated communities*" (GC) seemed the most appropriate to us. According to Keller (1975: 133-134) four fundamental aspects are involved in these residential areas. In summary: 1) A clearly delimited area in its physical terms, positioned in a large area and with a configuration that gives it a distinctive seal; 2) Services available only for the residents; 3) An area that represents certain values, and 4) "a group of forces that operate inside and over the collectively to give it a particular atmosphere". It is interesting that the author, in her investigation (taken place in the seventies), informs us of her difficulty to find the four characteristics in a

⁸ "This kind of settlements can house up to the fourth, or even third part of the population in large cities in Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru or Venezuela. Extreme –yet not exceptional cases- are Mexico

City or certain cities in Brazil..." (Tomas, 1997:19)

5

particular area. More than three decades later this notion seems to be tailored to our problem. Translated to our investigation, it will consist in: 1) a group of *residential units* (being several single-family houses or several multi-family houses –duplex, triplex, etc.) enclosed through wall or any other type of fence, in which interior collective spaces exist, traditionally considered as *public*; 2) the access to the neighbourhood count with certain measures, and in *different scales*, restrict free-transit of strangers; 3) with different levels of formalization, regulations exist that affect the internal collectively, which Keller calls: "A set or group of forces that operate inside and over a collectivity to give it a special atmosphere".

We also decided treating the subject from a double perspective: neighbourhoods as single elements, and neighbourhoods in their urban dynamics. As our main support we developed a set of tools that allow the visualization of physical characteristics and the spatial implications in gated communities in the agglomeration of Puebla; and we applied semi-directed interviews and questionnaires to the main actors.

2 Instruments of the investigation: the census, questionnaires, interviews and spatial analysis

Between 1995 and 2002, under the program PPDU9, an investigation group was organized that reformulated the project and constructed the permissibly note for the inventory of GCs. With support from students supported by Canadian International Development Agency (ACDI), a new investigation was tackled in government offices, with poor results. We proceeded with the revision of numeric orthophotos and topographical maps of INEGI10 and we complemented the information produced by taxi drivers. Over this base, during 2000 and January 2001 we traveled through the city, street by street, including suburbs following interurban routes. While doing the localization (physically and in maps) of the GCs, we photographed structural spaces, made questions to the inhabitants, and in some cases, we consulted real estate developers to integrate the pertaining information. Through these permissions we obtained a census or inventory which results are located in a database and in a geographical information system.

The census of neighbourhoods

Comprehends 912 gated communities, the variables are:

1. *Size* or area occupied by the neighbourhood, classified in: micro (up to one hectare), small (larger than one and up to 2 hectare), medium (larger than two and up to 9 hectare) and large (more than 9 hectare);

2. *Quality of the neighbourhood*, established by the quality and cost of housing (public housing, regular, good, and very good);

9 Programmed de "Partenariat en développement urbain".

10 Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática.

6

3. *Street pattern* on the inside of the community (in continuity or contrast with the surrounding environment;

4. *Use of land* (residential or mixed)

5. *Service administration modality* (individual, public or communal);

6. *Architectonic typology* (prototype, heterogeneous);

7. *Insertion into the city* (obstacle or not);

8. *Location* (downtown, intermediate, peripheral)

9. *Access to the community* (free, controlled, sophisticated)

10. *Type of enclosing* (wall, fence, combined)

11. *Environment of the community* (urbanized, non-urbanized).

12. *Year of creation* (when it started as an enclosing) or installation of enclosures.

Questionnaires to the inhabitants

63 questionnaires were applied (interviews made at home), during the first half of 2002; contemplating 50 questions about the following subjects:

- Socio-demographic characteristics of the families,
- Residential mobility
- Motives for the election of the community
- Cost of housing and ownership modalities
- Type of relations established with the member of the community,
- Places frequented for recreation, supplies and other activities.
- Community participation modes and,
- Perception of the social and spatial environment.

Originally intended to make a statistically representative number of interviews, basing on the GCs census. However, due to some inhabitants' unwillingness we could apply only 73 interviews¹¹.

We

made: fourteen interviews in 12 large GCs, 28 interviews in sixteen GCs of medium size; seven interviews in six small GCs and 24 interviews in twenty micro GCs; with a total of 54 GCs. In the four sizes the different quality of communities was covered. Consequently, even if the information has no statistical validity, it resulted important in the exploration of the internal dynamics.

The interviews

During the first semester of 1997 we interviewed sixteen presidents of the communities, representing GCs of good or very good quality. All of them count with juridical recognition. Their application took place *in-situ*; the questions were geared towards organization modes and regulations of the communities.

11 Inhabitants of GCs of the highest level presented more unwillingness to make the interview.

7

For institutional information, we interviewed the Chief of the Department of Municipal Urban Development, in August 2002.

For real estate developers, we chose three representative examples: *Consortio de la Vista* (very good quality), Casas Geo (public housing quality) and a company oriented towards small neighbourhood complexes (medium quality and public housing).

Spatial analysis

With the fieldwork results, a database was constructed, as well as a GIS that allowed us the conception of thematic maps. The cartography displayed the geographical distribution of the 912 GCs, their regularities and insertion modes into the terrain and some consequences that they produce in their environment. From these observations and our visits to certain places, the idea of elaborating a typological proposal in accordance to the impact generated in the terrain emerged.

3 About quantities and some basic variables

Based on the census, we identified 912 GCs between 500 square meters up to more than ten hectare (view table 1). Their internal structure is composed sometimes from a single street with constructions to the side, others that organize a traditional orthogonal grid, and also some capricious designs (comb-like, clusters, circles, among others). Regarding the homogeneity of housing, two variants can be observed: neighbourhoods sold as lots present architectural variation; and neighbourhood sold pre-constructed, which are generally based on prototypes. There is a general homogeneity in the interior of every GC: the cost of housing does not vary considerably. Viewed in their totality, we find a diversity of qualities: from affordable housing (because of the cost and type of organisms that approve the credit with which the housing is acquired), average, good and very good (see Table 1). Land use is predominately residential, only 63 of them (7%) are mixed. In those of great area and quality we observe four communities with golf clubs. None of the observed communities in Puebla count with an auto-sufficient model apt to be considered a mini-city.

8

Quality Total
Neigh.
Micro

Up to one
hectare
Small
Larger than
one and less
than 2ha.

Median
Larger than 2 and
less than 9ha.

Grande
>9ha

Num.
% Num. % Num % Num % Num %
Very Good 28 3 5 0.55 9 .99 5 0.55 9 .99
Good 197 21 114 12.50 48 5.26 21 2.30 14 1.54
Average 407 45 329 36.07 58 6.36 15 1.64 5 0.55

Affordable

Housing

280 31 189 20.72 51 5.60 27 2.96 13 1.43

Total 912 100 637 69.85 166 18.20 68 7.46 41 4.50

Source: Neighbourhood census, 2000, January 2001.

Table 1 : Quality and Size of Gated Communities

4 Gated communities and their relations with the city

Beyond quantitative data and a typological proposal stemmed from numbers, we are interested in looking at GCs in its relations to the city. This implies identifying the contributions and disadvantages in the function and future development of the agglomeration. We do not pretend a technical analysis, since this function is seen through a social perspective, considering the impact in the behaviour of the population, which we will demonstrate throughout this section. As we will see, the effect on the terrain and the population –external to GCs- do not depend *only* on the intrinsic attributes of the GCs, diverse elements of the environment also intervene: 1) *the urban fabric*, 2) *the disposition of facilities*, 3) *modalities in urban spaces* and 4) *institutional control*. These four elements, along with particular attributes and modalities of insertion of the GCs into the terrain, constitute systems or differentiated constellations; and every system causes differentiated impacts. From this platform we propose a typology of GCs. We have chosen the term *constellations* sine they allude to the concept of system and because it puts in relevance the *positions* that the different elements of this system take. As we will see, the urban problem the GCs trigger or reinforce is closely related to the positions that these occupy and with the characteristics of a determined environment. These position in their dynamics with other elements what give place to the so-called *perverse-effects*, unanticipated and detrimental to society. The most important impact caused by communities are due to –besides their dimensions when they occupy a large area-, the modes of clustering that take place, from which is worth mentioning: informal agglomerations composed of enclosed areas of diverse dimensions, without consideration to the environment or de city. Given these premises, before proposing the typology, we start with a brief but necessary approach to the city and the structures that constitute it.

9

Parting from its spatial configurations and the social dynamics that are produced in it, the agglomeration of Puebla –represented in diagram 1-, we can distinguish three big urban structures (view detail in plan 1). It would seem that they coincide with the three “street rings” that encircle the city¹² as parts of a concentrate system. 2) The *central nucleus* (the original Spaniard layout of 1531) with its expansion reached more or less by the seventies and eighties – is located between the first and second ring. 3) The *extreme periphery*, at the third ring. Viewing the diagram it is possible to observe the periods are not strict because –with exception of the

central sector- the mode of growth has been *pendular*. In other words, discontinuous urban developments leave empty spaces that are occupied later (corresponding to the movement of a pendulum)¹³. The rings do not establish a precise delimitation, but they do function as an approximate reference. As we will see, each of these structures present notable differences in terms of dominant patterns and fabrics, forms of organization and uses of land, and –in consequence- the modes of circulation and social practices that each one imposes (for more clarity we have constructed a summary of characteristics in Table 2).

12 The first ring corresponds to the Interior Circuit (Circuito Interior) that is composed by the following

boulevards: Norte, Heroes del 5 de Mayo and Circuito Juan Pablo Segundo. The second ring is formed the

24 sur avenue, the boulevard Las Torres or Boulevard Municipio Libre, prolonged to the North by the

Boulevard Vicente Suárez until meeting Juan Cordero Street and after Prolongación Diagonal Defensores

de la República, to find at the Northeast the Boulevard Atlixco, closing the ring at boulevard Paseo de la

Niñez. The third ring is composed by: Prolongación 24 Sur, Las Torres avenue or Boulevard Municipio

Libre, Boulevard Vicente Suárez, Albert Einstein st. crossing Federal Road to Tehuacan to be completed at

the México-Puebla Highway.

13 It results evident that this phenomenon of pendular growth is associated with speculative real estate.

10

Source "Estructura urbana, usos, destinos y reservas". Concept: Guenet, 2002

Direction of Urban development and Ecology,

Government of the State of Puebla, City Council of Puebla, January 2002.

Plan 1 : Urban structures, agglomeration of Puebla, 2002

Figure 1: Urban patterns

Central Intermediate Peripheral

URBAN PATTERNS

11

Urban

Structur

es

Characteristic

Patterns

Continuity/

Discontinuity

in Patters

Predominant

Land Use

Social

Behaviour

Modes of

Urban

Space

Institut

ional

Contro

|

Central

Orthogonal and

compact; small an

regular blocks

No ruptures Mixed blocks
and
centralized
main nucleus
Immediate
nucleus/Pe
destrian
circulation
Public Strong
Intermed
iate
Orthogonal,
combined; blocks
of diverse
dimensions;
modern streets
(diagonal and
encircled)
Deviations in
geometry;
continuity
and ruptures
Sectors with
mixed blocks;
residential
sectors,
commercial
sub centers
Immediate
functionality
/ Pedestrian
circulation
and
mediated
functionality
/
Vehicle
circulation
Semipublic
and
public
Mediu
m
Peripher
al
Large meshes of
agricultural origin
and small
orthogonal sectors
Strong
discontinuity,
patternbreaking
Varied singlefunction
sectors;
commercial
sub centers

Functionality measured by highspeed roads Semipublic and public Small

Table 2: Summary of Characteristics of Urban Structures

4.1 Gated communities, a tendency towards residential and urban expansion

The 912 GCs, as is appreciated in Diagram 2, are located in all the extension of the agglomeration, forming great constellations that scintillate¹⁴. In the central structure we can visualize the predomination of smaller neighbourhoods, in the intermediate structure, appear neighbourhoods, which occupy large blocks. We can also find communities that include some streets –recently stopped being freely transited- to complete communities that appeared in open modes and today are closed to free transit. In the peripheral structure enormous areas and amorphous agglomerated complexes can be observed, these have taken the axis of arterial, rural and inter-urban roads. Reviewing the years of implementation of each of these communities (registered during the census, the interviews and the historic cartography¹⁵) we can find a progressive character, constituting a *predominant tendency* towards urban expansion, as seen in Table 3 and Figure 2 (Histogram of appearance by year of emergence).

¹⁴ Scintillate: to emit quick flashes as if throwing off sparks (Merriam-Webster Dictionary)

¹⁵ Those that were closed after their creation were registered according to their closure date.

¹²

Source: Census of Communities, 2000-01 Creation: Guenet, Milian, 2002.

Plan 2 : Gated communities, agglomeration of Puebla

Observing the collection of plans by stages of emergence, we can establish four large periods of emergence of these communities: 1960-1974, 1975-1979, 1980-1989 and 1990-2001. In the first, we can appreciate how they emerge from the southeast section¹⁶. During the seventies, they timidly start to appear in the northwest part of the city (peripheral structure); during the eighties, they multiply to the interior of the layout, consolidated –occupying lost and empty blocks- in the margins of interurban roads. Towards the end of this period the closure of some streets and even antique communities and open complexes started. At the nineties they constitute the *the predominant tendency* of residential growth and metropolitan growth¹⁷. Of the total of gated communities, more than 70% were constructed between 1985 and January 2001.

¹⁶ The first one appears in the sixties: Plaza Europa complex, in Bella Vista.

¹⁷ During the investigation we observed very limited cases of houses under construction outside gated communities.

¹³

1960-2000 Period

Periods Number of Communities %

1960-1974 11 1.30

1975-1979 45 4.93

1980-1989 287 31.49

1990-2000 568 62.28

Total Communities **912 100.00%**

Source: Neighbourhood Census 2000-2001

Table 3: Stages and Number of Communities

Stages of emergence of gated communities, Puebla

Creation: Milian and Guenet, 2002.

Plan 3: Stages of emergence of gated communities, Puebla

14

0

50

100

150

200

250

300

60 68 70 73 74 75 77 78 79 80 81 82 83 84 85 86 87 88 89 90 91 92 93 94 95 96 97 98 99 00 01

A,,OS

Source: Neighbourhood Census 2000-2001.

Figure 2. Histogram by year of appearance (1960 to January 2001)

5. Community constellations in the urban structures of the agglomeration

The insertion mode of the communities and their effects are specific to each of the structures selected in the previous analysis (central, intermediate and peripheral). In some cases, these insertions are realized producing an integration, meaning that they don't produce drastic alterations to the environment. In others, the insertion of communities produce structural transformations and dysfunctions to the spatial ordering, and true aggressions to urbanity. Through this effect we have constricted our typologies. We distinguish four main types and their respective subtypes that are explained in Table 4. This table summarizes the most important characteristics of each type. In Plan 4 we have displayed in grey tones the constellations of GCs by type, and in consequence each homogeneous zone corresponds to a set of communities, excepting type D (La Vista) of which we can find only one example at this moment. To present the typologies, let's remember their components: 1) *Urban pattern*, 2) *disposition of facilities*, 3) *Modes of urban space* and 4) *institutional control*.

15

Source: Census of Communities, 2000-01 Creation: Guenet, Milian, 2002.

Plan 4: The constellations in the agglomeration, Puebla

Type of Impacts

Constellations

Structure of

the insertion

environment

Size the

community Pattern Use of land Behaviour

functionality

"A"

Integrated to

the structure

Central and

intermediate

Micros and

small

Nonexistent

Non-existent Non-exist an

"B"

In rupture with

traditional

structures

Intermediate
and peripheral
Small,
medium an
large
Ruptures Singlefunctionality
reinforcement
Reinforcement to
mediated/vehicle
functionality
“C”
Agglomeration
in puzzle
Peripheral and
edges of the
intermediate
Micros,
small,
medians y
large
No urban
references
Singlefunctionality
predominately
Predominately
mediated/vehicle
functionality
“D”

Grand barrier
Peripheral Large No urban
references
Singlefunctionality
predominately
Predominately
mediated/vehicle
functionality

Table 4: Types of Communities, Characteristics and Impacts
16

• **Type “A”, Constellations integrated to the traditional structure** (plan 5)

Under this category we classify the set of GCs that are inserted into the central and intermediate structures *without causing ruptures* to the urban pattern, or significant alterations to the use of land or the *character* of urban space. These GCs have used empty lots and even whole blocks corresponding to neighbourhoods that appeared before the closed trend, and even in empty spaces as a product of demolitions in downtown. These are *micro* and *small* communities (but this is not always necessary, as we will see later). As observed in Plan 5, in some occasions they produce quite concentrated groupings (view A in Plan 4) 18. Despite the concentration of communities, these urban sectors conserve their spatial characteristics –mixed land use- and as such an *immediate functionality*¹⁹ (possibility of pedestrian transportation for elemental activities) that do not require vehicle use. Their inhabitants give continuity to pedestrian and vehicle flow. We can also observe certain social continuity. Even though GCs are presented in different qualities (affordable housing, average, good), generally the insert into the corresponding level of their environment. As such, they don't produce an exodus of the original inhabitants. Summarizing, these GCs represent integration. The most representative sector is found to the south of the city, in Bugambillas, El Cerrito and Patrimonial. Consult Plans 4 and 5.

18 This strong concentration invites to think about an attraction effect, generating by the early-adopters that

establish the trend.

19 The concept is widely explained in the section corresponding to the central structure of the agglomeration of Puebla.

17

Type B, Constellations with Rupture in the traditional structure, subtypes: “B-2”, “B-2”
(Plans 6 and 7).

With this denomination we distinguish the groups of GCs inserted predominately to the interior of the structure which²⁰, under different modalities, *do* cause ruptures in the urban patterns, altering the disposition of land use and the urban space character. We find small, medium and large communities, and according to our classification their emergence is produced by two different conditions: one, the units that were constructed expressly as closed, using interstitial spaces located in the interior of the city layout in the nineties (subtype B-2, Plan 7). Examples: Reforma Agua Azul, Las Ánimas, Prados Agua Azul, Lomas del Mármol, among others). See Photos 1 and 2. Concerning changes in the mixed use of land we can find variants linked to the dimensions of the enclosed areas. This is due to the fact that the interior only allows residential use. These types of communities produce disorders, as they interrupt pedestrian and vehicular circulation continuity, as observed in Plan 7 (“Reforma Agua Azul” community). The dimensions of these areas allow to infer the possibilities of circulation. In some cases the use of a vehicle is very

20 They can also be found in the periphery where traditional patterns exist.

Constellations Integrated to the Traditional Structure, Type “A”

Sources: Background map, Servicio de Catastro de Puebla.

Thematic: Census of Communities 2000-2001.

Concept: Guenet, Milián, 2002.

Plan 5: Constellations Integrated to the Traditional Structure, Type “A”

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18

necessary. However, the existence of a previous urban structure, ruled by institutional order, diminishes the impact in contrast with the cases we will analyze later.

Photo 1: Frac. Villas Monarca

Photo 2: Space located

19

Constellations with rupture in the traditional structure, Type “B-1”

Sources: Background map, Servicio de Catastro de Puebla.

Thematic: Census of Communities 2000-2001.

Creation: Guenet, Milián, 2002.

Plan 6: Constellations with rupture in the traditional structure, Type “B-1”

Acceso

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• **Type “C”, Constellations with agglomeration in puzzle, subtypes “C-1”, “C-2”** (plans 8 and 9)

These types correspond to communities that are located in the peripheral structure. They use areas that were former limits of the city: agricultural parcels, lacking urban layouts. These are new growths that seem to follow no pre-established order, except for important arteries and rural roads that are used as axes. As observed in plans 8 and 9, they are constellations composed of differently sized communities (large, medium, small and micro) that aggregate one next to the other, separated by an artery or old rural road appropriated as an ordering axis. The difficulty in understanding the limits and access in the plans is similar to what is experienced while in transit through the region. These GCs implantations, successive and spontaneous, don't leave space for the construction of transversal streets, sidewalks, infrastructure networks, or the establishment of

Constellations with rupture in the traditional structure, Type “B-2”

Sources: Background map, Servicio de Catastro de Puebla.

Thematic: Census of Communities 2000-2001.

Creation: Guenet, Milián, 2002.

Plan 7: Constellations with rupture in the traditional structure, Type “B-2”

Acces

o

Acceso

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minimum urban facilities (public lighting, bus stops, or parks). They truly result in amorphous agglomerates, neighbourhood puzzles, a chaotic organization that does not take into account the global urban layout. Streets that serve as a space for daily activities, allowing unexpected spontaneous contact, have practically disappeared. The “urban spaces” or something similar is only found within the walled communities. We can distinguish two subtypes: one (C-1) that appropriates arterial roads as axes: sectors of the interior and peripheral circuit, interurban routes, and in some cases, former rural roads. Two (C-2) are insertions into immediate areas of former rural settlements.

In Plan 8, corresponding to the “Camino Real a Cholula” (Old Road to Cholula) and its intersection with “Calzada Zavaleta”, we can observe a characteristic example of the first subtype (C-1). In contrast with other truly single-function sectors, this place, due to its village-like antique quality, we can find mixed services and facilities that have been installed since the sixties (private universities, schools, shopping mall, sporting facilities, among others). This has facilitated certain respect for horizontal roadways.

22

In Figure 9 we present other subtype (C-2) concerning the Old Road to Xilotzingo (*Antiguo Camino a Xilotzingo*). It is a penetration that joins Boulevard Valsequillo with a sector of the Peripheral artery. Here the housing groups happen one next to the other, throughout 4 Kilometres approximately. In the same Plan 9, we can observe a complete physical disconnection between the west and east sectors. In a transversal direction only two roads exist, both close to the boulevard, over which pedestrian or vehicular transit can take place. The extreme South is delimited by the peripheral artery, and thus is not useful for pedestrian transit and vehicular transit is extremely dangerous. Contrasting with the previous example (C-1), there is no mixed land use. There are no businesses or educational and recreational facilities. This example is quite

Constellations in puzzle agglomeration, Type “C-1”

Sources: Background map, Servicio de Catastro de Puebla.

Thematic: Census of Communities 2000-2001.

Creation: Guenet, Milián, 2002.

Plan 8: Constellations in puzzle agglomeration, Type “C-1”

Acceso

N

Recta Cholula

Calzada

Zavaleta

Camino Real

23

interesting because it allows us to see the phases inside the emergence of GCs. The first implementations took place alongside Boulevard Valsequillo (urban interconnection road); the second phase developed on the inside, taking an old rural road as an axis, from which GCs were formed (an antenna formation can be observed); the third and last phase, illustrated by the wall, displays the next great construction of a gated community –currently in progress. En photo 3 we can observe a sector of the wall, and its continuation towards the other side of the peripheral artery (GC: “San Miguel”).

Photo 3: Wall in San José Xilotzingo

24

• **Type “D” Constellations in great barrier**

This corresponds to the largest communities, and share characteristics with Type “C”. However, this is only one community and not agglomerations (we don’t offer a plan, but imagining it is an easy task: capricious design intertwined with golf greens). Given their dimensions, they constitute authentic barriers. In its interior high level recreative areas are developed (golf club, clubhouse and restaurant). These services, in contrast with other communities, are open to a select public

that includes non-residents, and demand a special administrative apparatus. Regularly they form part of an international chain of communities. Lastly, they insert into a great complex of consumption, converting large areas into commercial areas and hotels. The prime example in Puebla is “La Vista” *Country Club*, on the side of the peripheral artery, close to the most important commercial zone, the *Angelópolis* complex. In Photo 4 we can observe a sector if this community, and a golf green is identifiable.

Constellations in puzzle agglomeration, Type “C-2”

FASE 1

FASE 2

FASE 3

Acceso

Boulevard

Valsequillo

Camino Xilotzingo

Barda

Periférico

Ecológico

San

Miguel

0 N 1 km

Sources: Background map, Servicio de Catastro de Puebla.

Thematic: Census of Communities 2000-2001.

Creation: Guenet, Milián, 2002.

*

Plan 9: Constellations in puzzle agglomeration, Type “C-2”

25

Photo 4: The Angelopolis Complex “La Vista Country Club”

As we have exhibited, in the last cases there is an evident absence of previous institutional planning, or during the installation of these communities. This has resulted in random ordering, labyrinths that disconnect urban and social sectors. They are barrier that prevent communication and a continuous harmony of future developments. In Plan 2, we can observe that this type of developments are encircling the city, in a lesser extent to the North.

To conclude this section we present Plan 10, “Commercial malls, markets and GCs”, where we highlight the main commercial facilities and first-class arterial roads (urban highways?) in the studied area. With support form information of the provision areas, obtained from 63 interviews that we applied to the inhabitants of VCs that we present in the next paragraph, we will ask the reader to imagine a set of structures that could overlap if we tried to trace the transit generated by the GC inhabitants.

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Source: Census of Communities, 2000-01 Creation: Guenet, Milian, 2002.

Plan 10: Shopping malls, markets and gated communities, Puebla

According to the interviews, the Commercial Microcenter Angelopolis, located to towards the southwest of the city, is the favourite place for the higher-level GC inhabitants, for recreation and provision, although they also reported traveling to Mexico City (14% of those interviewed). Medium Sectors also use Angelopolis but in a smaller measure, satisfying their provision need in other commercial centers, closer to their communities, eventually buying in popular markets. The population of affordable housing GCs has an increased tendency of using the markets close to their community (as confirmed by 57% of the participants), 25% buy in shopping centers and 35% visit downtown for entertainment activities.

We are conscious that the population of open communities also transits these installations, but we are interested in displaying how the closed communities are inserted, prioritizing linking with facilities, and close to their proximate environment. Under these conditions, the response of Monnet is: an urban structure of flow networks and community spaces of identification, excepting the North/South differences, it is useful to characterize the trends of transformation implied in the GCs.

27

6. Form urban segregation to social aggression: the “micro-governments” and the complacency of authorities

Segregation is a recurring concept to characterize the effects unleashed by GCs, in the sense of what remains outside of them, establishing distance with outsiders, as in the sense of auto segregation (“living among equals”). With different levels of consciousness, this is what effectively the inhabitants of enclosures do with the people who surround them, at the other side of the walls and fences.

The tendency of “living among equals” in Puebla as in other cities around the world, has been constant throughout their history. Polese (1995) based on official economic indicators, offers an analysis for Puebla in these terms. However, this type of segregation does not imply prohibitions in free transit or use of parks and other public installations. In fact, the emergence of a high level community provides support to the extension of infrastructure in sectors that lack services.

Besides material segregation imposed by walls and access regulation, GCs create situations of strong *aggressiveness*: they prevent circulation, use of facilities, extension of water and drainage (even though 85% of GCs are connected to municipal water and drainage networks, the problem is: with the discontinuity of streets there is a discontinuity of services. As streets circumventing the GCs have to be constructed, in a similar fashion, useless service networks to circumvent the obstruction. The enclosures in many cases create desert, arid and even dangerous surroundings. There are examples where, with the intention of obtaining the most lots possible, small ravines were levelled. These have historically served as a natural rain drainage, and consequently has caused inundation problems. In many of the studied GCs we can observe that they ignore their environment: they construct walls at the very limit, without leaving space for sidewalks or other urban facilities, as seen in Photos 5 and 6. They take what they need from the city, the neighbours, and the surrounding lands; yet –in what we have denominated as agglomeration constellations, they generate problems: fragmentation, disorientation, disconnection, blocking. In summary, a hardly reversible chaotic order has been established.

28

Photo 5 : Block off part of road

Photo 6: Real fragmentation and disconnection

The real estate industry has a fundamental function in these dysfunctionality, overtly known. The other determining actor has been the Stat, which incidence can be observed by its “absence”, as well as an “unconscious collaboration”. Far from establishing “controls” to guarantee urban function, it collaborates and promotes the development of GCs. For example, since the eighties the City Major in turn, in his annual government conference has congratulated the “citizens that contribute to security of their communities and neighbourhoods, constructing security booths that are supported by the City Government when justified” (1987:13). Fifteen years later, according to official declarations²¹, there are not regulations that contemplate gated communities. Their articulations with the environment are ruled *sui generis, discretionary*, referencing regulations of neighbourhoods and constructions before the appearance of closed forms that don’t contemplate these new circumstances. The authorities, according to the interviews applied, are unaware of the magnitude of the phenomenon (many GCs don’t have

21 Interview with the Head of the Department of Municipal Urban Development (August 20002)

29 official permission) and they don’t visualize the problems that these carry. Confronting the limited resources that they count with, -to provide necessary infrastructure- they find a relief from their responsibilities. They are seen as collaborators. When permissions are seek, or former open communities are gated, be it a street or a community sector, they sustain an ambiguous position. On one side, they grant permission under a clause that contemplates reversibility. This means that it may be re-opened to transit in case neighbouring inhabitants protest. On the other hand, the mechanism to construct or demolish a wall is –in words of the public servant- “pretty long and complicated”. Taking the wall of Xilotozingo as an example, during 2001 (see Plan 9) one must observe the results of the protests undertaken by neighbours of “Jardines de Santiago” the most aggressive where imprisoned, and yet the wall remained. We can say that, besides being complicated, the possibility of preventing action depends on the forces and interest at stake²².

Photo 3 illustrates the outrages committed by the neighbors.

Other form of “unconscious” State collaboration is perceived in the role of affordable housing in Gcs. In the census they constitute 31%. In the last years public housing organisms (Infonavit and Fvoi²³) suspended their policy of housing construction, directing financing towards credit approval. Real estate developers –of different dimensions- following the guidelines of these organisms (constructed square meters and construction specifications) and closed urban forms have been in charge of creating communities of diverse dimensions (from six to 1,500 houses) in many locations around the city and its surroundings. Casas “Geo” and “Casas Ara”²⁴ among the most representative companies, in parallel with small developers led by architects or lawyers, have found in syndicates, and low – middle income families a willing clientele. In closed developments they have found a model that allows a maximum use of land. Inhabitants of these developments expressed that their house was “assigned”, or that the motivations were “low cost” and “payment opportunities”. Living conditions are very distant from other developments, here housing is truly minimal (starting at 30m² of construction) considering salary (up to 10,000 pesos per month²⁵) and selling prices in these developments (between 125,000 and 200,000 pesos), we can say that they truly constitute the only way to acquire property for a large proportion of the population²⁶. In summary, through public financing, a part of the population –in principle far away from these models- has become one of the main elements of their proliferation. In Photo 8 one of these GCs is presented.

22 The zone was home of the City Major at the moment.

23 Instituto Nacional de Fomento a la Vivienda de los Trabajadores (Infonavit) and Fomento a la Vivienda (Fovi).

24 Two large developers that have constructed communities in diverse locations of the city.

25 Current exchange rates approximate 10 pesos per dollar.

26 These GCs present slight variations in their quality. When this is the case, the elevation in cost is absorbed by initial payments.

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In parallel to what we perceive as an institutional absence in urban layout, the Gcs have constituted group powers oriented toward new forms of urban administration and planning. Even though neighbour associations are nothing new in Puebla –most communities and neighbourhoods have official representative and legal recognition- their main attribution are oriented towards the correct administration of public services. In contrast, the associations of GCs primordial function is to regulate the access and use of collective spaces –historically public. Such as when a street is closed from free transit –through a gate-, or taking charge of the maintenance of streets and services, or as in the case of formally organized GCs, counting with legal regulation instruments, without a doubt are examples of represent the abstention of *power*. The problem resides in that these powers don’t have a counterpoint that represents global interest, those that contemplate society as a whole. A small sample applied to formally organized communities and juridical recognition is useful to observe this trend –already in motion- that replace institutional control for something that we could call “micro-governments”.

The internal regulation is the main instrument to rule the aspects that concern the collective life in the communities. They are specific to each unit and their framework is the condominiums lay. In some aspects they violate municipal norms (such as the restrictions placed on the used of land). Based on the revision of sixteen regulations we present the synthesis of the most important content of these documents. They regulate: access to the community (allowed only by visitors authorized by neighbours), internal circulation, use of common areas, functions and attributions of personnel that works in security and maintenance, use of land, and access schedules²⁷, and type of constructions allowed. In some cases, when the real estate developers does not concern constructions, the regulations include the architectural style of housing and construction material that must be used. Directive organs, besides taking part of their regular functions (charging monthly payments, administration of internal services, and overseeing obedience of regulations) form special missions in charge of the approval or architectural projects that are required from property owners. The administration is usually formed by a board of directors formed by the inhabitants; but cases where an external administrator is hired also exist, especially when the communities count with large facilities such as “La Vista”²⁸, that counts with

an entire administration team hired by the real estate developer, without participation of the inhabitants. Neighbours are conditioned to live by the regulations.

Conclusions

In Puebla, as we have presented, GCs are a growing phenomenon: nowadays they constitute the predominating mode of purchasing housing and are –without a doubt- the form in which the city is expanding.

27 Garbage collection trucks, provision of construction material, gas and other services.

28 La Vista is the largest (12 hectare) and most luxurious community in Puebla

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As we have displayed, the morphological fragmentation imposed by GCs has multiple impacts that affect the entire population. It has been interesting to observe through the typologies that the effects not only depend on the intrinsic properties of the communities, but of the characteristics of the *environments* –which are rolled in these closed areas- and the more or less lax control that the authority confers to each sector of the agglomeration.

The GCs of smaller dimensions were useful to exemplify this mutual dependency between communities and urban environments, and the consequent differentiated valuation that acquires the same form in function to the environment into which it is introduced. Therefore, we discovered that the *micro* GCs practically have no effects when they are inserted into the interior of a block with a traditional fabric because they don't alter streets or the disposition of the use of land (mixed). We can affirm that they *integrate* into their environment and even are beneficial because of the diminishing cost of housing (compared to the individual constructions). The creation of these complexes has eased the acquisition for some families (from 67 interviewed families, 97% are owners). Yet, even in a micro scale, the GCs produce dysfunctional ties when located between two blocks –also tradition- but interrupting roads and practices that previously had been in function. Even more worrisome is when small or micro GCs collide in sites that lack previous urban referents and an efficient institutional control. These types, that we have classified as *constellations in puzzled agglomeration*, independently of the individual dimensions of each, produce an additive effect lacking a wider vision of the complex, without an institutional supervision. The results from these combinations cause many different disorders, i.e.: disorientation for transportation, need to border large sectors through lonely and insecure areas, and the creation of authentic ruptures of land areas. The population lacking motor-transportation are especially afflicted, living inside or outside GCs. Public transportation does not cover enclosed areas, or access external urban sectors blocked by GCs.

Other difficulties are presented by GCs, traditionally, the emergence of a neighbourhood went in hand with the construction of an extension of the city, assuming the extension of infrastructure and services to emerging areas. In GCs, however, services are only provided on the inside, leaving the outside without infrastructure of minimal facilities. They seem as *no-man's land*. In Puebla, as in other cities, this situation is important as authorities don't count with enough resources to provide all these services. Then, the costs required for the urbanization of these streets are carried by those who need to transit them on a daily basis, or that require infrastructure to connect their homes.

In conclusion, the need to undertake great commuting distances, the danger that lies in building-free roads and the increment in difficulties and costs to acquire basic services transform into mechanisms of segregation, increasingly more *aggressive, onerous, and truly excluding*. The segregation caused by GCs is not only a matter of individuals with homogenous characteristics concentrated in certain areas, as the concept is often misrepresented. This modality imposes

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situations that effectively *separate, exclude and discriminate certain social sectors*, independent of wealth, and literally are aggressive and put society in danger. One just has to walk through these streets in between GCs, with walls made from different materials, of different heights, and street where pedestrians evade vehicles, bushes and even piles of trash.

The spatial analysis has allowed us to visualize that the problems with GCs overflow their intrinsic environment, the problem is about the transformation of urban structure; and thus, of the problems of urban order. These form contribute to the progressive disappearance of the concept of "city" –with streets and public plazas adequate for meetings and social amenities. A new type of place has been created, and it is not public or private. Canclini (1999) has denominated it

semi-public; maybe we could also talk about a *semi-urban* space. The new structure is composed by high-speed roads and dirt-roads –elements of articulation- and closed urban spaces (residential and commercial) that are so fashionable nowadays. They don't make the city, but they do contribute to urban *stress*.

From the results of our investigation, we know that convincing the real estate developers or the city inhabitants would be almost impossible. Without a doubt, from their limited and unilateral vision, it has resulted beneficial for some (specially real estate developers who have made excellent business). It's clear that this responsibility lies on the State, taking account of the social and urban dysfunction that this and other studies have demonstrated. Norms that regulate the modalities of insertion and urban specifics of GCs should be enforced. We must consider that the need for "security" can't be taken as a justification to multiply these residential structures. In 26% of the interviews applied to the inhabitants, thefts were reported, 12% expressed conflicts with neighbours, and transgressions to regulations. Thus, the security and paradisiacal calmness they provide is not entirely true, yet they worsen the conditions of urban life. Security is, without a doubt, a social *value* that needs to be confronted from a new perspective that has positive impacts for society, and as such it opens as a indispensable line of multi-disciplinary investigation, in which all spatial forms have a relevant place.

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