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## **PRIVATE URBAN GOVERNANCE AND GATED COMMUNITIES – A MATTER OF (DIS)TRUST?**

**Abstract:** Why do people move into gated communities? Why do they choose to live in closed quarters? Are the gates critically important or just a necessary evil?

*These are among the most interesting questions on the field of private urban governance research. The word private seems pivotal. Mckenzie (2006) attaches the appeal of Common Interest Developments to the ever growing conviction that private management is superior to government. The dichotomy public vs. private has inevitably to be considered in a discussion of gated communities. The single most distinctive feature of gated communities is their separation from public space, by restriction of access to non-residents. What does this mean from the residents' point of view? Can it be interpreted as an, at least implicit, disenchantment with public authorities and their perceived responsibilities? If so, what importance does it have in the set of motivations for choosing, amongst various residential options, to live in these sorts of developments?*

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# PRIVATE URBAN GOVERNANCE AND GATED COMMUNITIES — A MATTER OF (DIS)TRUST?

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## Introduction

Why do people move into gated communities? Why do they choose to live in closed quarters? Are the gates critically important or just a necessary evil?

These are among the most interesting questions on the field of private urban governance research. The word *private* seems pivotal. McKenzie (2006) attaches the appeal of Common Interest Developments to the ever growing conviction that private management is superior to government. The dichotomy public vs. private has inevitably to be considered in a discussion of gated communities. The single most distinctive feature of gated communities is their separation from public space, by restriction of access to non-residents. What does this mean from the residents' point of view? Can it be interpreted as an, at least implicit, disenchantment with public authorities and their perceived responsibilities? If so, what importance does it have in the set of motivations for choosing, amongst various residential options, to live in these sorts of developments?

This paper addresses the issue of public vs. private by discussing the interest of the sociological concept of trust in the study of the demand of gated communities. It starts by making a short assessment of the concept's ascendancy, suggesting its plausible theoretical relevance in the understanding of the drive towards this particular form of urban governance. The paper's core is then dedicated to an appraisal of empirical work performed in the Lisbon Metropolitan Area (LMA), in the form of in-depth interviews with 27 gated communities' residents. The purpose of this fieldwork was precisely to examine if, and in what way, lack of trust in the State was an important element in the decision to move into a gated community

## The Concept of Trust

Some authors claim that the growing attention devoted to the concept of trust is explained by extra-theoretical dynamics; namely that it reflects the malaise of a society characterized by individualism and uncertainty. The relevance of its study is said to arise in a world of increasing specialization, possibility and anonymity. The professional specialization, which results in an economy of narrow-competency experts, causes more and more interdependency between social

actors. Each and every one of us is now more dependent on knowledge, products and actions performed by somebody else. Moreover, globalisation has made those whose actions and behaviour might have a bearing on our lives progressively more anonymous. These factors combined impress the notion of risk upon us. Risk, in turn, is closely associated with the idea of the need for trust.

There are, however, purely scholarly justifications for the concept's pre-eminence in the last 25 years. The interest in culture as a fundamental social variable has more or less defined the social sciences since the 1980ies. This so called cultural turn has, in fact, represented a paradigmatic shift in both methods and objects of study. On the one hand it gave way to a specific awareness to the psychological and cultural dimensions of social reality. On the other, it allowed for a more serious and regular consideration of softer explanatory variables – in contrast, for instances, with class, status or economic condition. The concept of trust is but one of these softer variables, in that it embodies the theoretical shift from holistic views of society towards attention to individual actions and interactions between individuals. Like so many others concepts of this nature, its purpose is to contribute to the comprehension of human action in a societal context.

Trust is viewed as a lubricant of social relations, facilitating cooperative behaviours by its presence or enticing competitive ones by its absence. In the sociology of action and decision-making it is seen as being part of the social capital that permeates individuals and communities, helping to make social life possible. In the words of one of its leading proponents, social capital manifests itself in “features of social organization such as trust, norms and networks that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated action” (Putnam, 1993). In this sense, questions of trust and social action are but modern variations of the old sociological problem of order. Taking the definition advanced by Sztompka (1999), trust can be described as “the expectancy of others virtuous conduct towards ourselves”. Distrust, correspondingly, may be seen as the expectancy of others mischievous conduct towards ourselves. Trust is, therefore, about expectations of behaviours and actions of others. Most of the literature deals with expectations about the actions of a concrete person or group of people (for a now classical review see Gambetta, 2000). To trust your neighbours, to trust your colleagues or, more generally, to trust your fellow citizens is said to produce all kinds of positive effects by creating a sense of community, making social life predictable and facilitating cooperation (Misztal, 1996). In this paper, though, we are interested in a more abstract target of trust – the government.

It is a popular contemporary claim that citizens worldwide are placing ever decreasing trust in their governments' actions. The recent controversies about the war in Iraq, for example, have shown us how easily and rapidly vast sectors of the population can start distrusting their

governments' assertions. Various surveys, particularly in America, have supported statements about the continuously declining value of public trust in government since the 1960ies, giving rise to "one of the most famous findings of political science in recent years [that] has been the seemingly inexorable decline in the trust and confidence that Americans have accorded to their political institutions" (Cook and Gronke, 2002). Robert Putnam's now seminal essay, *Bowling Alone* (2000), traces the decline of the American community by empirically examining Americans' decreasing levels of political participation, civic engagement in associations and trust in fellow citizens.

In our view, trust is not easily measurable though; it is a mental state, which propels us to certain kinds of action. There has, of course, been much research dedicated to the quantification of trust in given targets (e.g. Glaeser et al., 2000 ; Chanley et al., 2000; Paxton, 2004). Either based on experiments or through survey questions, these types of studies aim at a precise determination of causal relationships between trust and specific social actions. Although we have no intention of objectifying trust in this manner, we are inspired by the promise of its conceptual explanatory power.

## **Gated Communities and Trust**

The worldwide proliferation of gated communities is well documented. It is arguably the single fastest growing real estate product of our day. The number of people reportedly now living inside gates in the United States is astonishing. The continental size of the country allows for communities literally the size of cities, with an impressive degree of autonomy from the outside world in terms of service availability. In the LMA there are no such city-like gated communities. However we have witnessed an incredible increase in the number of gated communities in the last 10 years. According to our assessment, there were 198 gated communities in the LMA until 2004; 123 of them developed since 1999. This dramatic increase cannot be solely explained by the demand side. Surely, the spread of this phenomenon also has to be clarified by studying the incentives to developers and to the authorities that licence them. Our interest in this research, however, lies strictly in the motivations that lead people into choosing, among various possibilities, to live in gated communities.

There have been various important suggestions in the relevant literature. Trough her empirical work in the U.S., Setha Low (2003) has identified conflict avoidance, longing for childhood memories and the search for community as principal motives for living inside gates. She, like many others, also points out the desire for a feeling of security (e.g. Juergens and Gnad, 2002 for South Africa). Actually, increased security seems to be widely associated with the appeal of this sort of development, both by people inside and outside the gates. Equally important, as a cultural foundation of gated communities' attractiveness, is the ever growing

conviction that private management is superior to government. Foldvary (2006) praises Common Interest Developments in general as potential “explicit voluntary contracts among persons of equal legal standing”. In this sense, they are seen as beneficial for the citizen/consumer for its empowering facet.

Be it the ambition to grow more independent from the State or the longing for memories of a simpler time, all these arguments shed light into the reasons why people move into gated communities. In our opinion, the public-private dichotomy seems crucial to the comprehension of gated communities’ appeal to consumers. As an instance of *private* urban governance, the act of living in this sort of development could mirror an, at least implicit, disappointment with government activities, whatever they are deemed to be. It is precisely in this context — of dissatisfaction with governmental authorities — that the concept of trust was seen as potentially illuminating.

When reviewing discussions about trust in State institutions, we are often taken to believe that the only foundations for such a feeling are honesty and integrity. That is to say, we are led to infer that citizens trust their governments if they perceive them to be honest and truthful and distrust them if they are seen as fraudulent and corrupt. This is certainly a fundamental aspect of trust, albeit not the only one. As an expectation of a virtuous behaviour or action, the concept of trust shouldn’t be narrow-mindedly considered. Governments do not exist to go about their business with immaculate ethics. Governments exist, first and foremost, to go about their business. They are given a mandate to do and create things that help the people they are supposed to govern. Naturally, it is most desirable that they do so with respect to the rules of conduct prevalent in the society, but that is not enough. Take the following example. An incompetent government, not capable of satisfying even the most pressing needs of its citizens, does so with extreme honesty and veracity. Its citizens can definitely trust him to abjure all sorts of corruption and nepotism; yet, they cannot trust him to alleviate poverty or manage a proper educational system. Trust in the State cannot be only about rules of conduct; it must also be about performance of tasks. There is no question that the way in which the tasks are performed is of critical importance, but first they have to be performed.

Research was precisely pointed in this direction. As spaces of private governance, gated communities profess to execute certain tasks usually under governmental domain. Accordingly, people who choose to live in such developments agree to renounce certain governmental actions. What we propose to investigate is if this renouncement is an outcome of a deliberate expectation about the State’s performance in given areas.

## Research's Guiding Principles

The research was conducted under a precise definition of trust in government: expectation towards the competent performance of given tasks. Conversely, distrust in government was said to be present when that expectation took a negative form, i.e. when the performance of given tasks was expected to be non-existent or incompetent. It must be stressed that we were not interested in the nature of the tasks our subjects ascribed to the domain of the State. Each one of them may have had different views on what constituted governmental obligations towards its citizens. What interested us was to establish if their choice of a gated community had something to do with lack of trust in governmental authorities; independently of what they deemed their responsibilities to be.

In that sense, the focus was directed towards the accounts residents presented of the decision towards their gated community of choice. More precisely we wished to ascertain if they talked of trust, or distrust more precisely, when explaining the reasons behind that decision.

Though we didn't asked them directly what tasks they assigned to each branch of government, we need to consider them briefly; in order to contemplate the duties that could, in principle, be the target of expectations of incompetent performance. Richard Musgrave, a distinguished economist of the public sector, provides a practical framework. According to his analysis, the State has three fundamental tasks in the economy: macroeconomic stabilization, income redistribution and provision of goods of a certain nature. Whilst the first two bear no interest to this research, the provision of goods is of vital importance. According to Musgrave's theory, that is now orthodox teaching in most economics courses, the State must be responsible for providing its population with particular goods, which, by their nature, won't be efficiently provided by market institutions. These so called public goods have already merited the attention of many scholars thinking about gated communities (e.g. Webster, 2002), its private provision being closely related to the reported attractiveness of these sorts of residential formats.

In Portugal, as surely in other countries with similar legal cultures, municipal authorities are the level of government assigned to the planning of cities. They are, furthermore, responsible for a set of tasks essential for their regular functioning. Gated communities are a real-estate product; therefore the level of government that most concerns us in this research is the local one. We cannot, however, exhaustively enumerate each task potentially subject to an expectation of competent or incompetent performance. We must assume there are certain inescapable obligations that are, in our time and place, consensually assigned to local municipal authorities.

Taking the lead from Musgrave, local governments in Portugal are exclusively responsible for the provision of certain equipments and services in the city. They are, for instances, expected to provide and care for roads, sidewalks, street lighting, vegetation, parks, playgrounds, sporting

facilities and so forth. Citizens are usually faced with no alternative but to make them accountable for the existence and upholding of these sorts of amenities.

Though outside Musgrave's merely economic framework, local authorities in Portugal, and particularly in the LMA, are also responsible for the general planning of cities. It is their job to decide what gets to be built, where it is to be built and who is allowed to build it. Through complex bureaucratic processes of licensing, they are expected to supply the population with a broad-spectrum purpose for the city, developing it in such ways that allow for a satisfactory urban life. These kinds of planning responsibilities can only be carried out by a central administration. Furthermore, the existence of a general plan for the city must be considered of utmost importance, given its potential impacts for citizen's daily lives.

Nevertheless, we mustn't pay exclusive attention to local government's tasks. There is one very important responsibility of the central government that has particular significance in the research of gated communities, namely security. In Portugal only the national government can be held responsible for providing its citizens with safety against crime. It is true that we have been witnessing an increase in privately supplied security. Shopping centres now employ their own security personnel and even public buildings — like museums, universities or ministerial branches — frequently hire private firms to secure their peaceful functioning. This is certainly just another instance of privatization, identified as "a policy movement and a process that shows every sign of reconstituting major institutional domains of contemporary society" (Starr, 1988). In Portugal these services operate under a sort of legal fog, for their actual jurisdiction remains unclear. The police remain hitherto the only institution responsible for fighting crime and enforcing security and it answers directly to the government and not to any local authority.

Accordingly, depending on what tasks are subject of interviewees' expectations, we will refer to either local or national government. All the same, the distinction will not be of much relevance to our study, as the focus will be placed on distrust in the State in general.

### **Interviews with Gated Communities' Residents in the LMA**

Again, the purpose of this research was to establish if distrust in government — meaning the expectation of incompetent performance of a given task — was an important factor in the decision to live in a gated community. Unfortunately this isn't something that we can directly observe. As part of individual psychology, we have no way of gathering knowledge about this action but to ask residents, as was done in the interviews. However, we must always be aware that when people are summoned to relive the past they tend to convey very neat and meaningful explanations of their decisions. Otherwise it would probably be impossible to communicate. The problem is that a decision to change residences is a very complex one and a lot of relevant information can be lost when people try to tell a very ordered storyline. It is the only method at the disposal of the

researcher though. It suffices to say, in this sense, that the objects which inspire our comments are residents' narratives of their decision.

The interviews were designed to make residents speak about three main (obviously interrelated) topics: the decision to move from their prior residence; the reasons for the choice of the gated community they now lived in; and the evaluation of the present residential experience. We chose not to face the interviewees directly with the concept of trust nor with its possible application to the State. At no stage during the interviews' progress did we ask residents if their choice was a reflection of distrust in a given branch of government. Not that we felt that it would be unscientific to do so; but it was rather thought that, since it was the first time we were investigating this hypothesis, we shouldn't put too much initial weight into it.

Nevertheless, we had three main *a priori* intentions with the selected interview structure: to check if the decision to move had anything to do with dissatisfaction with the performance of the government in any of the already identified areas; to investigate if the choice of the gated community in question was, either primarily or among other factors, motivated by a search for trust in the performance of certain tasks; and to ascertain if the satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the actual residential experience inside the gates was in anyway connected with given expectations of performance.

The interviews were conducted between September 2006 and April 2007. Thirteen were applied to men and fourteen to women. Regarding the profile of the interviewees<sup>1</sup>, the average age is 48 years old. Plus, by the time the respective interviews were carried out, twenty were employed (7 self-employed and 13 working on firms belonging to others) and 4 unemployed. In terms of formal education, seventeen had completed university degrees and seven had high school qualifications. The average reported wage was around 5000 Euros, although only twelve chose to pronounce it. It is also important to note that seventeen had children living with them. Likewise, it must also be stressed that none of our interviewees had ever lived in a gated community before. The time they had been living in their respective ones varied from three months to nine years.

The first result that strikes us is the fact that the vast majority of the interviewed subjects did not express explicit dissatisfaction with the former residential situation. When inquired about the reasons behind the relocation most of them espouse very specific personal reasons such as change of workplace or change of marital status. A few of them simply state that the new residence came as good opportunity in terms of price-quality relationship and the decision to move was not a consequence of unhappiness with the old one.

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<sup>1</sup> Three of them politely refused to answer these questions.

For those that had, for any given reason, overtly decided to move, the gated community didn't emerge as an obligatory option. In fact, only two subjects declared they were purposely looking for a gated community after the decision to move was made final. This means that most of them didn't immediately thought of such developments as answers to their particular ambitions. Although this is certainly an important result, its significance must be toned down by the fact that they ended up choosing a gated community after all. In some way, this has to denote a correlation between their desires and the features presented by the gated community.

In truth, the ones that have allegedly gone through a period of objective search commonly reference two kinds of aspiration. When asked about the characteristics they were looking for in a new residential situation, most of these subjects talk about, at least, one of the following: eagerness to have space outside the house (either for themselves or for their children) and desire to feel safe towards crime. We cannot, of course, argue that gated communities are the only type of residence able to deliver on those goals. Every ordinary apartment building can, in theory, be surrounded by open spaces and be located in an area subjected to few criminal incidents. However, we know that gated communities are customarily characterized by having stricter security measures than the regular street and by having amenities such as a garden or a park. So, while we must value the assertion — common to the vast majority of interviewees — that being a gated community was at no time a compulsory requisite of their search; we must also pay attention to what they were aiming for.

What is clear though is that the answers to these set of questions, which take the interviewee to the instances before the decision for their particular gated community was actually made, indicate no relationship between the resolution to move and dissatisfaction with the State's work in any area.

A second set of questions tried to capture the motives of the subjects' preference for the development they now lived in. The results thus obtained are particularly salient. A considerable majority of the interviewees mentions the existence of "espaços verdes" (literally, green spaces) as an important reason for their choice. In the Portuguese language's common use, "espaços verdes" is usually equivalent to greenery much in general (trees, foliage, grass, lawns,...) but also to parks, open spaces and recreational areas of this sort. The importance pervasively attributed to this matter can be further illustrated, by noting that it was frequently associated with both the concern of having space for children to play and the opportunity of living in a "nice" environment ( in a sense very similar to that encountered in Low, op.cit.).

In this context also, there is a significant number of subjects that point out security as a justification for the option towards their gated community. When asked to elaborate, most of the interviewees referred to security against mugging and home break-ins. A few also talked about security against more violent crimes such as kidnapping and rape.

These two factors combined — green spaces and security — constitute by far the most prevalent motives mentioned by our subjects. According to our brief discussion of local government's most commonly related tasks, the provision of recreational open air spaces is of fundamental character. In the LMA in particular, only local authorities have the possibility to assign specific places to recreational uses. Furthermore, they tend to take care of their construction and preservation. Hence, there is some legitimacy to the claim that, by looking for leisure spaces in a gated community, the interviewed residents implicitly manifest distrust in the government to satisfy their needs in that matter. Likewise, the search for security can equally be understood as disillusionment with government's performance in that particular area. The creation of a secure atmosphere is probably one of the most consensual government functions; shared by ideological perspectives from all sides of the political spectrum. In this sense, there seems to be a connection between the reasons that led to the subjects' choice of a gated community and a negative expectation regarding: local government's performance in the provision of leisure related facilities and national government's performance in the protection against crime. The actual importance of this latent distrust must be further investigated.

A third set of questions, designed with the purpose of stimulating an evaluation of the residential experience in the gated community, showed us that all but two interviewees express much satisfaction with their current situation. Furthermore, the weight generally given to the amenities (the garden, the pool, the open space,...) is very conspicuous among the reasons that justify this widespread feeling of contentment. This indicates that, for most of our subjects, these characteristics, which define most gated communities, are the basis for their sense of fulfilment with the residence. It can also mean that these facilities — which, with the possible exception of the pool, are all part of local government's direct responsibilities to the city — aren't being provided elsewhere; albeit people's demand for them. Still in the matter of recreational spaces, it also comes to attention the number of subjects that includes the efficiency in the maintenance and cleanness of equipments as a reason for satisfaction. This is a clear sign of a negative expectation; for it's hard to believe that people would declare themselves happy with something they assumed to be commonplace. Instead, it suggests that the delight caused by the quality of the community's management in this area is a result of routine disappointment with local government's performance.

There are also a few subjects who allude to a certain aesthetic coherence as something that pleases them about their respective gated community. But, ultimately, the feeling of security is the primary aspect, repeatedly cited by most interviewees as a motive for satisfaction. This sentiment is commonly associated with the happiness of being able to allow their children to play without necessary adult supervision. When asked to distinguish between living in a gated community and elsewhere, most subjects choose to mention the increased feeling of security, for both

themselves and their children. The same is true when asked to depict the differences, if any, in their actual daily lives: a great deal of them speaks of the amplified feeling of security that allows them to leave doors unlocked or children to their own devices. The massive importance, thus, allocated to safety is a very strong indication that most interviewees don't expect the government to provide them with what they want in this respect. Note that it is not relevant, in this context, to discuss the legitimacy of these general feelings of insecurity. The LMA, not being immune to the crime problems common to great metropolises, is certainly not affected by frightening crime rates. What matters though is that people feel unsafe, whether they have rational reasons for it or not. So, the remarkable prevalence of references to security in the course of the interviews implies that people aren't exactly satisfied with government's performance on this issue. Reasonably or not, our subjects seem only to get satisfaction from a level of security greater than the one provided by State institutions.

The same can be said with respect to the provision of certain goods. Interviewees not only referred the amenities as a ground for satisfaction, but also its frequent use as a major difference in their daily lives. Moreover, a surprisingly high number of them cite the fact that they no longer need to drive for miles and miles to find a place to enjoy their free time (usually with the children). This means that, for these subjects at least, the municipal authorities have failed to draw an appropriate balance between residential and leisure areas, making them face long distances to enjoy certain services that fall under municipal responsibility.

Still connected with an evaluation of their present experience, our subjects were faced with two questions destined to make them contemplate possible contrasts between private and public management. The first one — *Do you think things (management, cleaning, maintenance,...) work better because you are in a gated community?* — was supposed to examine the subject's appraisal of privately administrated institutions' virtues. Similarly, the second one — *Do you think things would be different if they were administrated by the municipal office?* — had the intention of, through the exploration of a hypothetical situation, obtaining assessments about local government's performance in relevant areas. Its importance is huge, in that it is the only question in the entire script that directly asks the interviewee to explicitly evaluate a branch of government. In this sense, its results are extremely suggestive. Regarding the first one, we find the great majority of the subjects linking the better management of their gated community with its private nature. The reasons for this assertion can be grouped under three recurring arguments: the fact that people tend to take better care of what is theirs; the fact that, as payers of condominium fees, people tend to be relentless with the administration's performance; the fact that the State is not capable of creating and/or maintaining public spaces. Note that the great number of residents who mention the failure of the State in this context do so out of their own volition, for it was not explicitly referred to in the question. Note equally, that the superior quality, almost universally,

attributed to the private management is also considered a reflex of people's differing behaviours towards what is public and what is private.

The answers to the second question are very clear as well. The vast majority of the interviewees think that, if the municipal services were to be responsible for the communities' management, they would be worse off, as everything would be poorly handled. This is evident manifestation of an expectation of ineffective performance. The grounds our subjects choose to justify it can be thus sorted: incompetence or laxity; lack of funds; and low level of citizens' pressure on public services.

## **Final Remarks**

The most important results of the fieldwork, above presented, allow us to make some final remarks. The purpose of the questions asked to the subjects was essentially to evaluate the hypothesis that the move to a gated community was, at least in part, a consequence of an expectation of incompetent performance by public authorities in the provision of certain services. This we came to call distrust in government.

The results are, without a doubt, ambiguous. On the one hand, while accounting for the reasons behind their decision to move, none of the interviewees talks about anything we can associate with distrust in government. The vast majority of them even grant they were not specifically looking for a gated community, after having decided to move. Their accounts simply do not include references to the State or to any expectations regarding its work. In this sense, we cannot say that our hypothesis has any explanatory promise.

However, if we look to the reasons most of them espouse to justify their particular choices of their respective communities, we observe two very recurring themes: the existence of "green spaces" and security. These themes had already arisen with the question — *What did you want, what were you looking for, when you started looking for a new place to live?* Through its answers we find a neat correspondence between what the subjects were initially aiming for and what they ended up with. Both instances are full with references to security and open spaces with trees and the like. These features were generally desired in the process of looking for a new residence and constituted generally alluded motives to substantiate its posterior choice. For that reason, they deserve some attention.

The fact that most residents put so much weight in the existence of green spaces could very well indicate their previous unhappiness in that field. Remember that many of them expressly mentioned their close-by availability as a major difference in their every day lives. It was in fact a reason commonly articulated to explain their satisfaction with their present experience. Although we cannot be certain of the influence it actually had on the decision to move to the gated community, we can certainly conjecture that they did not expect much from local government in

that respect. This expectation of ineffective or incompetent performance in the provision of leisure spaces seems to be directed at two targets. On the one hand it refers to the adequate planning of the city. As we have explained, it is our understanding that there is no alternative in the LMA to the municipal government in what comes to licensing and organising the space inside the cities. So, it is their sole responsibility to develop a satisfactory balance between all the urban needs of their citizens. Only municipal authorities have the power, if not the skill, to orchestrate a situation where residential areas are surrounded by sufficient parks and other similar facilities. It certainly seems that, for most of these gated communities' residents, this is something they find lacking.

On the other hand, our subjects also appear to expect public facilities of this sort to be usually poorly preserved. They not only express satisfaction with the management inside the gated community in terms of maintenance and tidiness, but also overtly state that, for a determined set of reasons, local government is not able to effectively perform in that area. Be it for lack of funds or pure incompetence, our subjects clearly expect the State to fail in the preservation of public property in general.

The existence of these targets of negative expectations — adequate planning and quality maintenance — is very clear. Most of our subjects effectively distrust local government in these areas. The fact they are living in a gated community seems, in part, to be motivated by this distrust. However, further research must be conducted in order to continuously evaluate the explanatory power of this claim.

The same could be said about the search for security. As is commonly agreed, security is a very popular theme when it comes to gated communities. In fact, the gates are supposed to serve the purpose of protecting the residents from threats coming from the outside. This idea seems already to be inculcated in common sense and our subjects are no exception. In truth, when asked to offer their personal definition of gated communities, a “place with increased security” is the single most prevalent choice. This means that, for them, gated community and security are almost equivalent. Moreover, we have seen that most of the interviewees acknowledge they were looking for safety against crime when they were seeking for a new residence. Although none of them actually mentioned it as a reason to move, it was something they clearly desired. It is even generally referred as a reason for satisfaction with the present experience, seeing as most of them declare they feel safer now than in the previous residential situation. This must make clear the importance our subjects bestow on security. Again, it is of no interest to our research to examine if this prevalent feeling of insecurity is justifiable in the context of the LMA. It is enough to note that it exists. In this sense, it must mean that the interviewees don't expect the government to competently provide them with the level of security they feel is necessary. Reviewing the interviews we find two issues usually alluded to in the talk about security: protection against crimes perpetrated upon themselves and safety for their children. In respect to the crimes, the references are made to personal and material assaults. In what concerns their

children, many subjects mention the lower probability of incidents involving cars inside the gated community. Additionally, most of them also point out the smaller risk of kidnappings and approaches by strangers. It is obvious that citizens shouldn't expect their government to be able to prevent every wrongdoing taking place in society. It is not clear if our subjects have such strong expectations or not. We think it is natural though to expect the State to promote safe environments for their people. Be it in the creation of parks where children can play without risk of getting hit by cars or in the sufficient policing of the streets, citizens usually anticipate some kind of action by governmental authorities. This research seems to indicate that our subjects don't show much trust in the government in this respect. It also suggests that the move to the gated community could in part have been motivated by this distrust.

In short, we must conclude that our interviews indicate a plausible connection between the demand for gated communities in the LMA and distrust in government in the provision of both recreational open spaces and security. Both these issues dictate subjects' concerns, desires and grounds for satisfaction. This result may come up as predictable given the features that define these kinds of developments. Nevertheless, we found the fact that so many residents' mentioned the same things exceptionally surprising. Equally unforeseen was the consensus around local government's underperformance in the provision and maintenance of public parks and the like. Although further research must be conducted, our interviews show that most subjects correlate the private management of their residences with competence and goal-attainment and public management with ineptitude.

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