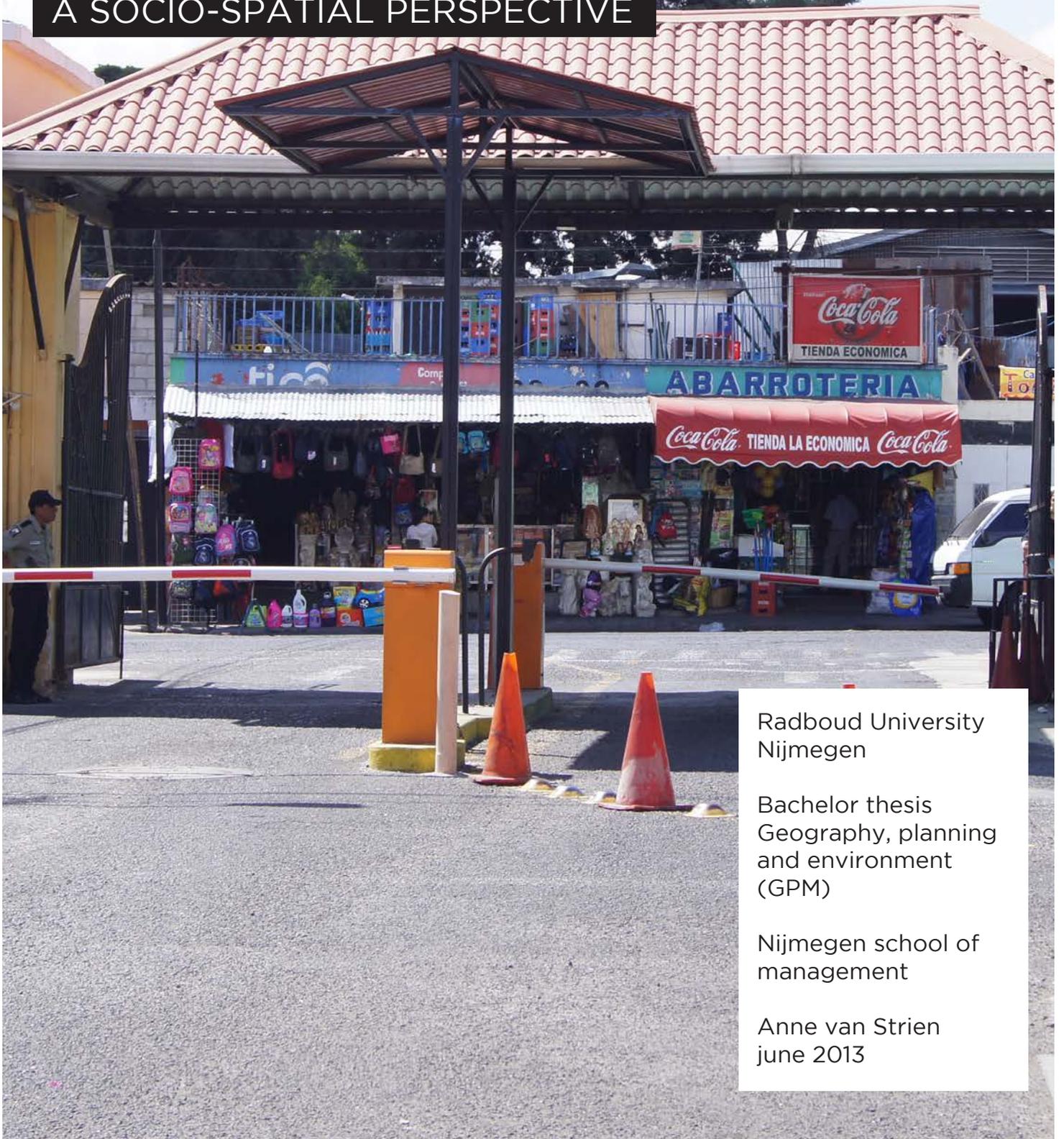


# GATED COMMUNITIES IN GUATEMALA CITY

## A SOCIO-SPATIAL PERSPECTIVE



Radboud University  
Nijmegen

Bachelor thesis  
Geography, planning  
and environment  
(GPM)

Nijmegen school of  
management

Anne van Strien  
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Supervisor: Dr. L. Smith  
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## **Preface**

This thesis is about gated communities in Guatemala City, seen from a social and a spatial perspective. This research has been done to close the Premaster course geography, planning and environment (GPM) at Radboud University Nijmegen that prepares for the master Human Geography. For the empirical part of this study, I went to Guatemala City to do field research. This was done in the form of interviews with residents of two gated communities, neighbouring dwellers and a professor that is connected to the centre for urban and regional studies at the San Carlos university in Guatemala City, observations and photographs.

During the research I discovered the different realities in which people live their (daily) lives. Everyone has his or her own story and perception of reality. For me it was a great and beautiful experience to shortly step into the lives of the gated community residents, those who are confronted with the daily reality in Guatemala City. This could have never been possible without the help of all the people that I interviewed, especially the residents of both gated communities, as through their words they gave me insight in their social and spatial surroundings that form the basis in which their lives take place, for which I am very grateful. In particular I would like to thank family Perez Morales, who have been very helpful and hospitable to give me not only a place to stay, but also great insights in their lives and experiences in the gated community and in Guatemala City, and provided me with useful information. Thank you Milton for helping me with the Spanish translations and supporting me. Next to them I would like to thank dr. Eduardo Velásquez Carrera, for his time and the helpful information he provided me with.

I would also like to thank my supervisor, dr. Lothar Smith, for his constructive criticism and helpful instructions that gave me confidence along the way.

Anne van Strien

June 2013

## Summary

In recent years many researchers have paid attention to the phenomenon of gated communities due to the role they play in the ongoing transformation of the urban realm. It is namely argued by many researchers that gated communities enhance social exclusion as groups of people are being excluded from these private spaces (Caldeira, 1996; Coy, 2006; Borsdorf, Hidalgo and Sanchez, 2007). Gated communities are a globally emerging form of urban living (Hamers et. al 2007, p. 45). With their arrival to the urban realm, they not only make a spatial impact, but also a social impact. The gates and walls that are erected to close off a living area in a neighbourhood, can also make changes in the ways people are able to meet each other in their everyday lives. The focus of this theses is on gated communities in Latin America, and more specifically in Guatemala City. The city counts a growing number of gated communities, both in the inner city as in the suburban area. To gain insight in the social and the spatial impact gated communities make on the city, two gated communities have been studied. One in the inner city area, Residenciales Cipresales and one in the suburban area, Alamedas de Villaflores. They differ in the spatial position towards the surrounding neighbourhood, as Residenciales Cipresales is located in a larger neighbourhood area, and Alamedas de Villaflores is spatially more separated from its social surroundings. By examining whether the social soft border (the extent to which there is social interaction between gated community residents and people in their immediate surroundings) overlaps with the physical hard border of the gated communities, insight has been gained in the extent to which a gated community is a sustainable phenomenon. This has been done by empirical research on the social networks of the gated community residents. The results of this research showed that there does not exist deep social integration between both gated communities and their immediate surrounding. The social networks of gated community residents are built of relations between people inside rather than much social relations with people in the immediate surroundings. Only minimum contact exists, mainly in the religious-, commercial-, or family sphere. This means that there is no major overlap from the social over the spatial border. The social border follows the spatial border in more or less the same way. The gates and walls do not provide openness for people from both sides to meet each other. Gated communities do not facilitate social integration, but enhance social exclusion. As the walls keep rising and people have no chance to meet each other regularly, fear will rise towards people that are not part of the gated community.

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Project framework

### *Gated communities: a general introduction*

In recent years many researchers have paid attention to the phenomenon of gated communities due to the role they play in the ongoing transformation of the urban realm. It is namely argued by many researchers that gated communities enhance social exclusion as groups of people are being excluded from these private spaces (Caldeira, 1996; Coy, 2006; Borsdorf, Hidalgo and Sanchez, 2007). Gated communities as such are not a new phenomenon, given the typologies of walled domains the urban space already knows from history, such as fortresses and courts, among others (Hulsman, 2007; Algra, 2007; Blakely & Snyder, 1999, p. 3-4). There are various reasons however, why gated communities are once again the focus of research. Namely, according to Gregory et al. (2009, p. 268), because of their “global presence, what they suggest about perceptions of security, community, citizenship, (the privatization of) public space, property and the role of the state in contemporary urban societies”. Glasze, Webster and Frantz (2010, p. 1) add that their arrival “brings into sharp relief fundamental social questions about the right to a secure environment versus the right to access, communal versus individual consumption, inclusion versus exclusion, heterogeneity versus homogeneity and efficiency versus equity”. This selection shows some of the issues that are connected to the phenomenon of the gated community. It becomes clear that they make an impact on urban life. In this thesis I elaborate what this implies, and why it is of relevance.

Atkinson and Blandy (2005, p. 177) have formulated the definition of gated communities as following: “housing development that restricts public access, usually through the use of gates, booms, walls and fences. These residential areas may also employ security staff or CCTV systems to monitor access. In addition, gated communities may include a variety of services such as shops or leisure facilities”. Gregory et al. (2009, p. 268) add to that: “They are also frequently governed by community associations that regulate residents’ activities and design decisions”. Bearing in mind that this is a general definition, given the fact that gated communities appear in cities around the world in very distinctive typologies. Not only their physical form is being scrutinized critically, even more attention is paid to the reasons why they have come to existence or the idea behind this specific urban form, their social significance for the city and whether or not it is a sustainable development.

Most literature that has arisen about gated communities, stems from a Western perspective (Blakely & Snyder, Low, Atkinson & Blandy, Blandy & Lister, Manzi & Smith-Bowers). This European and Anglo-Saxon situation is different however from the experiences in Latin American cities, even if appearances may be similar. Thus Rodrigo Hidalgo (2011, p. 157) argues how this “requires a permanent conceptual re-theorization that fits with empirical reality. From this we are able to formulate questions relating to the reality of the Latin American experiences”. This is an interesting argument to frame my thesis around, as this concerns gated communities in Latin America.

Latin American cities have undergone and are still undergoing an urban transformation process in the case of the rise of gated communities (Hidalgo, 2011, p.153). This transformation process derives from a view on Latin American cities as places of social injustice, as there exists a big gap between rich and poor people, powerless governance due to high corruption and an absence of police control in delinquent areas and high criminality rates (Klaufus, 2010, p. 37). In the literature this situation is described to have three different causal aspects, which Cristien Klaufus expounds as following: the socio-political history of civil wars – although with certain external differences – in the period of 1970 to halfway the 1990s, especially in Central America, which resulted in an increase in violence, and with that the urge for segregation. The second main reason she depicts, is the economic development since the Latin American debt-crisis of the 1980s, when almost all Latin American countries steered for a neoliberal course under pressure of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) This resulted in a bigger gap between the rich and poor. This had as a result the rise of criminality, and with that, the demand for walled residency, as a visible manifestation of an expressed need for more security, literally arose. Another consequence of the neoliberal direction was that more urban residential areas were planned by commercial private developers as a result of the privatization of central government tasks. This in turn resulted in a drastic downturn of the central government of their role in urban development and a shift in attention from governmentally developed social housing to commercially more attractive housing developed by commercial developers. As a third reason she mentions that living in a gated community has become a status symbol, and in Latin America this has led to a rise in gated living mainly according to the United States' model of living in luxurious suburban gated areas (Klaufus, 2010, p. 37, 38).

According to Klaufus, it is important to do research on gated communities in Latin American cities as this can provide an insight on “mechanisms that determine the social cohesion in the city” (2010, p.37). For instance, the extent to which the gated community plays a role in the change of the social fabric of the city. She states that all three reasons stated here created a real “boom” of fenced-off neighbourhoods in cities (p. 37, 38). So, in order to reveal in what way this has changed the social fabric of the city, research should be focussed on questions about the extent to which this has (already) taken place. In that way, insight can be obtained about the impact gated communities have on the contemporary Latin American city.

### ***Gated communities and their socio-spatial significance for the city***

Gated communities bring about certain 'border issues', in the sense that a 'hard border' (a gate or fence) physically creates a separation between two sides. The interesting thing here is, that there are always two sides to the same story. In this case that phrase can be taken quite literally, since there are two sides to the same gate. This physical aspect of separation in two different spaces by a border area brings about important notions of a socio-spatial dimension. As the gate as a border space creates two separate spaces, the question arises to what extent this physical 'hard border' is cohesive with the 'soft border', the social network: the relations between the people living inside the gated community and their relation with the people outside. Thereby the question of how the hard and soft border influence the social fabric of the community is an important one, as the physical perimeter suggests a certain harshness, but looking at the social fabric this might not be an equal borderline.

Also the relationship with the wider neighbourhood is supposed to be affected by gated communities, which according to Blandy and Lister (2005, p. 300) has consequences for community cohesion, as they state that “there is a danger of a 'them and us' attitude developing both amongst gated community residents and the surrounding neighbourhood”. This socio-spatial connection is a very significant one because together they are constitutive in the process creating the community *in* the gated community, and in its immediate surroundings, as the spatial form of a gated community can have influence on the social processes that are produced and reproduced within the gate. These social processes take place within the spatial environment, and in that way, give meaning to the spatial. The other way around, the spatial setting of a gated community is the space in

which the social community is being formed and continually takes place in this space. The spatial community is built and bounded to house and shape the social community. This enclosure is a significant feature of the community as it physically forms, defines, contains and captures space for the social community. In this way, the spatial dimension functions for the social dimension. The design of the spatial form can influence these social processes. When the spatial community was constructed, the social structure began to gain form, and since then they have merged into each other. In this way they are very much connected and related to each other as the urban residents are socially relating to each other in a spatial structure.

Among many authors the belief exists that gated communities are producers of socio-spatial segregation and inequality (Caldeira, 1996; Coy, 2006; Borsdorf, Hidalgo and Sanchez, 2007). Teresa Caldeira, professor of city and regional planning at Berkeley University has written extensively on gated communities in Latin America. She is very sceptical towards the social-spatial connection as she argues that social groups are being separated from each other through spatial features. She states that separation is only a perceived one since one way or the other, people from different social classes will meet in the urban environment anyhow (Klaufus, 2010, p. 38).

There is also a counter view however, because according to Smith-Bowers and Manzi (2006, p. 14), these views might contrast with what has come from empirical studies on residents' preferences. They conducted a qualitative case study of a gated residential development in London in which they analysed the experience of the social relation the residents have with the wider neighbourhood. Thereby they found out that "it was not the walls per se that created social segregation as reasonable levels of social cohesion were apparent between residents within and outside the walls". This 'bottom up view' of the inhabitants who really have the daily-life experience and consciousness of the existence of the 'border' is a very important one, as they can give a view on how it 'works' from the inside out. In this study such a perspective can provide insight in the relation between the physical hard border and the social soft border of gated communities in Guatemala City. How the two borders overlap each other can show the extent to which the gated community members are (still) socially integrated in the immediate surroundings. For my research, interviewing people living both inside and outside the gated community is thus relevant to include, in order to understand better the actual social implications and connections of living in a gated community, experienced by the actors who are involved:

the residents of the gated community and the people that live or work in its immediate surroundings.

### ***The (un)sustainability of gated communities***

The important issue is whether or not gated communities are sustainable developments, which is a major issue of discussion among various authors (Caldeira, 1996; Coy, 2006; Blandy and Lister, 2005. Manzi and Smith-Bowers, 2005). In the literature concerning the sustainability of gated communities there are two main schools of thought. On the one hand there are authors who argue that it is not a sustainable urban form in the sense that it enhances social exclusion and social segregation, and socio-spatial inequality (Caldeira, 1996; Coy, 2006). The second group of scholars who see the gated community as a sustainable (self organizing) community, is rather small. They analyse the gated community through the theory of 'club goods' in which residents organise themselves as a collective club against "real and perceived issues of crime, vandalism and anti-social behaviour" (Manzi and Smith-Bowers, 2005). Through a collective social governance system (resident association), they see the chance for developing sustainable communities and with that, enhance social cohesion, albeit, within the confines of the gated community. They also oppose to the first group of authors, as they see gating as "the antithesis of social cohesion by reinforcing social and class divisions, producing new forms of segregation between rich and poor, ignores the much more complex relationships between individuals and their environments" (p. 357). This is an important argument they make, because what is generally missing in the literature on gated communities, is how people in the gated community themselves experience being part of the gated community and how they socially relate to each other and the people in the surrounding neighbourhood, who are not spatially part of the gated community.

Empirical research on the socio-spatial connection, i.e. whether or not there is a similarity between the hard and the soft border of a gated community, is thus still not very well researched in current literature on gated communities. Indeed, those few studies that have been conducted, were done in Europe. Latin America still lacks much of the empirical research concerning the actual actors involved, the gated community residents and the people that live or work in its immediate surroundings.

The scientific relevance of this study is that it can help to enhance existing literature on gated communities by providing insight in the connection between the hard and the soft

border, and what this connection means for the gated community when placing it in the framework of sustainable cities. The societal relevance is that this study can contribute to create an open discussion around the impact gated communities have on the social fabric of the Latin American city, seen from a bottom-up perspective.

## 1.2 Research focus

In this study I will focus on Guatemala, specifically on Guatemala City. According to Dr. Velásquez Carrera, professor at the centre of urban and regional studies (CEUR) at the University of San Carlos in Guatemala City, the first residential enclaves arrived in Guatemala City in the early 1980's, and their number has grown ever since. He states that the reason of their arrival to Guatemala City is closely connected to the armed conflict, the failure of public security in the city and the resulting insecurity of urban citizens (Dr. E. A. Velásquez Carrera, personal communication, May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2013). Mario Bravo Soto, Guatemalan researcher of gated communities in Guatemala, also describes the connection between social segregation, urban violence and gated communities (2007, p. 19). Today there are numerous gated communities, both in the capital and in other, smaller cities in Guatemala. In Guatemala these spaces are known as '*barrios cerrados*', and in the capital they are spread out all over the city. These *barrios cerrados* vary in the extent to which they are secured, due to the varying wealth standards. Some neighbourhoods, or even only streets, are closed off only by a fence of which all residents have a key. Some only have a *garita*, a guard house, which sometimes is not even equipped with guards but just exists to warn possible unwelcome visitors, to more fully guarded *barrios cerrados* with twenty four hour guarded guard houses and cameras (figure 1). Some of the streets that are closed off, have only erected the gates recently. Before more of the street in the zone were public space, now more and more gets closed off.

In the more well-secured gated communities, with guards and a guard house at the entrance, as a non-resident, a visitors trajectory has to be paid. Various features make clear you are only part of the club for a moment, as visitors enter through a separate entry, controlled by cameras and only through the exchange of a valid identity card, for which in return visitors receive a visitors card (figure 2). Entry is only allowed if the name and address is given of the person that will be visited.



Figure 1. Various gated communities in Guatemala City with different grades of guarding.



Figure 2. Visitors are made clear through various features that they are only part of the club for a moment.

The ongoing presence and development of gated communities is also visible in the public domain in Guatemala City. Developers extensively advertise on big billboards with newly built gated communities, mostly presented as pleasant family areas and ‘decorated’ with soft sounding female names (sometimes even enriched with words like ‘Santa’, meaning holy) like Irene and Catalina, or stately names like San Nicolas III, or San Augustin (also referring to a Bible name). A third group of names has a more modern *touch*, like Altabrisas, meaning High Breezes, that foster the imagination (figure 3). Although the use of Bible names is not exclusively used for gated communities, as likewise ‘normal’ neighbourhoods often also have such names, it seems important to at least give an appealing, distinctive name.



Figure 3. Billboards with advertisements of gated communities are to be found all over the City.

### 1.3 Objective

Focusing on the project frame it becomes clear that not much empirical research has yet been conducted on the social networks of the residents of the gated community nor on the gated community in the framework of the sustainable city as an integrated social system. Yet these social networks are the indicators for the extent to which there is an interaction between the residents of the gated community and the people that live or work in its

immediate surroundings. In other words, the extent to which there is an overlap between the spatial ‘hard border’ and the social ‘soft border’ of the gated community. When insight can be gained in these two dimensions, insight can be gained in the extent to which the residents of the gated community are (still) socially integrated in the immediate surroundings. This can be connected to the framework of the sustainable city, as to what extent social integration or social exclusion exists, and what that means for the gated community as an (un)sustainable phenomenon.

By conducting a case study in two gated communities in Guatemala, and by interviewing the residents about their perception on the social cohesion in the community, an insiders perspective on social cohesion and the socio-spatial impact of a local gated community can be obtained, and with that, a better understanding of the extent to which the spatial dimension has an overlap with the social dimension of a gated community. Once this inventory phase is completed, an insight can be gained on how the gated community as a phenomenon fits into the sustainable city framework. As every gated community is a different case, empirical research from the actor perspective is needed to gain insight in the local situation.

The objective of this study is defined as:

*To gain insight in the social and spatial dimension of gated communities in Guatemala City and with that a better insight in the extent to which a gated community is a sustainable phenomenon. Thereby this research will conduct an empirical research on the social structure of the gated community residents and comparing those with the spatial structure of the community*

#### 1.4 Research model

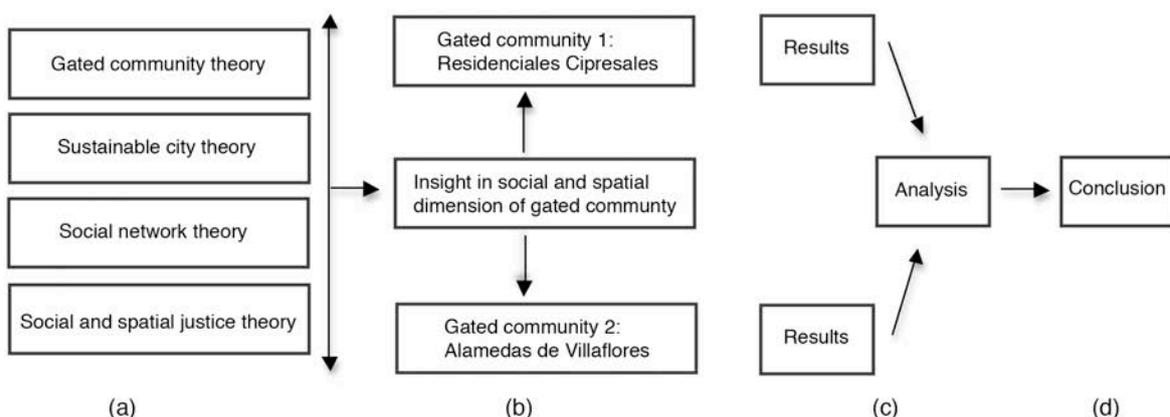


Figure 4. Research model

(a) Studying the literature on gated communities, sustainable cities, social network analysis and social and spatial justice, will lead to (b) an insight in the overlap of the social and spatial dimension of gated communities with which the objects of research (gated community 1 and 2) can be studied empirically. (c) The results that come out of this empirical research will be analysed and (d) will lead to a conclusion.

## **1.5 Research questions**

In order to gain insight in what kind of knowledge is needed to fulfil the objective, questions are being formulated (Verschuren and Doorewaard, 2007, p. 98). In this study descriptive questions are chosen in order to get an insight in the overlap of the social and spatial dimension of the gated community from an actor perspective, I have formulated the questions for this study in the following way:

Central question:

*What does the extent to which the social and the spatial dimension of a gated community in Guatemala City overlap mean for the gated community as a sustainable phenomenon?*

In order to be able to answer the central question, knowledge is needed, which will be gained in the form of sub questions. Together the answers to the sub questions will be able to formulate an answer to the central question (Verschuren and Doorewaard, 2007, p. 101).

Sub questions:

To get insight in both the social and the spatial dimension, the sub questions are divided in an inventory of these two dimensions. Then I will focus on the explanatory part; the extent to which the social and spatial dimension overlap, and what that means for the gated community as a sustainable phenomenon for the city. With that, the third sub question connects both dimensions.

### *Inventory part*

Social dimension:

1. Who are the actors involved with regard to the social arrangements in the lives of gated community residents?
2. How do these actors relate to each other?
3. How do the residents experience living in the gated community?

Spatial dimension:

4. How is the gated community spatially built up?
5. What role does the physical border of the gated community have according to the actors involved?
6. How does the gated community spatially relate to its immediate surroundings?

### *Explanatory part*

This part connects the social dimension and the spatial dimension to each other. Answers to these sub questions will provide an insight in the extent to which the social and spatial dimension overlap, and what that means for the gated community as a sustainable phenomenon for the city

7. To what extent do the social (social 'soft border') and the spatial (physical 'hard border') dimension overlap?
8. What does the extent to which the social and spatial dimension overlap mean for the gated community as a sustainable phenomenon?

## **1.6 Thesis layout**

In this thesis, the focus lays on the socio-spatial dimension of gated communities what these dimensions can tell about the gated community as a sustainable phenomenon. The layout of this thesis is therefore as following. In chapter one the subject 'gated communities, a socio-spatial perspective' and the research focus on Guatemala City have been introduced. From this, in chapter 2 follows the theoretical framework in which gated

communities are being connected to the concepts of social network, social and spatial justice, and sustainable cities. On the basis of this conceptualisation in the methodology section is chosen for an ethnographical approach in two case studies. In the chapters four and five the empirical research has been subdivided in the social and spatial dimension according to the research questions. In chapter six, both dimensions are connected and from that the thesis will be concluded by what that connection means for the gated community as a sustainable phenomenon for the city.

## **2. Theoretical framework: Gated communities in a socio-spatial context**

Gated communities are a globally emerging form of urban living (Hamers et. al, 2007, p. 45). With their arrival to the urban realm, they not only make a spatial impact, but also a social impact. The gates and walls that are erected to close off a living area in a neighbourhood, can also make changes in the ways people are able to meet each other in their everyday lives. In order to get insight in these processes, in this theoretical framework gated communities will be connected to social network theory, social and spatial justice, and sustainable cities.

### **2.1 Gated communities**

Gated communities are a global phenomenon, but with significant differences between countries. They are mostly typified by hard borders such as gates or walls; restricted and controlled access by the existence of one (or few) entrances and absence of continuous roads; twenty four hour surveillance by cameras, and / or guards, and collective spaces and services. Gated communities have come to existence for a range of reasons. Various but similar reasons are being mentioned for the arrival of fenced living in the Netherlands. According to Maaïke van Beusecom from the architecture institute of Amsterdam 'Arcam', the arrival of fenced living can be explained by a trend that people in current Dutch society search for community, being together with people you feel related to. She states that various critics perceive fenced living as a negative development in the Netherlands. Van Beusecom argues however, that living closed off is not at all a new development. "Historical courts are actually quite similar". This form of living exists all over the Netherlands already for a long time (Algra, 2007). Hamers also states that the Netherlands know the principle of fenced living already for a long time. He sees the rise of the fenced living areas as "a desire for protection, recognition and a small scale" (Hulsman, 2007). According to the Dutch Planning Bureau for the Lived environment (PBL), security plays a role of minor importance in the Netherlands, other than in for example the United States (Hulsman, 2007). According to Hulsman, critics are afraid that new fenced living domains in the Netherlands will cause social segregation. Hamers nuances this criticism as he states that the Dutch variant "will keep its typical Dutch character", which is a subtle bounded design where visitors are welcome (Hulsman, 2007).

In the literature about gated communities in the US the main reason that is indicated for their conception is the search for more security (see for example Blakely & Snyder, 1999, p. 1; Low, 2003, p. 9-10). Fear for 'the other' is a central reason for people to choose for living in a gated community. What is significant however, is that according to various authors, there is not a clear connection between whether criminality is actually rising which would lead to feelings of insecurity (Glasze, Webster and Frantz, 2010, p. 1). However undetermined the causality of the relationship between criminality and feelings of insecurity, the number of people in the US that move to gated communities is rising. Blakely and Snyder (1999) define distinct typologies as they divide gated communities into lifestyle, prestige and security zone communities, each with their own origin. Lifestyle communities arose out of a growing demand for "members-only" leisure activities and amenities (e.g. retirement community, golf- and country clubs), prestige communities out of a demand for "a secure place on the social ladder" (e.g. "enclaves of the rich and famous and the very affluent"), and security zone communities for the fear of crime and outsiders (e.g. city- or suburban "perches", in which the gates are not built by developers as the other two types of gated communities, but by residents themselves.) (p. 38-42). Low (2003) dedicates two whole chapters to security related reasons for the rise of gated communities in her book *Behind the Gates*. They are respectively called 'fear of crime' and 'fear of others', i.e. those people who are not part of the gated area. As an example she mentions Texas and California, both close to the Mexican border, where gated communities' residents depict Mexicans as immigrants who they fear (p. 136). Lin and Mele (2005) support this notion as they state that the primer reason for urban spatial segregation in the US is based on racial and ethnic division motives (p. 319).

This research focuses on gated communities in Central America, and more specifically in Guatemala (City). The reasons for their conception there is different from The Netherlands and the US. As already mentioned in the introductory chapter, in Central America and more specifically Guatemala, the conception of gated communities is in the first place related to urban violence, high criminality rates and the urge for separation and segregation (Klaufus, 2010; Bravo Soto, 2007).

As the words gated community indicate, there is a specific relation between people and place. There is a spatial dimension, the gates and the place itself, and a social dimension, the people that are part of the community. According to Wellman (2001), many definitions

of the word community position it “in rather small territories”, such as a neighbourhood. Furthermore he states that a community is “partially defined by social interactions among a set of persons that know each other”, but it is also embedded spatially. He distinguishes the ‘neighbourhood community’ as “a bounded geographical area in which many of the residents know each other” (p. 9). Blakely & Snyder (1999) have written useful and concrete “elements of community”, that can also be taken into account in this study. According to them, a community implies sharing:

- a shared territory such as gates that define boundaries of the community;
- shared values that define identity and commonality such as a common income level or class;
- shared public realm, a common ground for interaction such as a park;
- shared support structures, i.e. a church or a community organisation for that can provide aid;
- and a shared destiny within the territorial community to guide the future such as a neighbourhood group (that provide certain rules) (p. 32, 33).

In this study community is seen as a hybrid between those two dimensions: the social and the spatial dimension. Both dimensions are connected to each other and come together in the gated community. According to Thorns (2002), these two dimensions merge into each other (p. 108-109). Thus, ‘community’ in this two-dimensional approach is defined as following:

- socially, as ‘a local social system’

The local social structure of a particular locality. This system can comprise of locally based organisations such as community committees. This dimension holds the notion of the social network as in how social networks form around the various members. In this study this consists of the ‘soft border’: the residents of the gated community and the people in their social networks. Through interviews I will gain insight in the extent to which people in the gated community hold social connections with people in the gated community and in its immediate surroundings. By doing so, I can get insight how if or to what extent the hard border of the gated community resembles the soft border.

- spatially: as a ‘geographical expression’

A system of relationships in a “clearly delineated territory where boundaries are physical

barriers” (p. 108-109). The spatial dimension in this study contains of a spatial and a geographical dimension: a residential area bounded by gates (‘hard border’) with a secured entrance in Guatemala City.

It is largely supposed by scholars that as the word gated community already suggests, the group of people who geographically share their living space within the gates often also share socio-economic characteristics such as socio-economic status and the kind of jobs they occupy (Blakely & Snyder, 1999; Caldeira, 1996; Klaufus, 2010). As such, they form a kind of bonded group and thereby share a certain identity as a community. This community as a “local social system” is according to Thorns (2002, p. 108) to be explored as “the extent to which people living in any particular locality operate within a local system, with locally based institutions and organisations, such as community committees, churches and community centres” (p. 108). This is relevant for this study because by researching these aspects that create and form the community inside the gates can give insight if and in what way the gated community is connected to people in the wider neighbourhood.

The spatial constitution of a gated community may be significant for its social structure, as Harvey (1973, p. 36) states that it is important to consider the meaning of space and the impact it has on behaviour. This is a relevant point for this study to integrate the spatial and the social dimension. In this study I will try to reveal what exact impact the spatial situation of a gated community has on the social behaviour of its residents. In this study, the social dimension consists of the social relations gated community residents have with neighbours in and around the gated community. As said before, in that way it can be revealed how the community within the gates is built up, and how the people within the gated community form a community and if there are also (direct) social relations with people in the immediate surroundings, and if so, in what way they are part of the (gated) community. The spatial dimension consists of the physical spatial setting in which the social takes place. Together they are constitutive of creating the community in the gated community, and both are significant in the process of creating community. They are closely connected because the social takes place in the spatial. Scott (2000, p. 2) also notes this connection: “social meaning is actively constructed by group members on the basis of their perceptions and experiences of the contexts in which they act. The group and its environment are therefore elements within a single field of relations”. A theory that is related to this is focussing on the functioning of these social relations in social networks,

which describes how an internal structure of a group of people is related to its broader social environment and how social networks are being formed around people, so how social relations are interconnected (Thorns, 2002, p. 109).

## **2.2 Social network theory**

In order to 'measure' the sense of community and social cohesion within the gated community and the possible external relations of the residents, it is helpful to use social network theory. According to Scott (2000), it is useful for investigations of community structure (p. 2). Since the 1960s, social network theory has been used by social scientists to empirically research the existence of communities. Thereby the first social researchers working with this theory focussed on "connectivity rather than isolation" in their search for the existence of communities (Wellman, 2001, p.9). Social network theory makes use of 'relational data', such as the contacts, connections and ties that relate people to each other, as well as on a group level such as meetings. These data are analysed through 'network analysis', which "consist of a body of qualitative measures of network structure" (Scott, 2000, p. 3).

In this study it is possible to analyse social relations in the gated communities with the use of social network theory. From there on, insight can be gained in how the community is socially structured. This structure can contain of various relations between the residents, for instance if there is a sense of belonging or some kind of supportive care system arranged between residents, and how neighbours socially interact with each other. Next to that, insight can be gained to what extent the gated community residents have social relations with people in the immediate environment of the gated community.

In Emirbayer and Goodwin (1994) social network is defined as: "one of many possible sets of social relations of a specific content that link actors within a larger social structure". Next to that, they state that the unit of analysis can be "a territorially bounded network of social relations." And "individual and group behaviour, in this view, cannot be fully understood independently of one another" (Hess, 2004, p. 171). In this study, the unit of analysis is the gated community as "a territorially bounded network of social relations", as it is a spatially well-defined area with the gates as the territorial boundary. Wellman confirms this as he states that the social network approach supports the analysis of community ties that remain in neighbourhoods (Wellman, 2001). Networks are embedded

in space and social structures (Hess, 2004, p. 173). The network in this study is the social structure of residents of the gated community.

In order to gather insight to what extent there is sense of community, the personal community network approach (or ego-centred network) will be used to analyse each participants' own social network. This approach analyses the relations surrounded by particular key- or focal individuals in my study. The different relations these persons have with people in the gated community and its immediate surroundings will be collected as relational data and analysed to obtain information and insights about the extent to which there is interaction between those persons, what kind of interaction it is and how these relations weave the social fabric of the gated community. Wellman states "It is often useful to treat 'community' as a 'personal community'. Rather than fitting into the same group as those around them, each person has her own personal network. Each person separately operates his networks to obtain information, collaboration, orders, support, sociability and a sense of belonging" (p. 3-4). This counts for the gated community as the residents are spatially embedded in the same group of people (marked by a gate) but socially the community might contain various formations of community, built up of different persons interacting with each other. From that, a more broad view on the social structure within the gated community and its immediate surroundings can be disentangled.

### **2.3 Sustainable cities**

The focus of this thesis is how the gated community phenomenon fits into the sustainability framework and what that means for the sustainability of the city. Generally, a sustainable city exists of three components: it has to be socially, ecologically and economically sustainable (see for example Thorns, 2002). In this study, I will focus on the social aspect of sustainable cities. According to the famous Brundtland Report 'Our Common Future' (1987), sustainable city development comprises "a social system that provides for solutions for tensions arising from disharmonious development" (Thorns, 2002, p. 206). This social side of the sustainable city framework is enhanced by Thorns (2002, p. 203) "Inequalities of power and position, especially distribution issues and access for all social groups, are of major importance in the analysis of urban change and the provision of a desirable path for future development". This focuses on the extent to which the city is socially integrated. This social dimension is connected to the spatial dimension as the UN Habitat report on the State of the world's cities (2008, p.84) reports: "physical segregation in terms of distance, time and costs reduces the opportunities for

members of different income groups to interact". The spatial inclusion and exclusion of people can thus have an impact on the extent to which the city is socially integrated. Connecting this to gated communities can give insight in the analysis of it when it comes to social sustainability. A gated community is a spatial development that spatially excludes the outside world with its gates and walls. This spatial situation can be of influence in the social situation of the gated community residents and their social connections to people in adjacent neighbourhoods. Because of the physical border between social groups, it can also be(come) a social border. As such it can be harder for people to meet each other in their urban environment. The extent to which there is (still) social interaction between inside and outside, can indicate in what way both neighbourhoods are still connected to each other. If there is a strong interaction, then that results in a more sustainable situation than when there would be complete separation. The links and relations between people that form a social structure or social network is a key feature in the creation of social sustainability as it connects and bonds people together and in that way creates more integration between people. In itself as an entity the gated community can be a social sustainable when there is a profound social network between the residents. But the gated community in its urban context can be a development in tension with the concept of the sustainable city when the social networks of the gated community residents do not expand beyond the gates and thereby exclude other social groups.

## **2.4 Social and spatial justice**

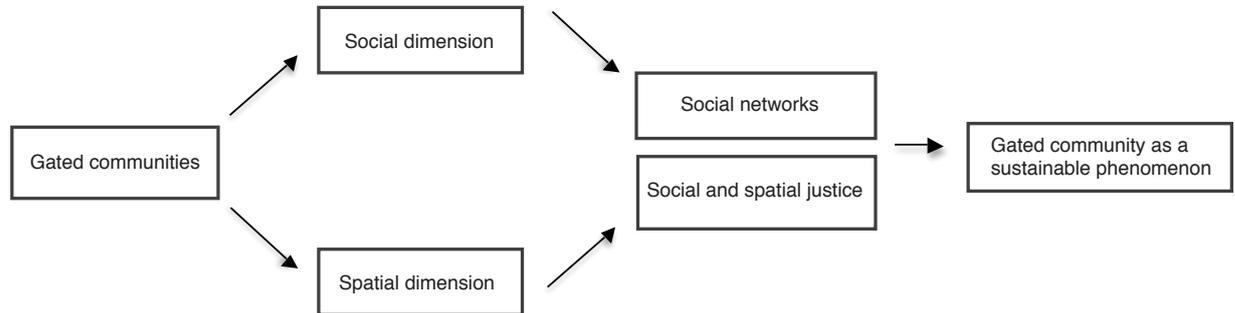
Two concepts that are closely connected to the idea of sustainable cities are social and spatial justice. In the context of the city, social justice cannot be seen separately from its spatial implications, as the city consists of spaces in which the social takes place, and as such, shape the social in a particular way. In the case of this study, this connection becomes very visible as walls and gates close off particular groups of people from others. In the context of the gated community the concept of social justice is a complex one. Following the main body of literature, justice is to be found in the social inclusion of all groups of people. Seen from the perception of the gated community residents in Guatemala City however, their justice lays in their right to protect themselves from possible dangers caused by delinquents living spatially close to them. The danger is so present in everyday life (officially declared by the Ministry of Governance as 'red zones'), that only through spatial interventions as erecting a wall with barbed wire on top provides a certain level of tranquillity for urban residents, however only available for the ones who are able to afford it.

Discussing the concept of social justice, David Harvey (2009) refers to Walzer, as according to him discussing social justice should include a notion of “local ideals for justice, sensitive to cultural and geographical differences” (p.40). This is a relevant notion because to be able to place the gated community in the context of social justice, the societal position of the population in Guatemala (City) has to be taken into account as it differs from the Western one, or any other country. According to Harvey, there is a supposed connection between social justice and social processes, and it is proven to be impossible to not take these social processes into account when striving for social justice (p. 41). In this case, what under lays the process of developing gated communities is the larger social process of heightened socio-economic inequality. A vast part of the population in Guatemala (City) has no equal access to all kinds of (economic) assets. One of these assets that is closely related to the urban violence which is one of the main reasons for gated communities to arise, is education, according to professor Eduardo Velásquez Carrera. He states that the missing of a decent education already at a young age, may lead to people that end up on the wrong path, into *maras* (gangs) (Dr. E. A. Velásquez Carrera, personal communication, May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2013). These *maras* create major social unrest and violence in the city. Hereby professor Velásquez Carrera goes along the way Harvey (2009, p. 46) also proposes as he states, “what we really need to do is understand something about the nature of the conflict”. While descending to the core of the issue, it becomes clear that, to be able to change reactions to existing delinquency, far more and deeper considerations should be made concerning the origin. One of these core assets is the proposed lack of adequate education.

Harvey states that the difficult thing with idealist notions of social justice is the missing connection to a real, everyday life social process. Only then social meaning can be gained. In this study there are examples of these real, everyday life events that take place in the context of social justice. Taking the example of the wall turned into art canvas into account, it is a visual sign of urban residents who take action on the (local) scale that is available for them (see figure 22).

## 2.5 Conceptual framework

The research questions are based on the following conceptual model:



**Figure 5. Conceptual model**

As a focal point for this study, gated communities are subdivided into a social and a spatial dimension. In the inventory phase, social networks of gated community residents are being and inclusion or exclusion and what this means for social and spatial justice. Together this will give an insight in how the gated community as a phenomenon fits into the framework of the sustainable city.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

“It’s a better way to exercise better control of the entry, or most of all of people... to control the persons who don’t live here in the residence”. “It is the delinquency in the capital that is really heavy. And...so for security”. These are statements about the gates of the gated community one of the interviewees made during my stay in Residenciales Cipresales. To elicit residents’ own stories about how they experience living in a gated community, in this study I choose for an ethnographic approach. To be able to observe and interview the gated community residents in their daily lives I stayed inside the gated communities of research. This has been a relevant approach to understand better from the point of view of the residents why they choose to live in a gated community.

In order to gain an integral and in-depth insight in the social and spatial dimension of a gated community, I have conducted a multiple case study in two gated communities in Guatemala. The explanation why I choose for these two in particular can be found in the next chapter of this thesis. A case study gives insight in the way in which certain processes happen in practice and why they appear in the way they appear, and often makes use of qualitative methods to compare and give meaning to collected data (Verschuren and Doorewaard, 2007, p. 163, 184). According to Creswell (2013) a case study is a good approach “when the inquirer has clearly identifiable cases with boundaries and seeks to provide an in-depth understanding of the cases or a comparison of several cases“ (p.100). The gated communities under study are indeed clearly identified and have (physical) boundaries. I have made use of the multiple case study in which firstly both gated communities have been researched separately. The research has had a two-staged approach: an inventory part and an explanatory part. For the inventory part I collected empirical data on the social and the spatial dimension of a gated community. Secondly the inventory data results have been used as input for explanatory analysis of the two cases, in order to gain an in-depth view on the outcome.

For this study I went on a three-week explorative field research on location in Guatemala City. I stayed in two gated communities. The empirical data has been collected in the form of visual data (of the physical setting) and semi-structured interviews. These different forms of collecting data have been used to increase triangulation, which is a way of approaching data collection that contains multiple and different sources to provide validity,

and it can help to gain an integral insight of the object of research (Creswell, 2013, p. 251; Verschuren and Doorewaard, 2007, p. 185).

To make an inventory of the social networks of the gated community residents and to understand what meaning they attach to that, I used semi-structured interviews to interview focal persons. This interview technique provides some structure, but still has enough room to go deeper into the topic and to ask for explanations (H. Swedlund, lecture sampling and collecting data, Nijmegen, February 4, 2013). In the interviews I also used visual data in the form of images of the two gated communities, that helped to make the talk more dynamic. The photographs also triggered the interviewees to talk more about certain aspects of for example the differences in spatiality or typology of the gated communities, and how they looked upon or experienced that difference (see attachment 1 for interviewguide).

For the interviews I made a distinction between gender (male/female), because my presumption was that these two groups may respond differently to the posed questions. This with regard to the extent their social networks reach out towards adjacent neighbourhoods, and their experience of living in a gated community. The research population in the Residenciales Cipresales consisted of five woman and four men, three out of five woman had a job, the other two were housewife, four out of five were highly educated. Two out of four men were still working, the other two were retired, but all four were highly educated. The research population in Alamedas the Villaflores consisted of five woman and two men, all five woman were housewife, three out of five were highly educated. Both men were working and highly educated. The residents in Alamedas de Villaflores I interviewed are relatively younger then the residents in Residenciales Cipresales. This is connected to the fact that it is a relatively new gated community compared to Residenciales Cipresales, as it is only in function for 5,5 years, compared to 27 years. The average age of the interviewees is less, and there are more young families with young children. These aspects might also be of influence in the outcome of the interviews in terms of social relations people have.

The meaning of the inventory phase was to gain first insights in the importance and meaning of the social relations gated community residents have with the local community inside and outside the gates, and what kind of people are involved in these relations. Next to interviewing people within the gated community, I did field observations and I made

photos in the gated communities and their neighbourhoods. I also did small open interviews with people in the immediate surrounding of the gated community to get insight in how they experience the gated community. For my analysis of the social network of gated community residents, I have collected relational data through a qualitative approach. Campbell and Lee define certain types of information social network analysis can provide:

- Characteristics of focal individuals (e.g., their gender);
- Characteristics of ties between focal individual and network members. These may be relational characteristics (e.g., each network member's frequency of contact), relational contents (e.g., the extent to which a network member provides emotional aid), or relational types (e.g., whether a network member is a friend, neighbour, workmate or relative of a focal individual);
- Characteristics of the network members with whom focal individuals have ties (e.g., their gender);
- Network composition, the aggregated characteristics of the network members and ties in each ego-centred network (e.g., the mean frequency of contact that the members of a network have with a focal individual, the proportion of network members providing emotional aid);
- Network structural characteristics (e.g., the overall density of ties in a network, the number of clusters in a network) (Müller, Wellman and Marin, 1999, p. 2).

These dimensions helped me to structure and focus on the social network framework.

### **3.2 Reflections on methodology**

In order to get a good insight in the relation and kind of overlap between the soft and the hard border of the gated communities under study the fieldwork experience in Guatemala City has been of great help and importance to collect relevant data. The fieldwork was especially helpful for taking all the photographs and to collect the data about the social networks of the residents, and how they experienced living in a gated community.

Because of earlier visits to the Latin American continent and more specifically a Spanish course that I took in Guatemala some years ago, I did not experience a lot of difficulties during the interviews, as my Spanish is good enough to talk and more important, understand and react to the answers the residents gave me. Next to the interviews with

residents, another valuable meeting I had was with professor Eduardo Velásquez Carrera, who works as an urban researcher for the centre of urban and regional studies (CEUR) at the Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala. He provided me with a lot of (background) information about Guatemala City and its *barrios cerrados* (gated communities), their origin and today's situation.

To visualize the social networks of the interviewees, my first plan was to make use of the social mapping tool, which is a visual method of showing the social structure of an area that can show data on community layout and their distribution of assets. It is a visual registration and description of social networks of respective focal individuals: the ties (relations and interactions) they have with other residents in the gated community and its immediate surroundings, and the way in which they might be structured and institutionalized in internal institutions such as a collective community organisation. Because this study contains not only of a social but also of a spatial dimension, my initial idea was to transform the social mapping tool slightly into a social-spatial mapping tool. Combining the social and the spatial dimension into a visual data set could give a direct visual insight in the extent to which the hard and the soft border of a gated community overlap, or how the social networks of the focal persons are spatially embedded in the environment under study. This graphical visualisation (mapping) of a network can help to describe relationships, to keep track of the relationships discussed in the interview, it can facilitate the discussion of relationships and it can be a stimulus for the production of narratives (Hollstein, 2011, p. 412). This idea did not work out in the field however, because most of the residents (first and foremost in Residenciales Cipresales) knew almost all residents. If not friends, at least they were acquaintances. This soon turned out to be too messy to map in my social-spatial mapping tool, and would not really add to the essence of the questions. That is why I decided to focus on the content of the questions and answers in the interviews.

In order to get a good overview of the possible variety of responses people have, my aim was to interview in both places as much males as females. In the first visited gated community (Residenciales Cipresales) this worked out, but in the second one (Alamedas de Villaflores) this did not work out, as men were mostly at work during the time I visited the place. As a sampling method I used snowball sampling, whereby I asked interviewees if they knew neighbours within the same gated community I could interview. This strategy worked out really well. The people in the immediate surroundings of the gated

communities I interviewed in a more short and open-ended way. In the surroundings of Residenciales Cipresales, I managed to talk to various persons, shop keepers and neighbouring residents. In the second gated community, I did not manage to talk to as many people, as that case is spatially more separated from its social environment. I did manage to speak to a neighbouring resident though.

I had the privilege to stay with one of the families that live in Residenciales Cipresales, the first gated community I studied. This stay was really valuable, as it gave me the real experience of what it means to live in a gated community in Guatemala City. It also gave me the opportunity to have more informal conversations about living there, next to the interviews I had prepared on forehand.

Next to the interviews I also made a lot of visual observations in the form of photographs. This helped me a lot to structure and bring across certain aspects of the social and the spatial dimension in a visual way such as the series of wall paintings on the wall of one gated community. The use of visual data next to the transcript data of the interviews is an interesting addition concerning the visual (confronting) presence of gated communities in the city. The visuals are a visual support of the interview outcomes and the observations I did. After the empirical data was collected, I have interpreted it, and with that, gained an insight in how people behave in space or more specifically how the social structures come to being in the spatial structure that surrounds them.

A difficulty I experienced during my research was the fact that I did not felt very mobile and free to go to the places I wanted to research. I either had the choice of taking a taxi or one of the family members of the family I stayed with had to drive me. This made me realize how free and mobile I am myself in the Netherlands. In Guatemala City it is for example almost impossible to go somewhere by bike, as there are no bike roads. Neither does the traffic take cyclists into account and the possible danger of being more vulnerable on a bike made me decide not to use a bike. However unhandy some moments during the field study, it was definitely a worthwhile experience as I gained a profound insight in the local situation.

## 4. Introduction of cases

As the title describes, this thesis is about gated communities in Guatemala. The focus is on Guatemala City because I have visited and lived in Guatemala City for several months, and during that period, I became very interested in the socio-spatial set up of the city. Gated communities are in that respect a very good example, since their arrival makes an impact on those two components of the city structure.

### 4.1 Introduction and context

Guatemala City is the capital of Guatemala, and the biggest urban area in Central America. The city houses over 3 million inhabitants in the greater urban area, and over 1 million in the inner city area, and it is still growing (La Prensa, 2010; INE, 2012). The city structure is built up of zones (*zona's*) and they are numbered from 1 (city centre) to 25.

For this study I choose two gated communities as two cases to base my research on. This choice is based on the fact that they differ in various ways. As a first aspect, these two cases differ from each other when it comes to the extent to which they are spatially interwoven with their immediate surroundings. The first one is called 'Residenciales Cipresales', and is situated in the urban inner city area, zone 6. This gated community is more spatially interwoven in the city fabric than the second case: 'Alamedas de Villaflores'. This gated community is situated in a suburban environment, in a peripheral area of the city (see figure 6). The spatial segregation significantly differs from the first case, as there is a spatial gap between the gate of the gated community and its social surroundings. The first case is located within the city fabric, so there is no spatial gap between the gate and its social surroundings.

The two cases also differ in their physical existence and typology, as Residenciales Cipresales has come to existence over time, and Alamedas de Villaflores was developed very recently and top down, in a short period of time. This difference in planning has resulted in a different design. Within Residenciales Cipresales the houses were designed from the same ground plan, but residents have (had) the liberty to adjust and paint their house and fill in the ground plan according to their own wishes and taste. This 'bottom-up' approach has resulted in a varying and lively area, with houses painted in different colors

and constructed in different ways (see figure 9). Within Alamedas de Villaflores the houses were planned and designed from a top-down approach, so by the developer of the gated community. The residents do not, or only very basically have (had) a say in how their houses should look like. This has resulted in a more homogeneous area of the same housing design. This design might have a different impact on the social behaviour of the residents within the two cases as the first case has less spatial restrictions than the second case. Their scale and type also differs, as Residenciales Cipresales consists of 339 houses, and Alamedas de Villaflores of 1200 houses. Residenciales Cipresales was developed into a gated community over time, as originally it was a military airport. This has resulted in the fact that many inhabitants have the same military background. Alamedas de Villaflores has been developed as a more 'normal' residential area, so the inhabitants do not share a particular background. The year of construction also differs, as the construction of Residenciales Cipresales was finished in 1986, and Alamedas de Villaflores in 2007.

It is interesting to compare these two cases as they differ in so many aspects. In this sense it can be a comparative study between two types of gated communities and what they both mean within the framework of the sustainable city. The empirical research outcome in the following two chapters will give an insight in what way the spatial set up of both gated communities has an impact on the social interaction between the gated community residents and the people in the immediate surroundings.

In the following image the relative position of both gated communities in regard to each other and their location in regard to Guatemala City is shown.



**Figure 6: Two gated communities in regard to Guatemala City (Source google maps)**

The first case that has been studied is Residenciales Cipresales. This gated community is located in zone six, in the inner city area (figure 6 & 7).



**Figure 7. Residenciales Cipresales (highlighted in red) located in inner-city Guatemala City. (Source google maps)**

The residence has developed out of a military airport (Instituto de Previsión Militar, IPM) into a residential area for military officials. The area was completed for residential use in 1986. As the residents have (had) the freedom to adjust their house to their own taste and resources, the area has come to be a lively area full of colour (figure 9). The residence has two entrances, one main entrance for pedestrians and cars, and one only for pedestrians, at the south end of the residence (figure 8, main entrance).



**Figure 8. The front gate and its near surroundings (left from the inside, right from the outside) (Photos by Anne van Strien).**

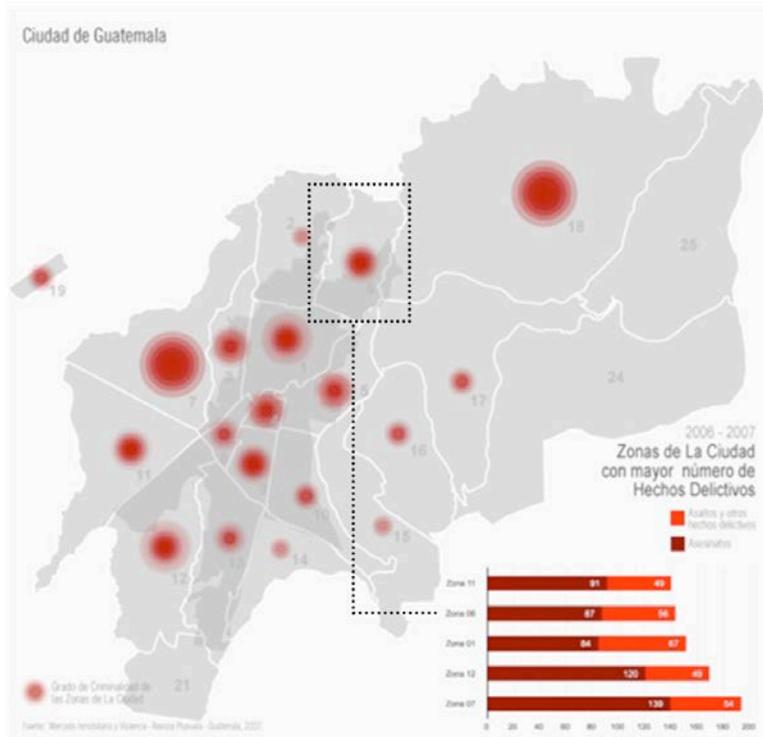
The gates at the main entrance close at night between ten in the evening and six in the morning. During the day the gates are open, but the residence is still closed off with

guarded barriers. Not only at the gates, but also inside the residence the police guards the area twenty four hours, mainly by bike.



**Figure 9: Residenciales Cipresales: Impression of the housing typology (Photos by Anne van Strien)**

The walls of this gated community have come to existence over time, and not without a reason. In zone 6, the delinquency rate is so high that this has come to be one of the most dangerous zones in the city (ranking the zones from most to least dangerous, it is placed on the fourth place from the top), with only in this zone 143 assaults between 2006 and 2007, from which no less than 87 were murders (figure 10). Together with zone 18, there are 16 *maras* (gangs) located in the area (Bravo Soto, M., 2007, p. 149).



**Figure 10. Zones in Guatemala City with highest delinquency rates, zone 6 accentuated (source: Urbanistica, 2007).**

These data got meaning during my own stay in the gated community in zone 6, as one evening I heard shots being solved in the adjacent neighbourhood *La Reinita*. During the interviews some residents also told me about assaults that happened to them or people they knew in the zone around the time the interview took place. The danger is thus clearly existing and noticeable in the daily lives of zone 6 residents. What I did notice was that the moment the shots I heard got solved, none of the residents (in the house where I stayed) really paid attention to it. It was obviously not the first time they heard it. During my stay I found out that the danger in the zone is officially ranked by the Ministry of Government. They indicated various parts of zone 6 as red zones (*zona roja*). According to the residents of Residenciales Cipresales, ‘their’ gated community area is indicated as a white zone, which means that it is a (relatively) safe area. However, by the time I was about to leave Residenciales Cipresales, various neighbours told me their concerns about relatively new neighbours that had moved into the gated community as renters, who were suspected to have connections with *narcotraficantes*, drug traffickers. This became more visible as a few policemen (apparently the drug police) were starting to put one of the residential houses under 24 hour surveillance.

During one informal talk I had with a resident, I was told about the gangs called *maras* who are active in the adjacent neighbourhood La Reinita. The police does not dare to enter the *mara* territories, as they themselves are afraid to get killed. They do enter the somewhat safer main streets of the area. While I was doing an observation in *la Reinita*, I saw an armed policeman actively patrolling the street, looking for someone to be found there. This happening was seemingly integrated in the day rhythm as the rest of the people in the street hardly seemed to notice as they continued their activities (figure 11).



**Figure 11. Visual presence of police on the street in terms of security. (Photo by Anne van Strien)**

The different *maras* in the neighbourhood mark ‘their’ territory with their tag or sign, to visually illustrate their presence in the area (figure 12). I was told by Carlos, one of the younger Residenciales Cipresales residents, that their power and presence is thoroughly interwoven in the neighbourhood. It is even supposed to be so extreme, that dwellers and bus drivers in the neighbourhood have to pay the gangs a kind of ‘fee’, or tax, in order not to get killed. In this way, they infiltrated and now dominate the area in an oppressive way.



**Figure 12. *Mara* territory illustrated by tags in the adjacent neighbourhood La Reinita, whose gang leaders live in the slums visible on this photo. (Photo by Anne van Strien)**

The second case that has been studied is Alamedas de Villaflores, located in zone 7 in San Miguel Petapa, on the south side of the city in a peripheral area, still within the metropolitan area of the city (see figure 6 & 13).



**Figure 13. Alamedas de Villaflores: location in the city (Source: Google maps)**

The residence was developed by a development company and completed in 2007 containing 1200 houses, divided into 12 sectors. It is clearly visible that this development was master planned, as all houses have the same façade (figure 14).



**Figure 14. Alamedas de Villaflores: impression of the housing typology (Source: El periodico)**

This type of housing development is called a condominium, and it has only one place to enter. Once entering the residential area via the main entrance, you arrive at the main street, known as the principal boulevard (figure 15). This boulevard connects all sectors, which are smaller living areas that are separated from each other, and accessible via a second guarded *garita* (guardhouse) (figure 16). The sectors are smaller living spaces in the bigger whole of the gated community, but it is not a freely accessible whole, as even the own residents in the gated community cannot circulate freely between sectors, they also have to identify themselves at the sub *garita* at a sector entrance, when they wish to enter.

However on the south side, just outside of the inner city in a suburban area, delinquency is also existing in this part of the metropolitan area. Talking with the residents made me aware of the fear they feel leaving the residence. One woman told me “you live with the fear that something can happen to you”. When I arrived at the residence, some 100 meters before the entrance a few policemen were lined up to control cars that wished to enter the gated community. One resident told me later that they are there to provide some security because it has happened that as residents left the gated community, they got attacked immediately.



Figure 15. Principal boulevard of Alamedas de Villaflores. The name 'boulevard' reminds of a place full of strolling people, but it looks very closed off with the high raised walls surrounding the street. (Photo by Anne van Strien)



Figure 16. *Subgarita*, extra guardhouse for each sector. (Photo by Anne van Strien)

## **5. The social dimension**

Gated communities are often defined as separationists, as dividing the city up into accessible and non-accessible areas (Caldeira, 1996; Coy, 2006; Borsdorf, Hidalgo and Sanchez, 2007). In this thesis I want to argue how this would limit understanding of certain interactions that do take place across the divide of the gated community / non-gated community. By doing so, I want to focus specifically on the social dimension in this chapter. In the next chapter I will focus on the spatial dimension.

The 'soft border' of the gated community consists of the social networks of gated community residents. These networks are built up of social relations between gated community residents and the relations they have with people in the adjacent neighbourhoods. The empirical evidence that has been collected in both gated communities in Guatemala City can give insight in the extent to which this social divide, thus the 'social border' exists. In this chapter the empirical research and outcome will be presented on the basis of the research questions concerning the social dimension of the gated community.

### **5.1 Social networks and social cohesion**

Residenciales Cipresales has been inhabited by (family of) people who serve(d) in the Guatemalan military. Because of this shared origin, a lot of them have known each other from before they inhabited the residence. The men have not only been living together, but some also studied together. Almost all respondents have lived in the residence since 1986, so almost twenty-seven years. Because of this long time that they have lived together in the gated community, most of the respondents know the majority of the residents. This majority is indicated as acquaintances by most of the interviewees. Some indicate that only with few people they are friends, or have a more strong relationship and feel more confidence. They feel the confidence to help each other if possible. Most of the interviewees have a (little) group of friends inside the residence, however all respondents also have other friends that live elsewhere (in the city). The people they have a more strong friendship with, visit each other at each other's house or in the communal park that is located in the residence. Respondents agree that as neighbours they salute each other when they see each other in the street. Overall, Juan Recinas indicates the social relations in the residence as "a good relationship between neighbours". There are also

some side notes or critiques in terms of social contact given by some residents. A few residents state that there has also been greed between the residents, in that all want to have the same as the neighbour. Between the officials' wives there sometimes existed greed when one of the officials got a higher rank in the army. Another side note was made by one of the men, as he said that because of lack of time because of the work situation, one has (had) less time to socialize, because they mostly where away to work.

There are also activities organised by people in the residence that help to socialize. These activities take place around holidays like Christmas and New Years, mostly in the collective park that is located in the middle of the residence. The park is the central meeting place and social area of the residence. It is used by youngsters and young adult residents as a hang out place and sporting area. It is also used by the primary school children as a playing and sporting area (figure 17). The residents have long been trying to arrange a communal space inside the residence, but until today they still have not had approval of the land owner, the military institute (IPM) (figure 21).



**Figure 17. The park in Residenciales Cipresales is used as a social area by the residents. (Photo by Anne van Strien)**

Most of the activities that are being organised have a religious character, as Guatemala is quite a religious country, with large groups of Catholics and evangelists. There are also masses organised, but these are only evangelic masses. The evangelists have even created two 'churches' inside the residence named *celulas*, where the evangelic gatherings take place (see figure 20, top row, in the middle). Other religious activities contain processions that walk around in the residence, organised by a group of woman who all live inside the residence. Residents indicate that it is hardly ever allowed for people from the immediate surroundings of the gated community to participate in these activities, as they are not taken into account because of the fear the residents feel towards "people from outside", or "strangers", as they do not know them.

The social connection with people in the adjacent neighbourhoods is thus rather delicate, as most of the residents indicate that they hardly know them, or even not at all. They do indicate a (social) difference between both adjacent neighbourhoods. The one on the north side is a bit more decent according to Mario Perez, as it mainly houses *trabajadores*, working class people. The neighbourhood on the other side has a rather bad reputation in the eyes of the gated community residents. Miguel Fernandez indicates them as (family of) *maras* and delinquents. Lucrecia Morales agrees as she indicates that there is a big difference between inside the residence and adjacent neighbourhoods in terms of social groups. She says that people in the adjacent La Reinita neighbourhood have a lot of social problems. Mario Perez also agrees on the social difference as he says that it is possible these people take part in organised crime. He speaks of a 'we' and a 'them' as of the people in the residence are united into one group he talks for. He says "we do not really have a relation with them". Some residents even speak of fear towards these adjacent neighbours. Odit Portio says that for her all people are the same, but she thinks that not knowing these neighbours creates fear for "people from outside". Some residents do say that they have a relation with people in the adjacent north side, but they are family members like parents. The only 'bonding' place in the near surroundings is the church, which some residents visit regularly. Odit Portio told that in conjunction with this church outside the residence, they organise charity activities to collect *viveres*, basic provisions like rice, beans, sugar but also clothes for people in neighbouring slums.

Outside of the residence is a street with some shops and services like a beauty salon and a bakery. This is where some of the residents go. Lucrecia Morales told that she knows all the beauty salon employees. That is because before, the beauty salon was located inside the residence. Because of the possibility for more clients, they moved just outside the residence. Another shop owner also lives inside the residence, but for the same reason has her shop just outside. Residents tell that they hardly shop inside the residence, only for some small things like tortillas or bread, but mostly go (by car) to shopping malls in the outer neighbourhood, every two weeks or every month. These malls are secured by private security. Elsa Escobar says that her family does not like it when she goes out of the residence on her own, because of the perceived danger on the street. She tells that she hardly leaves the residence, and if she needs groceries, her family takes her to the supermarket when necessary. Residents do use the shops in the immediate surroundings of the gated community, but mostly only to buy the daily bread

and small products like sodas or soap. For larger groceries they prefer to go to the supermarkets that are located in the larger malls. In this way, there is only little contact between residents and shop owners that are located just outside of the gates.

Unlike the residents of Residenciales Cipresales, the residents in Alamedas de Villaflores are not connected through a shared background. This is reflected in the difference in social contact and the social networks between people, as they do not know their neighbours that well as the residents in Residenciales Cipresales do. The younger woman that was interviewed, indicated that they greet each other when they meet each other on the street. They say that they do feel integrated, but this is not only because of the social situation, it has more to do with a feeling of tranquillity and security. Julio Mejia, one of the men interviewed indicated that he felt only a bit integrated, as he said that life in the gated community is “very individualistic”. This makes that there is not much (real) contact between residents. One older lady that was interviewed did not feel integrated at all because according to her “there is not much communication”. The direct connections between residents mostly are spatially bounded by the various sectors. Some women do indicate that they have a good bond with their closest neighbours, but only with very few it has become more of a friendship relationship. They do feel confident and bonded because they feel that they can rely on their neighbours when they would need help.

The social network of the residents is hardly socially connected to the immediate surroundings of the gated community. Only few indicate that they know a few people (2 or 3 families), and these contacts are either family based or have a religious character. They hardly have a chance to meet inside the residential, as people from the immediate surroundings are not able to join activities that are being organised in the gated community. The activities are only intended for the residents of Alamedas de Villaflores. Only if you are invited by one of the residents, you can have access but only by identifying yourself and through approval of the resident, according to some respondents. For all residents of the residence there is a communal space available in the form of a space with places to barbeque, communal seating areas and a sports area. In the communal *salons*, religious activities are being organised a few times a week, in which all residents are free to participate and have the possibility to meet each other. This is one of few activities that are being organised for the gated community as a whole. Apart from the communal activities it is possible to rent off one of the *salons* for individual use or parties.

Inside the sectors sometimes information related activities are being organised. During those activities residents are being informed about changes inside the sector that can increase their living environment. This is done by the *junta directiva*, the administrative board that consists of neighbours who are in charge of organising and administering the maintenances and services. When something within a sector has to be changed or adjusted, the junta collects money between neighbours to be able to make the change. The neighbours have to arrange their own living environment, as it is a private space where the municipal government does not enter. Every sector has its own junta. Some respondents indicate however, that they would like the junta to organise more social activities for the sector, so that they have more opportunity to bond and to meet each other.

The difference between inside and outside the gated community in terms of social coexistence is perceived differently by various respondents. The difference is related to the security level, and the perceived tranquillity inside the residential according to Valery Gonzales and other respondents. She says “when I leave the residence, what a fear that they might assault you, or that something will happen in the street”. She relates this to the delinquency that she fears. Diana Galindo does answer according to the perceived social coexistence. She thinks that outside the residential, in the “open neighbourhoods” there will be more communication, but rethinking her answer she notes that there is not a real difference in social coexistence between inside or outside the gated community.

Groceries like bread most residents buy freshly from the bakery that is located inside the residence. Valery Gonzales says, that that is a place where the woman from the residence can meet each other in an informal way. The baker himself also lives inside of the gated community. But for all other groceries most respondents indicate that they go to the nearby supermarket, which is a ten-minute drive by car, or a local market that is located some five kilometres away. These visits are mostly made during the weekends, when the whole family has time to go together, once every two weeks, or once a month. Just outside the gates there is a little commercial area that is open for people that not live inside the gated community, but as the residence is located on the side of a thoroughfare, it is mostly used only by the residents (figure 23). These commercial outings thus often do not serve to be opportunities to bond with people from the immediate surroundings, as it is purely intended to buy groceries.



**Figure 18. Communal area with barbecue places and larger event spaces. In the background the sports area is visible. (Photo by Anne van Strien)**

## **5.2 Living experience**

In Residenciales Cipresales, the shared background is one of the reasons that make the respondents feel integrated. The perceived security of the residence, the tranquillity, the good relationship with their neighbours and that they know the majority of the people who live there, sometimes including family members like parents or children who went living on their own, but did not leave the residence, make them feel integrated as well.

The experience of secured living in the residence was a major topic while talking to the residents. They do feel that there is a major difference in security level between their residence and the adjacent neighbourhoods. For Odit Portio for example, it is very important to live in a secured environment. That makes her feel more tranquil and secure for her children that they can safely play outside. Almost all residents indicate the security as a positive aspect of the residence. Security is a vital aspect in the arguments and responses of the residents when it comes to comfortable living. One respondent even stated that “because of a higher level of security, one has more freedom”.

But there also sounds a critical note against the security in the residence, from an informal talk I had with one of the young people in the residence. He said that he sees the – by older residents perceived – ‘security’ as a “false sensation of security”. The policemen that are guarding the gates are also persons holding arms, he argues. There has even been a case in which people have entered the residence and killed one of the residents. Thus, the reality of the residents is that what provides for them feelings of being secured is people holding arms, that in case of emergency can defend them. For me as a relative ‘outsider’, this was a relevant but quite a heavy aspect to observe as it became clear that to feel secured involves arms as well.

What is indicated by some to be pleasant in the living experience, is the amount of services that are available in the residence. These are for example the organised security and twenty four hour guarded gates by private security, waste collection, street cleaning, improvement and maintenance of the two parks, school bus service, and the residence has its own water supply (figure 19). This in contrast to the adjacent neighbourhoods, who do not always have constant water supply. The services are being organised and administrated by the residential neighbour organisation called ‘*Comité unico de barrio*’ (CUB), which is also in charge of supervising the security organ and the residential maintenance. All residents have to pay a fee to the CUB, in order to be able to collectively pay for and make use of the services. The CUB is also in charge (in collaboration with the guards) of ‘governing’ the residence. This is reflected in certain rules, for example for the youth who are now forbidden to have drinks in the park after ten in the evening. They try to contact their parents in order to maintain the tranquillity in the park. I have also heard some critique towards the CUB, mostly from informal talks with youth in the residence. According to the interviewees, their social task should be better developed, in the sense that they should pay more attention to improve the social sphere in the residence by organising more (social) activities.



**Figure 19. Services within Residenciales Cipresales: garbage cleaner, water deposit and schoolbus. (Photos by Anne van Strien)**

Mario Perez says that the well being of the (retired) officials is a little bit better than those living outside the residential, as people inside mostly have more than one car in front of their house, but “those from the other side” have less.



**Figure 20. Residential houses converted into community serving shops, evangelical church, sports centre, primary school, spa, pharmacy. (Photos by Anne van Strien)**

In Alamedas de Villaflores, opposite to almost all (younger) respondents, the only one who is not (at all) pleased by the living experience in the gated community, is the (only) older lady that lives in Alamedas de Villaflores. She lives there in the first place to accommodate her children. The (lack of) social interaction is really different to her former situation, in which she lived in a village about an hour away. There people were more socially involved, as it is a village where almost everyone knows each other. Julio Mejia, one of the interviewees, affirms as he says that in the *aldeas* (villages) people have stronger connections because they have known each other for a long period of time. Yet on the other hand, he says, villagers do not have the security that exists in a place like Alamedas de Villaflores. Valery Gonzalez thinks it is a pleasant living environment. She says that it is a nice space for her children, “it is really quiet, totally different from how I grew up”. That it is a better environment for kids is a shared idea between parents / residents. They worry less about their children because of the perceived tranquillity and security. Valery Gonzalez even characterises the security as “primordial”, and sees it as a positive aspect of living in Alamedas de Villaflores.

Another positive aspect of living there is the design of the gated community, according to the respondents. All houses have (more or less) the same façade, and this provides tranquillity to some of the respondents, which they appreciate. According to some, a negative thing is the distance from the city centre, because all have to enter through the same passage, which sometimes can lead to traffic congestion.

The living experience of both gated community residents is generally positive and comfortable, but is mainly focussed on the inside of the gated community. The more secured residents are, the better they feel.

The social interaction of Residencial Cipresales residents with the surrounding neighbourhood does exist, but is rather minimal. Only some interaction takes place in the adjacent shops, but that is not profound social contact. The nearby church does function as a place where the residents of the gated community meet people from adjacent neighbourhoods and the gated community residents also take part in charity activities, organised for people in the adjacent neighbourhoods. Some family members who live close by do take part in the social networks of the gated community residents. The spatial interconnection with the direct (social) surroundings does provide more opportunity for the residents to interact and meet people from the adjacent neighbourhoods than the spatial gap of Alamedas de Villaflores with its immediate social surroundings, though the interaction that exists is not very profound contact except for the charity projects.

As indicated in the introduction to this chapter, it is important to understand how the social relations and connections that do exist are built up and function. The spatially more interwoven Residenciales Cipresales seems to be better integrated in its environment, however delicate social relations are. In both gated communities there does also seem to exist a social border towards the outside, non-gated surroundings. From the accounts of the respondents of both gated communities it became clear that a certain fear exists towards “the outside”, people that live in the neighbourhood but who are not included in the gated community. These accounts make clear on a daily basis how the permeability is organised in the border area between inside and outside the gated community.

## **6. The spatial dimension**

Next to the social dimension that has been the focus of the former chapter, the spatial dimension of the gated community has a substantial share in the transformation of the urban environment. The gates have an important role in this process, as these are the physical dividers that create a 'hard border' between two adjacent spaces.

### **6.1 The gates and the community**

The main entrance of Residenciales Cipresales is located in a lively street packed with shops. The residence consists of a long strip of two main roads surrounded by a cement wall, enclosing 339 houses. In its early days, the residence was not entirely closed off from the surrounding neighbourhood. The cross-over road that connected both adjacent neighbourhoods was open. Dwellers from the adjacent neighbourhoods, in particular from La Reinita, came in to play football. According to the residence residents, they also came in to steal bikes, flowers, and even whole sinks. Mario Perez told, that a point came that the situation was that worse, that robbers even got killed. The problems the residents experienced with (armed) robbery while the residence was not yet closed off is why it became walled and secured over time. Firstly this was done by the inhabitants of the residence, as they were themselves part of the military. Later private security became in charge of guarding the residence. Mario Perez says, "It was difficult, one had to protect himself". Today the abrupt closing by walls is still visible from inside the residence (figure 21).

The residents do not see the gates as a negative aspect of living in the area, but as a necessity to secure themselves from "outside". "They are a good thing" was a frequently heard answer when asking how residents feel about their living environment being surrounded by gates. According to one of them, it is a "better way to have control over the entrance". Miguel Fernandez even states that the fact that they are surrounded by a wall, isolated from the adjacent neighbourhoods, is a positive aspect.



**Figure 21. Closed off streets that before were open. Now it is a possible place for a communal space.**  
 (Photos by Anne van Strien)

The gates provide certain quietness in the neighbourhood, as the streets are not thoroughfares, but only intended traffic bound for the residence enter. Only sporadically a car passes by. The streets are cleaner than the streets in the adjacent neighbourhoods, because of the regular cleaning service that keep the streets free of waste. Another spatial difference with the surrounding neighbourhoods is that the houses have a wider set up and there is more space and green around the houses.

## **6.2 The surrounding neighbourhood**

Asking people in the immediate surroundings of the gated community how they feel about or see the gates, results in a small pallet of answers. A city goat herder who strolls around the zone with his goats, selling fresh goat milk directly at the doorstep of the neighbourhood residents, would like to enter the gated community to have more possible clients for his goat milk. The guards do not let him in however, because according to the goat herder “the goats might eat the flowers”. The ironmongery owner whose shop is located next to the main entrance does not live inside Residenciales Cipresales, but in the adjacent neighbourhood. According to him there are “pro’s and contra’s” regarding the gates. He says that it should not be closed, as it is a public road, but he understands that they have closed them off. Yet he is also critical towards the perceived fear the residents have against ‘people from outside’ as he rightly says “I am not a delinquent”. Another nearby shop owner who does not live inside the residence says that “it’s ok that there are gates because it is a private zone”. However, she continues, “in the beginning I felt molested that they didn’t let me in, but now I think it’s ok, for security reasons, right”. A woman who lives in the surrounding neighbourhood tells that she has never entered the gated community, and that she doesn’t know anyone but one person in the residence.

This shows from both sides that the gates do have a separating consequence towards both sides.

Another outcome of the research in the surrounding neighbourhood was a very tangible one. A trip around the gated community showed the other side of the wall, seen from outside. This was a surprising discovery as people from the adjacent neighbourhood had turned the wall in a sort of art canvas. This was a very hopeful sign to see that the wall on the other side was not anymore the hard, grey, concrete wall it once was, but instead transformed into a colourful pallet of murals expressing the hopes and dreams for a better and more peaceful society where people take care of the land and the environment (figure 22).



**Figure 22. Transformation of the surrounding wall into an art canvas by people from the adjacent neighbourhood La Reinita to expose ideas and dreams about society. (Photos by Anne van Strien)**

In contrast to Residenciales Cipresales, Alamedas de Villaflores is spatially separated from its immediate (social) surroundings (figure 24). It is only accessible via one main entrance (figure 23).



Figure 23. The front gate of Alamedas de Villaflores. (Photo by Anne van Strien)



Figure 24. Alamedas de Villaflores seen from above, in relation to its surroundings. (Source: Grupo Macro)

The entrance is located next to a thoroughfare coming from Boca del Monte, which is situated just outside the inner city. The residence consists of a sort of little village, with twelve habitual sectors, the largest one packed with 350 houses. From the beginning the residence has been surrounded by a large wall (figure 23 & 25). Between the road and the wall there is an extra strip of grass that accentuates its closed character and separateness from the accessible public space. The wall seems to hide itself from the outside world as it is partly covered in plants and painted in the same colour as the surrounding green.



**Figure 25. The surrounding wall, visible while approaching the entrance from the thoroughfare.  
(Photo by Anne van Strien)**

To be able to enter Alamedas de Villaflores, one has to identify him- or herself at the gates. The access is built up in two stages. First the main entrance, where only presenting identification is enough to get access to the commercial area. To access the living areas, the (twelve) *sectores*, one has to identify himself again, hand over the identification papers and in return receive a little access card. It is quite a process to access as a visitor. The residents appreciate the gates, they think they are “good and adequate”, a good way to control who enters and leaves the residence. “They give a certain feeling of security”, Diana Galindo says. There is also critique towards the gates, but only in the sense that they should even be guarded more intensely, with the help of cameras to registrate everyone.

The commercial area is located behind the entrance (figure 26). Intentionally designed as a separate space within the gated community, one has to enter or cross the commercial area prior to arrival at the habitual sectors. Next to small shops, chains like ice cream chain *Sarita* have established themselves in the little shopping street. This shows that this gated community is even more designed as an isolated entity than Residenciales Cipresales. The commercial area was intentionally designed to provide a shopping mall in which residents could find everything they need. In this way, they hardly have to leave for other necessities as almost everything is provided for. As such, it becomes an isolated ‘island’ where people who do not live there can hardly enter.



**Figure 26. Intentionally designed shopping area, where shop chains like *sarita* have already entered. (Photo by Anne van Strien)**

It was more difficult to speak to people outside of the residence than it was around Residenciales Cipresales, because it was less accessible by foot than the other case. This demonstrates the difference from Residenciales Cipresales in accessibility towards the adjacent neighbourhoods and the more closed character of the gated community. The spatial gap between Alamedas de Villaflores reflects the social gap that exists, in the possibility of meeting people from the adjacent neighbourhood. I did speak to one woman, who was working inside the residence as a nanny, but lived in the outside neighbourhood. She said that according to her the gates “are good”, because they provide security to the residents. Valery Gonzalez is straightforward about the role that gated communities like Alamedas de Villaflores play in Guatemala as she states that “these kinds of spaces create the security that you are looking for as a country, right”, it is like a “new Guatemala”.

Both case studies thus clearly show the major role the gates and walls play in terms of social integration of the gated community with the adjacent neighbourhoods. As the residents are separated from the outside environment, their social networks are not likely to cross the border either. In that way, social exclusion exists and is being enhanced and reproduced. A clear border exists between the ones inside, able to exclude themselves from the ones outside. Because of the amount of incidents that happened in the past,

residents in Residenciales Cipresales argue their right to secure themselves from surrounding dangers. Residents in Alamedas de Villaflores are spatially so disintegrated in their social surroundings, that by being so excluded, social contact with the adjacent neighbourhood seems even harder to accomplish. These 'excluding practices' have impact on both sides, both inside the gated community and outside. Residents inside are confronted with entering gates everyday that are guarded by armed policemen. Visually experiencing this border enhances their fear towards the outside world.

## **7. The gated community as a sustainable phenomenon?**

### **7.1 Social and spatial dimension connected**

To get closer to answering the central question of this study, both sub domains have to be connected to each other. In this way, an insight can be gained into the extent to which the social soft border and the spatial hard border overlap, and what that overlap means for the gated community as a sustainable phenomenon.

#### ***The overlap***

As illustrated in the former chapters, there does not exist deep social integration between both gated communities and their immediate surrounding. Only minimum contact exists, mainly in the religious-, commercial-, or family sphere. This means that there is no major overlap from the social over the spatial border. The social border follows the spatial border in more or less the same way. Only at the entrance part, where both 'worlds' meet each other in a spatial way, the soft social border does not exactly follow the hard border. The permeability of the soft border extends more outward than inward, as from the 'inside' towards the 'outside', the passage is free for residents (they do need a digital pass), but from outside in, it is harder to cross the border as one has to identify him- or herself, and has to make his or her destination clear. Some residents go out to shops that are located at the entrance. There they meet people from adjacent neighbourhoods. The social interaction that comes out of these meetings is only superficial and brief contact. A gender division is also visible, as these people are mainly woman for daily groceries or other purchases, and men mostly go straight into the residences as they come home from their jobs at the end of the day. Another place of interaction is the local church that is located in the neighbourhood next to Residenciales Cipresales. Contact residents have there with people from outside the residence is also very brief, but they do take part in charity events for people in the adjacent neighbourhood La Reinita.

Alamedas de Villaflores is spatially more separated from its immediate (social) surroundings than Residenciales Cipresales. Some social connections between residents and people in the adjacent neighbourhoods exist, however like Residenciales Cipresales, these are mainly religious or family connections. The social border follows the spatial border thus in quite a strict way. Random, accidental social contact is hardly possible, as the spatial form and its social sphere do not really facilitate this. In this case a gender

division is also clearly visible, as men do leave the gated community (by car) in the morning to go to work, but these are mainly trips that lead immediately to their work destination, in the inner city. Women stay at home, inside the walls, caring for the children. Couples do go out together to nearby neighbourhoods, but only for commercial reasons (to buy groceries) or for family visits during the weekends.

### ***The gated community as a sustainable phenomenon***

Placing the gated community in the sustainability framework is a complex and layered matter. Looking at the gated community in its surrounding context, there is not much social integration between inside and outside. The social networks of gated community residents are built of relations between people inside rather than much social relations with people in the immediate surroundings. This has various reasons. Gated community residents feel safer inside the gated community than outside. As the social situation in (a large part of) the city is very delicate, the reaction of wanting to secure oneself is somehow understandable. It does reveal the deeper problems that are rooted in the city that have to be solved in order to create a more sustainable city. However understandable, the excluding practices, both excluding themselves as a gated community and excluding people in the immediate surroundings does not help to sustain or create a dialog either. The gates and walls do not provide openness for people from both sides to meet each other. Streets are getting more and more closed off by gates and fences. This causes a problematic situation for the city where fear for possible dangers is rising.

Looking to the gated community as a mere community in itself, it fits better into the sustainability framework as an entity. In Residenciales Cipresales the social networks of the residents are well and deeply rooted between residents. The social relations are well developed, and also can take place spatially in each others home or in the collective spaces, such as the park. In Alamedas de Villaflores these social networks also exist between residents, however these are far less rooted, because of the absence of a shared background. Alamedas de Villaflores seems like a little village in which almost everything takes place. There is not a clear connection, spatially and socially, with its near surroundings. It is set up in a way that provides (even until the front door) all services and everyday needs, so residents hardly *need* to leave, so in this way social contact outside the door is not really stimulated. This is reflected in the fact that some residents experience the residence as a very individualistic place. As well as in Residenciales

Cipresales, the gates are being seen as a good thing, as they provide the security they wish for. It is not seen as a negative aspect, but indeed as something positive about their living environment. As well as in Residenciales Cipresales, the social networks of the residents in their everyday life are built out of relations between people inside rather than social relations with people in the immediate surroundings.

As the two gated communities are not really socially integrated in their immediate environments, from this point of view the gated community is not a sustainable phenomenon. Gated communities do not facilitate social integration, but enhance social exclusion. As the walls keep rising and people have no chance to meet each other regularly, fear will rise towards people that are not part of the gated community.

Yet when putting the gated community in the context of everyday life in Guatemala City, the sustainable city focus shifts to the underlying structures of the major social disbalance that exists in current Guatemalan (urban) society. This became clear during the conversation I had with dr. Eduardo Velásquez Carrera, and during the observations I did in the adjacent neighbourhoods in zone 6. From that point of view the gated communities are reactions to a situation that is not a sustainable situation from its origin, where neighbourhoods are being 'governed' by *maras* and gangs. Gated community residents search for some security amidst a space that is full of uncertainties.

## **7.2 Recommendations**

During this research, I have noticed how interwoven the social and the spatial dimension of gated communities are. As it is the residents that live and behave in the (bounded) space, the social dimension can hardly be seen separated from its spatial context. As such it is valuable for future research on gated communities to see these as two connected aspects of the same phenomenon. To reach integrated and sustainable insights for future development and/or understanding of gated communities and their surroundings, I would recommend to approach and/or do research from an interdisciplinary socio-spatial perspective.

As I have noticed during the fieldwork not only the very obvious and formally regulated space of a gated community may produce certain exclusivity in the city. For future research it can be interesting to research other forms of 'non-spaces' in the (same) city

such as socially 'gated' communities such as slums. These places may not be very accessible for others than its own residents due to insecurity. How the city is dealing with these more informalised gated communities might be an interesting topic to research, and whether there are certain symbioses between these phenomena. Are they separate worlds that do not really take part in their surroundings or are they interrelated in their surroundings?

A key recommendation here is to research how to create, design or plan approachability between different social groups in such a way that they are not being isolated from each other, because that enhances conflict situations, but rather overlap socially. It is certainly interesting to further study interrelations and interactions between different social groups in the urban environment because that can lead to a better understanding of a sustainable living environment.

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## Attachment 1: Interview guide

### Interview guide

Name / Nombre:

.....

Place & Date / Lugar y fecha:

.....

Resident of / Residente de:

.....

M – F

Occupational Status / Estatus Ocupacional:

.....

Finished studies / Estudios terminados:

.....

### Introductory Questions / Preguntas Introductorias

1. How long have you been living here? / Cuánto tiempo lleva viviendo aquí?
2. Why did you move here? / Porque se mudo aqui?
3. Do you feel integrated here? / Se siente integrado de vivir aqui?
  - What makes you feel like that? / Que es lo que le hace sentir asi?

### Social dimension

4. Do you know a lot of people in this residencial? / Conosce a mucha gente en ese Residencial?
  - Amigos
  - vesinos
  - duenos de la tienda
  - portero
  - personas de servicios
  - otra: .....
5. And in the immediate surroundings of the residence? / Y en los alrededores de la residencial?
  - amigos

- personas de servicios
  - otra: .....
6. How is the social contact with the people in the residencial? / Como esta la convivencia con la gente en ese residencial?
  7. Can you see a diference in social contact between inside and outside the residence? / Puede ver una diferencia en la convivencia entre dentro de la residencial y en los alrededores de la residencial?
  8. Can you tell me with what people in the residence or in the immediate surroundings you have contact? / Tiene usted algun tipo de relacion con personas dentro de la colonia, y en los alrededores de la colonia?
    - What frequency of contact? / Qual frecuencia de contacto es?
    - What kind of contact or relation is it? / Que tipo de relacion es?
  9. Do you do your groceries in the residencial or in the immedeiate surroundings of the residence? / Sus compras de alimentos, lo hace a dentro o en los alrededores de la residencial?
  10. Is there a community organisation in this residence? / Hay un organizacion comunitario en ese residencial?
  11. Are there things or activities organised in this residence? / Realisan algun tipo de actividades en esta residencial?
    - If yes, by whom? / Si si, por quien?
    - What kind of activities are being organised in the residence? / Que tipo de actividades se organizan en la residencial?
    - When / how often are these activities being organised? Cuando / Con que frecuencia se organizan esas cosas?
    - Do you participate in these activities? / Participe usted en estas actividades?
    - Where do they take place? / En donde se realizan estas actividades?
    - Can people from the immediate surroundings of the residence take part in these activities? / La gente de los alrededores de la residencial, pueden ser parte de las actividades?
    - If not, why not? / Si no, porque?
    - How do you feel about these things being organised? / Que piensa usted sobre esas actividades que se organizan?
  12. Is there any place inside the residence to gather socially? / Existe algun lugar dentro de la residencial para socializar?
    - If yes, which places? If not, should they be there, according to you? / Si, cual son? / Si no, deben estar?
  13. And in the immediate surroundings of the residence, are there any places to socialize you know of? / Y en los alrededores de la residencial, existen lugares para socializar que usted conoce?
  14. How do you experience living here? / Como se siente viviendo aqui?

- Why? / Y porque?
15. How do you experience the social sphere here? / Como se siente el ambiente social aqui?
- How come? / Y porque?
16. Are there things that you experience positively about living here? / Cuales cree usted que son los aspectos positivos en esta residencial?
17. Are there things that you experience negatively about living here? / Cuales cree usted que son los aspectos negativos en esta residencial?

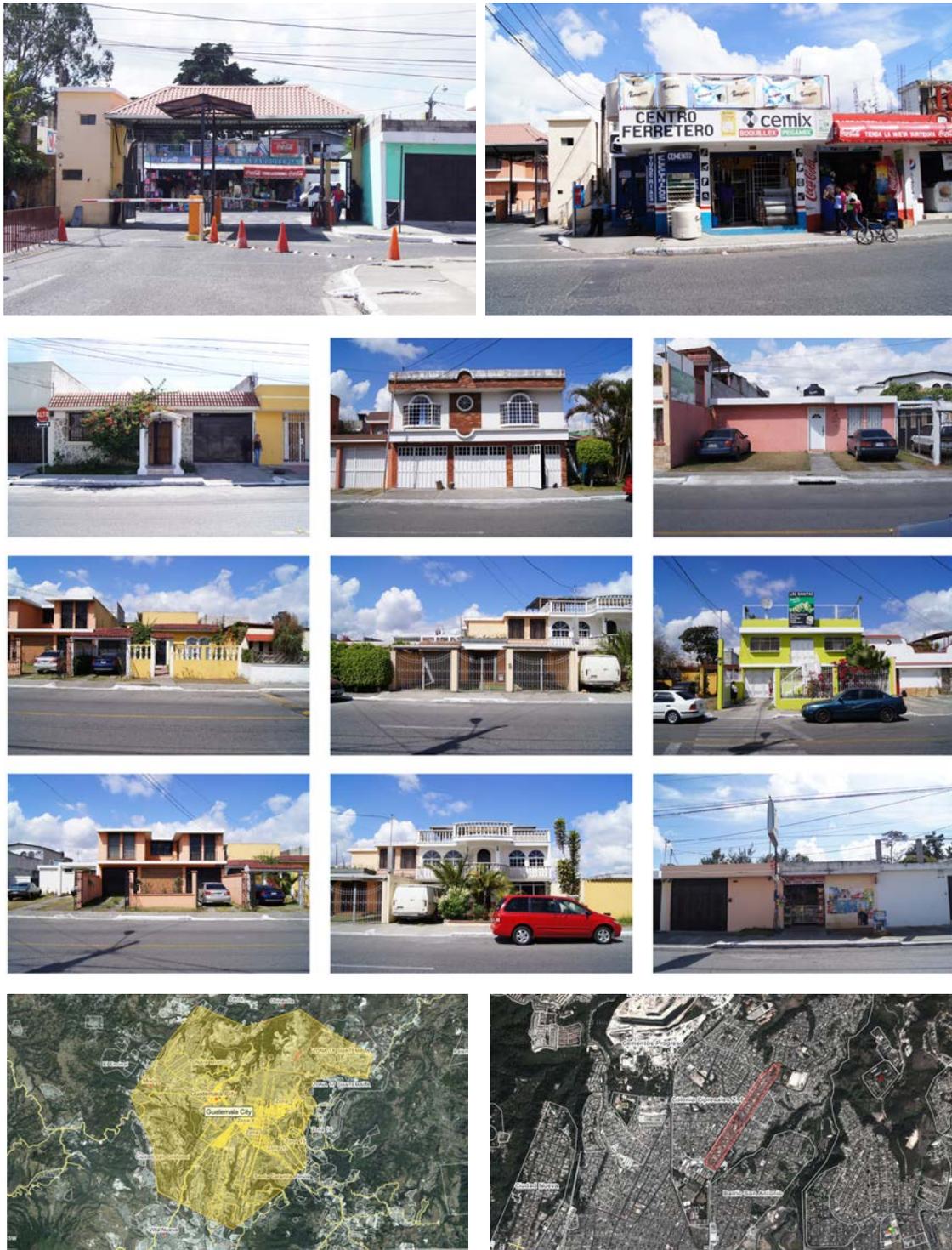
**Spatial dimension**

18. How do you feel about the (collective) facilities inside the residential? / Cuales son los servicios que hay en la residencial, que usted usa?
- Are there any facilities missing according to you? / Que servicios considera usted que deben presentarse dentro de la residencial?
  - And why? / Y porque?
19. How do you feel about the gates of this residential? / Que piensa usted de los puertas para entrar en este residencial?
- Why? / Y porque?

**Photo's (see next pages)**

- What do you see here in these photos? / Que es lo que ve aqui en estas photos?
- Can you see differences? / Puede ver diferencias?
- Do you like these places? / Le gusta estos dos lugares?
- What do you like about them? / Que es, lo que le gusta?

Photos Residenciales Cipresales as used during the interview



**Photos Alamedas de Villaflores as used during the interview**



