

GATED COMMUNITIES IN BRAZIL: AN URBAN SIMULACRUM

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Abstract. This article aims to understand and discuss how urban space has been transformed through the virtualization of the city in the housing segment, specifically the gated community in Brazil, favoring the fragmentation of the city, and with that, dismembering the collective in favor of the individualism of a privileged portion. Baudrillard's concepts about simulacrum and simulations were the central point in understanding these urban environments that synthesize and simplify the city's reality, by denying the rest of the city in favor of a simulated reality. To achieve the proposed objective, this research carried out a bibliographic review of articles and books from national and international literature related to the topic and in searches on Google Scholar, Scientific Electronic Library Online (SciELO) and through book acquisition.

Keywords. Urban Space, Urban Simulacrum, Gated Community, Spatial Segregation

1. Introduction

The understanding of simulacrum and simulations in this article follows the concepts listed by [1] according to which gated communities constitute urban simulacra, as they are configured as a simulation of reality from the moment residences, businesses and services analogous to those in the city are reconstituted within a closed community.

As a result of the context presented, this article aims to understand and discuss how urban space has been transformed through the virtualization of the city in the housing segment, specifically the gated community, favoring the fragmentation of the city, and thus, dismembering the community. in favor of the individualism of a privileged portion.

The method used in this research was a bibliographic review of articles and books from national and international literature related to the subject and found in searches on Google Scholar, Scientific Electronic Library Online (SciELO) and through the acquisition of books. The exploratory study was used to characterize this work, as it allows a better approach to the topic addressed. This type of research allows hypotheses to be formulated and new perspectives on the subject to be revealed [10]

The current phenomenon of idealized cities has brought important questions and changes in urban space. The fantasy city, or simulacrum city, is not a new term, but it has been in the spotlight in recent researches due to the effect it has caused between

the built space and social life in the contemporary metropolis. This is an urban space that can be analyzed based on various dynamics, as a set of points, lines and areas, the perception that some segments have of the space in which they live or as a spatial form interconnected to the social structure, processes and urban functions. The focus of this article is on the latter, adding the symbolic perception of these articulations.

2. Urbanization and Urban Space

According to [13] the diversity in the meanings of urbanization:

"[...] is a consequence, on the one hand, of the variety of professionals who deal with the problem at hand, each of them receiving different training and highlighting one aspect of this multifaceted process. On the other hand, we remember that this expression has already been appropriated by society, at the level of common sense, often emptying its conceptual content." [13](p3)

The concept of urban space can be understood as fragmented and articulated, a social reflection and conditioning, a set of symbols and a field of struggles, that is, diverse spatial relations with variable intensity that [...] "are empirically manifested through flows of vehicles and people associated with the loading and unloading of goods, with daily movements between residential areas and the various workplaces [...]" 3(p7).

Professionals in Engineering and Architecture view and work on urbanization in different ways. Engineers work on infrastructure in urban spaces, such as road systems, leisure areas, etc. Architects and Urban Planners will be concerned with analyzing the architectural configurations that are part of the urban space, focusing on urban forms and their functions within the urban territory [13].

In the capitalist view, this articulation is less visible, through spatial relations encompassing decisions and investments of capital, surplus value, power and ideology. This social relationship dynamizes class society and its processes, segregating the city through capital and with repercussions in the past that are imprinted on the spatial forms of the present [3].

One of the important processes to be described is residential segregation, defined as a concentration of population types within one side of the territory that ends up characterizing the city and assumes new spatial dimensions [3]. These spatial dimensions portray the differential capacity of each social group to pay for the residence they occupy, with different characteristics depending on the location and type of housing, comfort, quality, accessibility and amenities that will be reflected in the price of the land.

The other side of the coin is imposed segregation, in which low-income social groups have no choice of where to establish their residence, reinforcing the unequal form of social housing, such as popular housing complexes in locations further away from the city center.

3. Urban simulacrum and its effects

The 20th century French thinker Jean Baudrillard introduced the term simulacrum where symbols and signs replace all material reality with virtual simulacra, which when absorbed by everyone in everyday life, transform everything from the closest to the most remote. According to [9] simulacra are "[...] all types of stereotypes, models, whose meaning works by itself, without the need for a physical or factual referent. They are signs or images with their own meanings, producing autonomous realities beyond the actual reality" 9(p.2).

The evolution of information technology allows us to experience a version of reality, a model or simulacrum. Reality is more real and interesting through cell phone or television screens than in everyday life. Modern fiction is responsible for constructing imaginary worlds through metalanguage, where everything that exists does not actually exist [9].

It is important to note that simulation and simulacrum can be distinguished. Simulation is made up of something that is not entirely true - it does not allow for deception. However, simulacrum exceeds these models, assuming the role of lived reality itself.

It is a consented illusion:

"[...] as if the subject adopted a truth in which he does not completely believe, about which he cannot be absolutely certain, but which, for some convenience, takes the place of actual reality. In this way, the author (Baudrillard) proposes that simulacra are not just a false reality, much less a mere deception. They end up replacing reality, and for this very reason they diminish the importance of reality for the subjects" 7(p61).

Baudrillard exemplifies these questions using the great theme parks of the United States, such as Disneyland, which in his words is the "[...] perfect model of all kinds of confused simulations" 1(p20). For him, the park is the miniaturization of the real America, personifying its joys and limitations, the American values of the "*American way of life*":

"Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real, when all of Los Angeles and the America that surrounds it are no longer real, but rather part of the realm of the hyperreal and simulation. It is no longer a question of a false representation of reality (ideology), it is a question of hiding the fact that the real is no longer real and, therefore, safeguarding the reality principle" 1(p.21).

This theorization fits perfectly into the current trends of fragmentation of cities, through the expansion of gated communities with services and businesses reconfigured within the fortified walls of the enterprise and of *shopping centers* that reproduce the urban space with the aim of maximizing Capital through the State and agents of the dominant classes, as explained above [11].

4. Discussion

The issues raised in the previous topics are interrelated in the sense of transforming the lives of its inhabitants, causing social, political and economic ruptures in the built space. Quality of life has become a product, something that encompasses the main aspects of political economy such as "consumerism, tourism and the culture and knowledge industry" 5(p81).

What is highlighted is the risk of the city fading away in the face of an idealization of a city with adjectives, that is, qualified in a socially exclusive and environmentally harmful way in favor of an urban management agenda that benefits a portion of the population, disseminating:

"The idea that urban policies could enable cities to succeed in inter-urban competition. However, they reduce the dimension, scope and content of what can be considered urban policies to the mere condition of strategies for the insertion of the city in this competitive world; to build a relationship between the local and the global, according to logics that are in the interests of dominant groups, deconstructing the identities of the place and the effective interests

of the community 8" (p12).

A new pattern is then observed in modern social practices and the concretization of a consumption model that produces processes of unequal occupation of space, structuring the contemporary city. This structuring occurs through speculation and the real estate market, the consumer, leisure and security sectors, influencing new consumption patterns of the upper income classes [11].

This new pattern of relationship between public and private spaces encompasses various urban segments such as housing, commerce, culture and leisure. [2](p2) describes these segments in which "commerce is represented by *shopping centers* ; services, by business centers; culture and leisure, by cultural and entertainment centers; and housing by gated communities".

In order to exemplify the theory presented in this article, gated communities were used to discuss these articulations and fragmentations that affect the postmodern metropolis.

The horizontal or vertical gated community is not a recent idea; historically, the search for a harmonious society has been pursued since the Greek philosophers of the 5th century. However, it was in the 16th century that Thomas More theorized the Island of Utopia, placing the word "utopia" for the first time as the title of a literary genre that throughout history will give rise to important variations and meanings, inspiring thinkers of urban planning [4].

The thinking behind these developments is almost always related to abandoning or excluding some negative aspects of the city from coexistence. [12] (p149) argue that there is "[...] a denial of a reality through the idealization of living. Such forms of urbanization can be considered as anti-urban, given that the urbanity of the city can be denied in exchange for the achievement of individual well-being".

The main arguments used by the middle and upper classes to justify distancing themselves from the city center are violence and the poor quality of public services. The search for individual well-being through this way of living brings negative repercussions, such as the loss of the sense of collectivity, the feeling of integration and belonging of these residents towards the city [12].

One of the economic agents that operate in the built environment is the real estate market and the *marketing strategies* inherent to this field. They benefit from the varied demands of the city to delight the customer within an imaginary of a perfect city materialized in gated communities.

One of the symbolic strategies employed by the real estate market is the adjectives used to describe these developments using hyper-realistic computerized images and foreign names with no reference to the location, such as: "[...] *Residence, Club, Ville* or *Villa* [...]"

as well as symbolic markers of ecological appeal: *Brisa, Horto, Park*" 6(p137).

This pseudo-freedom, through sophisticated monitoring systems, private security and strict rules of conduct, takes on another dimension and scale. Simulacrum cities sell the illusion of well-being, comfort and security in a way of life alienated from the real city [6].

5. Conclusions

The gated community, understood as an urban simulacrum, denies the city as a place of exchange and struggle, causing a rupture in the inhabitants' sense of belonging.

This phenomenon generates socio-spatial segregation due to the instability of contemporary metropolises, marked by the breakdown of collectivity and public space, aggravated by the fragility of public power in regulating urban space.

This article aimed to highlight the effects of gated communities and their influence on the city as a fragmenting element of collective identity, where residents who enjoy this simulated space begin to deny the very city of which they are a part of.

Thus, drawing attention to the possibilities of materializing a future in which cities become fragmented in favor of an individualism that can hide public space, exacerbating social and economic inequalities.

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