PREFACE: NORDELTA, THE MAJOR GATED CITY IN LATIN AMERICA.

Buenos Aires’ inhabitants proudly introduce their city to visitors via the enumeration of records; Taking a taxi from the international airport to the city centre, everyone will get to know that the Plate River is the broadest one crossing an agglomeration in the southern hemisphere, or that the avenue 9th of July is the widest urban avenue crossing the densest CBD in South America. Since the late 1990s, the urban story of the Argentinean capital beat two more records: The widest metropolitan motorway on the subcontinent (16 lanes) unifies the dense city centre with Nordelta, Latin America’s largest gated city development. The so-called Town-Village Nordelta (CiudadPueblo) can be characterized as a counterpoint to the crude urban reality of the 14 million inhabitant mega-city, in which approximately 60 percent of the population live with a daily income lower than one euro.

“An avenue surrounded by palms. Great green areas and parks. Lime trees, spruces, willow-trees and magnolias. An enormous and silent water surface. And everything, what design and comfort could nowadays introduce
achieve a better life. A place like this does exist. And it is not at the end of
the world. It is exactly in the geographical centre of Nordelta. Its name is
*The Island*.

Nordelta Town-Village: The way to live better.

Nordelta, 2002

Although Nordelta is far away from being an isolated island, the marketing target
is based on selling an image of a grand, self-sufficient garden city completely
detached from the local and national economic and social setting. The 1.600 ha
development for about 80.000 inhabitants counts on huge sports facilities, own
private schools, a technical school and a private university, thereby offering a
whole range of education and sports activities. Despite of the proximity to
commercial and leisure facilities in the suburban setting, Nordelta has its own
Mall, Urban Entertainment Centre and also a Civic Centre as meeting point for the
growing population (see illustration 1). These spaces could be characterized as
areas which have a pseudo-public character: On first sight, they invite inhabitants
to a stay in a place which has access for everyone living inside Nordelta. But
giving it a closer look, they are also included in the surveillance circuit
announced in the publicity; Everything which is characterized as an unusual habit
will be detected: Mobile security cars remind people to stick to the rules., Every
point of the huge development is reached by service cars before no more than 90
seconds. As deduced from this argumentation, the existence of a public sphere is
impossible under such conditions. But beside this fact, common spaces are
required to create a local citizenship and to introduce social interactions which
otherwise would be impossible to realize due to the access controls towards each
of the almost 30 planned neighbourhoods inside Nordelta, eight of them being
already functional.
Illustration 1: Town-Village Nordelta, the major gated development in Latin America.

Analysing the wish to attain distinction and the citizenship building processes occurring in Nordelta, it is possible to outline that this is not only an official strategy of the real estate companies to improve the sale of the properties. Individuals living inside also follow a personal strategy in order to stress the change in the personal lifestyle which took place while moving to Nordelta. Many of the inhabitants define themselves as “Nordelteños”; in contrast to the local characterization of Buenos Aires inhabitants as “Porteños” (cfr. Janoschka 2002a, 90). Education institutions also stress the new way of live in their slogans, such as the catholic college Cardinal Pironio: “A new education for a new civilization”.

Although Nordelta is still the most complex and biggest private urban development in Latin America, it is important to note that with the exception of Cuba, gated and access-restricted neighbourhoods have become a key part of the real estate market throughout the whole continent. In this paper, the historical evolution and current importance of gated communities for Latin American city regions will be summarised and analysed. Discussion will focus on the reasons leading to the proliferation of access-restricted neighbourhoods within the urban context and the controversial question concerning urban insecurity. Due to the existing substantial differences within Latin America, a comparative analysis based on empirical evidence from the authors’ case studies in different cities and countries is required to characterize common aspects and divergences in development and diffusion of access-restricted neighbourhoods. This point will be discussed following a life-style based analysis derived from our empirical work with inhabitants of gated communities. The political consequences for local administration and social contract between different classes due to the expansion of this housing concept will be covered in the conclusion. The text will begin with a short introduction to the socio-political and urban transformation processes which caused the actual urban configuration in Latin America.
FROM THE POLARIZED CITY TO THE FRAGMENTED AGGLOMERATION: URBAN TRANSFORMATIONS IN LATIN AMERICA IN A GLOBALIZED WORLD

Massive changes have been taking place in Latin American societies since the early 1980s, when re-democratization processes started to replace the military regimes from one decade before. Regardless of whether the orientation of the new democratic governments was left-wing or conservative, capitalist and neo-liberal politics were implemented. At that time, we can determine the end of the development strategies employed from the post-war period, which were based on the substitution of importation by an internal industrialization. This industrialization was accompanied by restrictions of importations and active economic intervention of the public sector. From the 1980s this development strategy was changed towards an integration strategy in the world market with the subsequent reduction of tax barriers. Privatization of state-owned companies and former state-organized services and the attractiveness of the market led to a complete new orientation of Latin American economic activities. Foreign Direct Investment and the subjugation to open market laws led to a reduction of the importance of the public sector and in many countries, inducing a de-industrialization process due to the higher competitiveness of imported products. On a social sphere, some of the results of the neo-liberal economic trend were a substantial increase in social polarization (cfr. Ciccolella 1999) and the rise of unemployment despite the high economic growth rates which most Latin American countries had in the 1990s.

Since the finance market crisis of the late 1990s, Latin America’s economic panorama notoriously changed. With the exception of Chile and Mexico, the latter country profiting from NAFTA integration process with the USA and Canada, the dynamics of Latin American economies became negative: there were reverse capital flows from 1998 which are still negative nowadays. Economic growth has
been low and the income per capita has been slowly decreasing. Some countries such as Argentina, Uruguay or Venezuela suffered a strong economic depression accompanied by internal political problems. Under such conditions, social polarization has been raising at a higher rate in the last years (cfr. Ocampo 2003, Ruiz 2003).

In the urban context and especially in the last 15 years, it was possible to observe a rapid modernization process of the urban infrastructure, which was driven by foreign investment in many cases; This investment was concentrated on the one hand on basic urban services such as telephone or water provision, nowadays owned by international companies which provide an international standard for the middle and upper classes. However, more investment took place in urban elements which express the globalization of urban spaces, worldwide available installations justified by the growing importance of a leisure activity oriented lifestyle. These elements can be characterized as signs of post-modern urban development through their exclusive architecture and social target: the expansion and privatisation of motorways, private industrial parks and international hotel chains with integrated business facilities, shopping malls and hypermarkets, urban entertainment centres, multiplex cinemas and in the first line, gated and access-restricted residential quarters both in urban and suburban areas (cfr. Janoschka 2002b). The absence of state intervention in urban planning processes led to the fact, that the private investment was directed mostly towards excluding urban forms, based on private transportation: As a result, a new, car-based lifestyle flourished, causing a greater degree of fragmentation and spatial segregation. While in earlier decades urban growth was driven primarily by lower class’ migration processes from rural areas towards the cities, these patterns have changed from 1980s, since migration declined strongly. In the last two decades, urban expansion has been substantially a result of the major use of space per capita, chiefly driven by changes in residential areas of the upper and middle classes.
MODELLING THE FRAGMENTED AGGLOMERATION

Until the end of the internal development strategies in the 1980s, one of the basic principles of Latin American cities was the strong polarization of urban spaces. Differentiation in social status was heavily bound to the localization within the city. Urban space was divided in polarized sectors such as the rich city and the poor city (cfr. Gilbert 1998). This tendency changed during the last two decades: Settlements of poor and rich people got closer to one another due to occupation of suburban and former poor areas by high income population and also related to the installation of poor families in abandoned, formerly homogeneous, middle and upper class spaces. This process is accompanied by a strong delimitation of small areas, often through private security services. An easy explanation can be given on gated communities: They are homogeneous, highly segregated and protected areas; like islands inside the urban neighbourhood and promoting the physical fragmentation of urban space (Sabatini, Caceres and Cerda 2001; Parnreiter 2004, see Illustration 2). This is a basic observation for the development of the new model of the Latin American urban agglomeration.
Illustration 2: Fragmented urban space in the suburban municipality Pilar in Buenos Aires.

Analysing the term “model” from a geographical or urban point of view, it is possible to distinguish three basic and different connotations. On the one hand, city models can be a constructive utopia – a vision or Leitbild for further urban
development just as it was the modern city in its time or the garden city movement. On the other hand, a city model can also be a product from a deductive logic and be the result of theoretical studies just as we knew the work of Christaller or Thünen (cfr. Borsdorf 1999). Finally, a model can also be the reduction of the huge urban complexity to provide a better understanding of a type of city (cfr. Borsdorf, Bähr and Janoschka 2002). Regional city models, from the urban models of the Chicago school (Burgess 1925, Hoyt 1939, Harris/Ullmann 1945) until latest work of authors such as Dear (2000) or Soja (2000) use the latter approach of the term and try to analyse social behaviour through the modelling of city structures. In the US but also in Germany, from the 1970s until today, discussion about the Latin American city structure and the possibilities to catch the most important elements in a model is a hot spot in urban investigation. In 1976, German geographers Bähr and Borsdorf published two independent models of the Latin American city structure which were the starting point for an intense discussion in Europe and North America (Griffin/Ford 1980, Gormsen 1981, Deler 1992, Crowley 1995, Bähr/Mertins 1981, Borsdorf 1982).

The dramatic transformations which occurred in Latin American city regions from the 1980s, were just reflected through new theoretical impacts by Ford (1996), Meyer/Bähr (2001) and Borsdorf (2002a) who redesigned the traditional models or developed new models (Janoschka 2002b, 2002c), derived from latest empirical data. Studying these designs, Bähr, Borsdorf and Janoschka (2002) updated their investigations with a new common model which integrated the different arguments of the three authors (see Illustration 3). Using a time schedule, the city development in Latin America is characterized in four phases which correspond to different modes of state interaction (urban planning) on the real estate market.
Illustration 3: The Model of the actual Latin American city structure.

Source: Borsdorf, Bähr and Janoschka 2002; adapted.

The model stems from the observation that the different phases of urban development are characterized through different key principles of structuring and urban policies. In the early phase, the colonial time, this principle was the compactness of the urban body and a decreasing social gradient as it relates to an increasing distance from the central plaza. The argument for the representation of social status was to be close to the plaza due to the central social and political functions concentrated there. This urban model gained importance due to the royal instructions for the foundation of cities, the subsequent implementation of the most important functions in and around the central plaza and also the installation of the colonial elite around the plaza.
After independence, linear structures began to gain importance. Upper classes moved into new houses in the main street – the Prado. Along the most important streets, settlement of gardening or handwork activities and later on of the first industrial activities is observable. These sectoral patterns did not completely change the older ring structure, but did strongly transform the urban structure.

From 1930 onwards movement from rural areas to urban centres caused a strong population increase, the agglomeration process being accompanied by the polarization between rich and poor areas; an urban development which can be characterized as typical for the modern industrial city (Marcuse 1989). The upper class areas transferred from the centre towards suburban areas. But the main impact for the growth of the Latin American cities was the expansion of poor neighbourhoods. Urban politics got more and more unable to set the guidelines for urban development – not only due to the high growth rates but also because of corrupt and polemic policies which alternated with authoritarian regimes during phases of dictatorships. The former sectoral principle of urban growth kept intact but was overlaid by the polarization principle. Only some time later, a process of cell-type growth began in the peripheries: in suburban or outer urban areas, neighbourhoods for social housing were built such as illegal marginal areas (favelas, villas miseria). Thereby a cellular principle began to gain importance already in that time.

During the last two decades, urban expansion has followed again a different scheme. The following aspects can be characterized as driving forces of the urban development (cfr. Janoschka 2002c, 65f):

- Gated communities for the upper and middle classes appearing in the whole metropolitan area. This fact is breaking with the principle of a sectoral implementation of the upper class areas;
The dispersion of malls, shopping centres and urban entertainment centres in the whole agglomeration and not only in the upper class sector;

The trend to build gated communities occupying a larger area and integrating more and more urban functions. Complexity and size of lots of major gated communities are passing the level of small cities, as observed in São Paulo, Buenos Aires but also in smaller cities such as Córdoba, Argentina;

The key role of transportation infrastructure; proximity to a motorway entrance is the most important principle for real estate prices and attractiveness of detached suburban housing areas;

The suburbanization of the industrial production and the location in peripheral industrial or business parks or centres of logistic activities;

Higher grades of avoidance/impossibility to enter areas of lower social groups and marginal areas through walls or informal ways of supervision.

The new scheme of the Latin American city structure responds to the criticism by the development of a new theoretical approach. A basic spatial factor for the implementation of the new fragmentary and nodal urban structures is the transformation of the transport system; and specially the motorways from being insufficient and saturated to modern and effective ones. This has been made possible by private investment: So the baseline for the private and privatising urban development in the neo-liberal political and economic system has been a private inversion which responds to the necessities of the real estate market. Only this modernization and the strong reduction in commuting time make suburban locations really interesting for middle and upper classes due to their time restrictions.

The second important principle of structuring also follows the guideline of post-modern urban development: The cellular elements in the periphery (in former
times predominantly related to marginal areas) are becoming more integrated in the market sphere and turn increasingly interesting investment areas for real estate enterprises. Another element of fragmentation has to be analysed through the tendencies of allocation of functional spatial units. This is remarkable in the retail sector: Although the urban centres gain new importance due to renovation programs and other upgrading intervention, they cannot compete with suburban malls, which represent a north-American lifestyle of rising interest. Social exclusion works here not through the construction of walls, but by accessibility: These islands of consume and leisure only have access by car and exclude everyone which cannot participate in private transport. Whilst the first malls were clearly oriented to the upper class market in the urban upper class sector, such facilities are currently found in the whole urban area due to dispersion of the upper and middle class population. Poorer areas also have transformed during the last decades: The marginal areas have been integrated in the urban space – and in some cases they entered an upgrading process. On the other hand, there are numerous cases of marginal areas which kept without any integration and are currently almost inaccessible nodes of criminality. Discussion of the transformation of the Latin American city structure shows, that the desire of distinction through enclosure of the vicinity and inaccessibility is not only a preference of the population with high income, but a general societal principle. In order to understand it, a historical approach of the rise and diffusion of gated residential neighbourhoods will be presented.

GATED RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBOURHOODS IN LATIN AMERICA: A HISTORICAL APPROACH.

The actual discussion about gated communities is dominated by the characterization of the new aspects of the urban dynamics (Meyer/Bähr 2001; Coy/Pöhler 2002) and the growing importance of a north-American dominated life-style due to the already described processes. Globalization and the fear for criminality are two central arguments used for explaining the proliferation of
gated communities. These aspects cannot be neglected, but analysing the appearance of gates in the urban context from a historical point of view, it is possible to find an important line of dependence of the actual processes in the typical behaviour of the Latin American elites through decades and centuries.

Analysing the urban configuration of the Spanish colonial cities in Latin America, it is certain that the traditional urban structure was based on an open integration in the landscape without city walls. But this openness was accompanied by a strong internal closure. The residential buildings – atrium houses with internal patios - were closed towards the street with heavy wooden doors; and until the mid 19th century the windows were small and in a location that guarantied privacy. Even inside the buildings, different grades of segregation and privacy were established: Guests never had access to the second or third patio which was reserved for women or garden activities (cfr. Borsdorf 2002b). These houses were not gated communities in the actual definition due to the fact that they only consist of one housing unit. But also in the colonial époque, the existence of enclosed neighbourhoods which were accessible for the inhabitants (in those cases widows, orphans or priests) are reported from cities such as Santa Catalina in Arequipa or the Hospitolio Cabañas in Guadalajara (cfr. Borsdorf 2002b, 239). During the 19th century, another form of access-restricted neighbourhood was funded: company towns for the workers and employees of mining companies, highly segregated and in many cases walled or at least without public accessibility. All these examples may be convincing to show the principle of gating in Latin American cities through the history, but still do not differ so much from what is known from European cities.

The first real precursor of the closed neighbourhood, becoming a more and more important part of the real estate market, was the installation of poor households in the described atrium houses in the central areas. This occurred from the late 19th century, when the owner of such houses moved towards the latest high-standing
areas of the expansive city. The single-family atrium house was subdivided, and each room was rented to a low income family. This transformation occurred in all bigger Latin American cities; these housing areas were called *Tugurios* in Peru or *Vecindades* in Mexico. In Chile and Argentina the name of *Conventillo* semantically reminds to the concept of the already mentioned convent. The wooden entry gate of the former patio house was transformed in a 24-hour, guarded entrance to prevent the access of new neighbours without paying rent. When the historical building stock was filled, this kind of structure was also reproduced in new lower income areas; for example in Chile during the 1920 and 1930s or in Mexico until the early 1950s. Hidalgo (1999) and Rovira (2002) pointed out the proximity of these neighbourhoods with gated communities of lower income groups in the late 20th century. In a context of political instability, military regimes and the later loss of state control, the gated communities of these groups become comprehensible in their actual form and historic development. A parallelism occurs with many slum areas in the outskirts, called *Favela* in Brazil or *Villa miseria* in Argentina. In most cases, the origins of these settlements which sprawled in Latin America from the 1950s are at least irregular or even illegal. This lack of legality led to a series of hard state interventions such as evacuations and massive destructions in the 1960s and 1970s. This fact, which was accompanied by a rising criminalization of these areas (headquarters of drug dealing, organized criminality etc.) induced an internal organization structure that prevents the access to persons which do not live inside. Although in a strict sense, these areas should not be called gated community – the effect is very similar to the gate: The public cannot enter.

Analysing the evolution of gated communities for the upper classes, it is also possible to find a historical predecessor in earlier developmental stages. Many authors suggested the origin of the ‘wealthy’ gated communities as based on the model of Country Clubs or Golf Clubs: Borsdorf (2002b) describes the case of Mexico-City, where at the beginning of the 20th century, Golf was imported by
wealthy English immigrants and became rapidly popular in the European upper class. In the case of Buenos Aires, the first Country Clubs were installed in the early 1930s; also emulating the life-style of the English-oriented bourgeoisie (cfr. Janoschka 2002d). In the moment of their foundation, such clubs were still far away from the city; but the rapid growth of the agglomeration made them forming part of the urban core during the second half of the 20th century. By that time, those clubs decided to guard their area and secure the entrance due to the incorporation in the growing urban space and the low occupation during the week. Until the early 1970s, the number of those clubs was still low and clubs were mostly used for vacation and week-end activities. From that moment, a first increase with a rising diffusion of Clubs is observable. As an example, about 70 Country Clubs for the upper and upper middle class were found in Buenos Aires in mid 1980s, mainly bound to sports activities in a quasi natural environment.

THE SPREAD OF GATED RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBOURHOODS IN THE LAST TWO DECADES.

The described pre-forms of gated neighbourhoods may vary in many features from what it is nowadays found, but there is still one persistent aspect. Advertisement remains focusing towards connecting the gated housing area with an elitist life-style – quotations from Nordelta publicity leaflets show it clearly from the beginning of the text. This elitist style comes apart with a definition and identification of the Latin American upper classes outside their countries: first and until the mid 20th century in Europe and nowadays in North America. Many advertisements, especially in Colombia and Brazil, are oriented towards achieving this target. Photos of and remarks about the life-style in Miami accompany the discourse of fear and insecurity which is especially strong in those two countries. The result is the construction of a habitat which is far from the local scene and
evokes a natural environment including a range of temperate zone plant species inexistent in Latin America.

Within the massive proliferation of gated neighbourhoods which occurs in most Latin American city regions in current times, there is a necessity to structure the different structural forms as done with the model approach. A typology of these developments begins with a problematic definition; Throughout Latin America a range of names to call different types of gated housing complexes exists. Often the meaning of the same word may substantially vary according to different countries. Condomínio fechado (Brazil), Barrio Privado (Argentina) or Fraccionamiento Cerrado (Mexico) stand for different products of the real estate market in the different countries; and even the term Barrio Cerrado (closed neighbourhood) which is used in various countries such as Chile, Ecuador or Bolivia, has a wide range of meanings. Therefore this text deals with the English terms.

Three main types of gated neighbourhoods can be differentiated as described in the model of the Latin American city structure; using only aspects such as structure, location and size. The three groups consist of:

- **Urban gated communities**, which can be defined as groups of attached houses or even towers or skyscrapers without many facilities. The target of these developments may be on one hand middle or lower middle class families in intermediate locations (even social housing projects) or upper middle to upper class families in central areas on the other hand. This concept also involves the massive enclosure of existing areas, in most cases high standing single-family housing areas in central or intermediate locations.

- **Suburban gated communities**, predominantly for the middle and upper classes with single detached houses. These developments share wide areas
for common sports facilities. In case of location in the periphery, suburban
gated communities without common facilities may be oriented to lower
middle class income groups.

- Mega-projects with integrated cultural and educational facilities. Although
  there are still only a few of these projects, the dynamics and the
  internationalization of the real estate market make this segment the most
  rapid growing one.

The recent boom of gated communities can be recognized all over Latin America:
Between 1990 and 2001, only in Mexico City around 750 new gated
neighbourhoods with almost 50,000 housing units were lanced on the market
(Parnreiter 2004). In the Argentinean capital Buenos Aires, more than 450
suburban gated communities exist – 80 per cent of them began the
commercialization between 1995 and 2001. A dozen private neighbourhoods
reach a size of more than 5,000 inhabitants (Janoschka 2002a). To this figure, an
unknown number of urban gated communities known as Garden-towers (Torre
Jardin, cfr. Welch 2002) must be added in Argentina. In 2002, more than 130 of
these Garden-towers were listed in the local newspapers as offering new
apartments; the quantity of pre-existing stock is unknown. Estimation of the total
population may range between 300,000 to 600,000 persons. In another example,
Pöhler (1999) estimates that more than 100,000 people live in condomínios
fechados in Rio de Janeiro’s upper class and beach-oriented city expansion area
called Barra da Tijuca. Brazil’s financial centre and mega-city São Paulo also
counts on a mega-project, ‘Alphaville’ with around 35,000 inhabitants and more
than 100,000 people working inside the gates. Gated communities also diffused to
secondary cities such as Córdoba, Argentina (1.3 million inhabitants). Within the
metropolitan area there are more then 50 gated residential developments, one of
them Valle Escondido (Hidden Valley), promoted with the slogan: - “The new
city”-, which offers a cluster of different gated communities for a total population
of approximately 25,000 inhabitants (Roca 2001, ECIPSA 2003). Research data
for Curitiba in Brazil estimate the number of gated communities in about 300.
Similar situations can be found in most big Latin American cities. In medium size cities (< 500,000 inhabitants) and in some cases even in small towns (for example Gualeguaychú, Entre Rios, Argentina), gated communities also become more and more common.

The market share of gated housing complexes is extremely difficult to estimate, not only due to the substantial differences between the countries. There are poor statistical data concerning the construction sector and in most cases differentiation between the products is not clearly specified. For the case of Buenos Aires, own calculations are about 100,000 units in the suburban gated communities. In relation to the whole housing stock, which is about 3 million, the market share represents not more than three per cent. But considering only the proportion of suburban housing, the market share already rises to 10 per cent. If the calculation is based on the demand group (which are the upper 15-20 per cent of the population, equivalent to 450,000 households), these 100,000 units represent between 20 and 25 per cent of the market share. To these figures it should be added the number of ‘quasi’ gated communities (streets and neighbourhoods with strong vigilance and closure of access during the night or posterior enclosed neighbourhoods) which do not appear as those in the open real estate market. And also at the other end of the social pyramid, for example social housing projects from the 1970s which nowadays are walled and gate-guarded; or the whole range of areas which are inaccessible due to internal organization and predominance of criminal structures. As a summary, it is a fact that in Buenos Aires, the market for single detached houses or lots for construction of detached houses in suburban location predominantly refers to gated communities. During the period of macroeconomic stability from 1991 to 2001, between 80 and 90 per cent of the urban expansion was related to the expansion of gated communities.
URBAN INSECURITY: A REASON FOR THE SPREAD OF GATED RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBOURHOODS?

According to an important part of the literature, the spreading of gated neighbourhoods in general and specially in Latin American city regions is closely related to two reasons: (1.) the globalization process and (2.) rising insecurity in the city regions. The argumentation presented before showed that despite of the ongoing globalization processes and the insertion of the Latin American economies in the global market sphere, the urban configuration keeps being different from other world regions. The proliferation of gated communities started in most urban areas long before politic decisions led to a rising internationalization of the economic activities and the integration to the world market. Neither globalization nor Americanization of the local societies can explain the peculiar rise in gated housing areas in the Latin American cities.

Justifying the phenomena by the second reason seems highly convincing at a first sight: Superficially, a time parallelism exist between the socio-economic transformations in most Latin American societies which led to a substantial rise of urban insecurity in the major city regions and the proliferation of enclosed neighbourhoods (Caldeira 2000, Dammert 2001). The development of gated housing complexes seems to be a logical solution not only for the richest parts of the population, but also for everyone as an obvious consequence of the rising criminality. This argument is based on the hypothesis that there is a direct, positive correlation between the use of security mechanisms and the diffusion of gated communities. The argument involves a double false conclusion: Firstly, the difference between real criminality and subjective insecurity has to be explained (cfr. Beckett 1997, Reuband 1999). The crime rate is only one among several factors which have an effect on the fear of criminality. The investigation on the social behaviour in Argentina and other countries carried out by the authors show that media (especially television and newspapers) play an important role in the development of the fear for crime. It is also revealing to think about the reliability
of crime statistics; crime is very hard to compare between different geographical units and different moments (cfr. Janoschka/Glasze 2003). On the other hand, empirical data from several studies in Latin America show that the concern for criminality cannot fully explain why people move to a gated neighbourhood. The exception is Colombia, where about 40.000 murders per year are committed by violence and the internal political conflicts. However, in all other cases there are more important reasons than violence in itself. Between different countries and cities, the significance of the fear of violence varies. As Caldeira (2000) proves for the case of São Paulo, Brazil, urban violence reaches such high values, that most of the inhabitants of gated communities had direct experience with some kind of criminality before making the decision to move inside the gates. This experience is comparable in several big Brazilian cities and also in Mexico-City. But in the rest of the city regions in the hemisphere, the approach is strongly different as the following example of the analysis of biographical interviews with inhabitants of Nordelta in Buenos Aires shows: Despite of the media discourse and the selling regime, which stress the fear for crime, the inhabitants of the private city do not mention these factors as key for the decision making process. There are several aspects which are more important for the new inhabitants of Nordelta and playing a greater role for the decision to move in a privately organized neighbourhood:

- The political and economic insecurity accompanied by the incapacity of the state to organize urban services and social infrastructure.
- The changed urban and suburban environment due to the private investment: On the one hand, suburban spaces became more interesting because of the improvement in infrastructure (motorways, private schools, shopping and entertainment facilities). On the other hand, the urban environment degraded due to densification, rising motorization and state retreat from maintenance of public spaces.
- The desire of a change in the personal life-style and the search for a homogeneous environment. The rise in social polarization leads to the wish to look for a more homogeneous environment in economic and life-
style oriented terms. Nordelta inhabitants are mainly between 35 and 40 years old and have one or several children. The idea is to gain space and time for the family and outdoor activities with the children. The decision to move into the private city is an option to change the life-style and guarantee a secured and known quality of urban space to the growing children. The package bought is not only the gated community, but also the possibility of high-standard education and future networks for the children – to guarantee in a certain way the long-term social standard of the family.

- Last but not least, the wish to achieve a new life-style is motivated by face-to-face propaganda, personal knowledge and group behaviour. Most people moving to Nordelta know from relatives and friends how life is organized in the gated neighbourhood. Some people even commented on friend group pressure as determinant for their decision – in certain social groups you are ‘out’ if you do not move to the suburban gated neighbourhood.

The mentioned aspects are only a small interpretation of the data collected in Nordelta and other gated neighbourhoods in Argentina (cfr. Janoschka 2002e). Empirical data from other Latin American cities such as Santiago de Chile, Mexico-City or Quito show similar arguments and trends: Despite of the huge differences in urban settings, social behaviour, socio-economic development between different countries in Latin America, the importance of the criminality is much lower than expected and in many cases irrelevant.

**EPILOGUE: CONSEQUENCES OF GATED NEIGHBOURHOODS FOR THE SOCIAL CONTRACT IN LATIN AMERICA**

The physical fragmentation processes analysed in this paper, have a serious impact on the quality and the understanding urban life. Inhabitants of Latin
American gated communities rapidly change their life-style and fully accommodate their daily habits inside access-restricted areas. Public spaces lose their basic role as points of interaction between different classes as each class organizes its own homogeneous space ‘inside’. This tendency rises with the growing surface and integration of complex urban functions inside the new private cities as shown in Nordelta. Subsequently, inhabitants live in bubbles which are detached from the local political and social environment. The central difference to former times is based in the fact that today every social class tries to escape from reality.

As explained in this text, Latin American elites did never orient towards their own society but followed life-styles imported from Europe and later from the US. A life behind walls and in gated neighbourhoods, leads gated neighbourhood inhabitants even more far away from the social reality of their ‘home’ society, which for the great majority of the population consists of struggling for survival. From this point of view, the proliferation of gated neighbourhoods is equivalent to a decrease in solidarity between different social groups. The discussed examples have shown that this attitude is a historical behaviour of the elites in Latin America which today dominates also middle and lower middle class population. During the last two decades, neither Latin American media nor urbanists, architects or political actors have interpreted the proliferation of gates within the city regions as a severe problem for the society. This is not astonishing since all these groups which are relevant for urban and economic progress, directly or indirectly benefit from the gated communities. With the exception of Brazil and Colombia, gated neighbourhoods are a product of a created insecurity, promoted by media and real estate companies – both gaining from the product they publish and announce. These two actors concentrate sufficient economic power to disable local and regional governments to fulfil the laws and act against gated communities. As politics in Latin America are not equivalent to the implementation of the citizens’ desire but the realization of particular interests, gated communities represent the perfection of Latin American traditions applied
by the regional elite. Only recently and in the light of the actual crisis a re-thinking process started, in which the negative consequences of urban disintegration through gated neighbourhoods were evaluated. The announcement from urban government in La Paz, Bolivia to open by force a dozen gated neighbourhoods to the public in March of 2003 sows the hope that changes in urban policies may be possible in the future. Credible politicians and active civic participation are required to increase the public awareness towards urban but also social problems.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


