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Planned Socio-Spatial Fragmentation: The Normalisation of Gated Communities in Two Mexican Metropolises

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Abstract

Mexican metropolises, like many others in Latin America, are facing complex challenges connected to rapid urbanisation and population growth. Local governments struggle to provide the necessary infrastructure, housing, security, and basic services in a highly divided—socially and spatially—urban realm. Socio-spatial fragmentation in cities like Guadalajara and Puebla has existed since their foundations in the 16th century, as planning guidelines in the *Laws of the Indies* established differentiated rules for Spaniards and indigenous people. However, in recent decades, neoliberal planning and housing policy reforms, the consolidation of the real estate market, growing crime and violence, and socioeconomic disparities have contributed to more tangible forms of planned socio-spatial fragmentation, such as gated communities. This work discusses how policies and social practices have led to the normalisation of these fortified enclaves in the metropolises of Guadalajara and Puebla, whose capital cities are preparing to celebrate their 500th anniversaries in a context of conflict, loss of shared space, insecurity, and social inequalities. The work is based on a comprehensive review of national and local planning and housing policies, a historical and cartographic analysis of neighbourhood development, and qualitative research in Puebla over a decade, along with similar work in Guadalajara in the last couple of years. The relevance of this work lies in identifying the role of planning in the production of fragmented urban structures and visualising the possibilities for more inclusive solutions.

Keywords

gated communities; Guadalajara; Mexico; planning; Puebla; socio-spatial fragmentation

1. Introduction

Discussions around socio-spatial segregation have persisted in Latin American urban studies since the 1970s (González, 1989; S. Jaramillo, 1979, 1996; Rolnik, 1994; Sabatini, 2006). Literature on gated communities emerged in the global north in the early 1990s, but in Latin America, Caldeira's book *City of Walls* (2000), which describes fear and segregation in São Paulo, Brazil, is one of the region's earliest and most relevant works. Since then, a growing body of literature has concentrated on the negative urban, social, and environmental impacts and the drivers behind these enclaves. However, the academic debate has not hindered the production of these fortified residences in the region. Some consider these spaces will be part of our urban landscape for a long time (Roitman, 2010); therefore, planners and policymakers can embrace the lessons that have come to light since their emergence and proliferation and use this knowledge to accomplish more inclusive and equitable cities.

This article explores the recent proliferation of gated communities in two of the most important metropolises in Mexico: Guadalajara and Puebla. Both cities were founded almost 500 years ago following social and spatial differentiation guidelines. In Mexico, socio-spatial fragmentation did not start with gated communities; fortified architecture, spatial segregation, and social differentiation have been central in the evolution of its cities and society. The accelerated urban sprawl of the last four decades has sharpened these distinctions, particularly around gated communities where physical barriers and social exclusionary practices are standard, while shared public spaces where different social groups could coexist in the past are almost extinct. These metropolises are economically, historically, and socially relevant to Mexico, but they face enormous governance and functionality challenges due to planned fragmented urban and housing solutions.

The article is organised into five sections. The first section presents a general conceptualisation of socio-spatial fragmentation. The second section describes the materials and methods used for this work. The third section is a historical review of the evolution from planned neighbourhoods to gated communities in the Mexican context. The fourth section analyses the origins and challenges of planned fragmentation and the normalisation of gated communities in Puebla and Guadalajara. The final section presents the conclusions and a brief policy recommendation.

2. Conceptualising Socio-Spatial Fragmentation

In recent years, many scholars in Mexico and other countries in Latin America have focused their work on various aspects of social segregation and urban exclusion (Caprón & Esquivel Hernández, 2016; Duhau, 2013; Monkkonen, 2012; Pérez-Campuzano, 2011). This work focuses on fragmentation instead of segregation because "segregation is intended to signal the division of different social classes, which are not necessarily circumscribed by some physical element that delimits them territorially" (Alvarado Rosas & Di Castro Stringher, 2013, p. 17). The research behind this article goes beyond separation by classes; it aims to understand the connections between planning policies and physical barriers, financial decisions, social practices, aspirations, legislation, and infrastructure. The fragmented city is shaped by multiple levels of segmentation, interaction, and differentiation (Harrison et al., 2003), as well as global and local articulations and disarticulations. Gated communities are examples of socio-spatial fragmentation because they encompass all these layers and convey multiple spatial challenges.

Massey anticipated in the mid-1990s that a "new age of extremes" was upon us and that in the future—talking about the 21st century—the affluent and the poor would live and interact only with others like themselves, and "the advantages and disadvantages of one's class position in society will be compounded and reinforced by a systematic process of geographic concentration" (Massey, 1996, p. 409). That vision proved correct, as pockets of wealth and poverty define modern urban arrangements; however, there are differences between regions. The Latin American urbanisation process in the last decades has been scattered and fragmented (Cabrales Barajas, 2004). In this region, urban space can be "socially mixed at a neighbourhood scale, but also more spatially and socially fragmented at the block and street level" (Thibert & Osorio, 2014, p. 1325). This means that there might be spatial proximity between neighbourhoods, yet socially and functionally separated. Thibert and Osorio (2014, p. 1325) claim that "there is evidence that income polarisation and urban restructuring may be associated with an increase in urban fragmentation"; wealthy residents might be spatially close to lower-income groups and still isolated from them.

Socio-spatial fragmentation in Latin American metropolises is also connected to formal and informal urbanisation processes in peripheral land. The informal settlements that appeared during the late 1970s in most Mexican cities' peripheries concentrated low-income families isolated from the benefits of the city. However, these same peripheries received in the 1990s middle- and high-income private developments supported by neoliberal economic policies such as the deregulation of planning and land tenure regulations, the liberalisation of the housing market, and the presence of global financial investments (Morales, 2016). Gated communities became a profitable option because there was a growing demand for a more exclusive lifestyle, but also because the new housing units were surrounded by contrasting urban and sometimes rural surroundings. The new developments provided isolation, privatised open spaces, and facilitated the use of personal automobiles to avoid the inconveniences of the immediate context.

The discussions about gated communities have thrived since the 1990s. Libertun de Duren (2022, p. 100) considers that "today, these walled and privately developed, managed, and policed low-density residential complexes are ubiquitous features of the sprawling metropolis of the region." However, these enclaves are not homogeneous; there are differences between countries and cities. For example, Kostenwein (2021) presents different types of gated communities, including high-density multi-storey buildings that are common in Bogotá, Colombia, while Cabrales Barajas (2004) and Borsdorf and Hidalgo (2010) present examples of low-density options outside the central urban areas, including megaprojects with transnational investment. The gating of modern cities is a symptom of a more complex phenomenon, as Low (2006) discusses in her framework of a "theory of urban fragmentation." The author compares 12 dimensions in three different regions and suggests that there might be differences between them; for example, in Latin America, the role of neoliberal policies, crime rates, and volatile environments are distinctive, but the logic of fragmentation is the same. The challenge is to address the conditions that create social and spatial connections and disconnections. Prévôt Schapira (2001) argues that fragmentation in the Latin American region is connected to the accelerated urban growth process shaped by market liberalisation, informality, unemployment, and urban poverty. However, the gating process in each city changes depending on the different incentives and limitations.

Spatial fragmentation is visible in sprawling cities because mega blocks affect permeability and connectivity and because the landscape is often shaped by gates and walls that protect residential compounds and privatised public spaces (Borsdorf & Hidalgo, 2010; Sobreira & Gomes, 2001; Zaninetti, 2010). The territory is built of "fragments" and "fissures" (Alvarado Rosas & Di Castro Stringher, 2013) that extend beyond the

walls. There are notable differences between housing quality, roads, urban furniture, facilities, and infrastructure in wealthy and poor neighbourhoods. Fragmentation is not limited to residential compounds; there are examples in transit, work, retail, and leisure (Janoschka, 2002). This shows that this fragmented urbanisation model is not an isolated effort; urban planning and policy implementation play a crucial role.

3. Materials and Methods

This work uses the cases of two Mexican metropolises—Puebla and Guadalajara—to explore how planning policies contribute to socio-spatial fragmentation, especially the normalisation of gated communities. It addresses questions such as: How is current socio-spatial fragmentation connected to the history of these cities? What is the connection between "planned" neighbourhoods and the fragmentation of the urban structure in both cases? Also, what are the main structural conditions that facilitated the emergence and normalisation of gated communities in these metro areas over the last decades?

The two capital cities in these metropolises will celebrate the 500 years of their foundation in the coming decades. In both cases, the cities come from a history of social and spatial differentiation but somehow managed to maintain shared spaces for public life. This article aims to identify the connections between this historical background, new policies and practices, and the metropolitan areas' current fragmented urban condition. The article combines the results from over a decade of the author's research in Puebla and recent work in Guadalajara in the last couple of years. The work is mainly qualitative, although some geostatistical information was analysed. The main methods were policy analysis to evaluate the background and outcomes of planning decisions, a thorough literature review to understand the evolution of urban development in both cases, semi-structured interviews to address the perceptions and experiences of different stakeholders, and multiple participant observation exercises in the past year to identify the main elements that contribute to socio-spatial fragmentation.

The comprehensive policy review in both cases included national, regional, metropolitan, and local housing and planning instruments, particularly those published in the last three decades. More than 20 semi-structured interviews were conducted with stakeholders, including city officials, policymakers, residents, and real estate agents, to understand the perceptions and experiences around gated communities. Documental analysis included a literature review of previous research on urban development in these cities and geostatistical information from the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI). Participant observation was conducted at different moments throughout the last year to observe changes and behaviours inside and around metropolitan gated communities in the municipalities of San Andrés Cholula and Ocoyucan in Puebla and Tlajomulco de Zúñiga and Zapopan around Guadalajara. The observation exercises also included visiting other central neighbourhoods with open street layouts to identify the differences. The observation was supported by photo documentation and notes describing specific social and spatial fragmentation examples and contrasted with historical cartography, satellite imagery, and geostatistical data.

4. Mexico's History of Planned Socio-Spatial Fragmentation

Physical borders, privatised open spaces, and fortified residential and commercial areas shape the urban landscape in most modern Mexican suburban neighbourhoods; however, spatial and social differentiation can be traced back to the foundation of most cities. For several decades, urban studies in Mexico focused on

irregular settlements and the relationship between the centre and peripheries. It was expected to read that lack of planning was the reason for such informality. However, Mexico has had planning guidelines since the 16th century. The *Laws of the Indies*, a compilation of laws by the Spanish Crown, included planning considerations for new settlements that regulated the territory and social and economic activities. Cities were seen as the "cultural transmission core" (Rojas Aguilera, 1977, p. 9); therefore, the Crown was eager to produce legislation to order and control the population (Rojas Aguilera, 1977). The most relevant planning guidelines come from the *Ordinances for the Discovery, New Settlements, and Pacification of the Indies*, issued by King Philip II of Spain in 1573. These ordinances assembled the thoughts of leading philosophers, architects, and humanists with some utopic Renaissance principles. The ordinances paid particular attention to the action of "populating," which shows that planning considered people and not just space, and the orthogonal urban grid that is common in most colonial Mexican cities can be seen as a technique to "domesticate" the territory (Rojas Aguilera, 1977).

Domestication of the territory has been at the root of planning policies that generate borders and urban fractures for centuries. For example, the Bourbon Reforms in the 18th century introduced new administrative measures that led to territorial control and neighbourhood differentiation (Delgadillo Guerrero & Hernández Ponce, 2019). Planned neighbourhoods or *colonias* developed during the Porfirian period in the late 19th century—a time of policies for progress and modernisation—aimed to satisfy the needs of the local bourgeoisie and newly arrived European and North American migrants. These neighbourhoods were used to upgrade cities to global standards by introducing infrastructure and services, including railroads, streetlights, sewerage, and elegant French-inspired buildings (Piccato, 1997). The Porfirian *colonias* were seen as spaces that would bring order and beauty to the city with the support of the private sector (see Figure 1); "private interests and public policies worked together in seeking to

Puebla

Guadalajara

Figure 1. Photographs of different types of *barrios*, *colonias*, and *fraccionamientos* in Puebla and Guadalajara: (a) Puebla's city centre (2023), (b) Fraccionamiento Jardines de San Manuel (2021), (c) Fraccionamiento Gran Reserva in Lomas de Angelópolis (2020), (d) Colonia Americana (2022), (e) Santa Teresita (2021), and (f) Club de Golf Santa Anita (2023). Photographs by the author.

preserve the spatial separation between classes" (Piccato, 1997, p. 80). The residential development during this period created a profitable real estate business, which benefited from creating differentiated urban solutions for the wealthiest population and facilitated the asymmetrical provision of infrastructure and services based on an urbanisation vision of order and hygiene, tools used to exclude the urban poor.

Residential fortification can be seen as the evolution of the planned neighbourhoods of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, as it responds to real estate market interests and enables spatial and social differentiation and segregation. The first affluent planned neighbourhoods did not have fences or gates to block access; however, they did have written and unwritten rules for social behaviour in public spaces as part of the civilised, hygienic, modern urban vision. The *colonias* of the early 20th century, with European and North American influence, were substituted by the *fraccionamientos* of the 1940s, in which the central government allowed developers to fraction land using functionalist planning principles and contribute to infrastructure investment. In essence, they are the same, privately led urbanisations, but in the latter case, the state overlooked that the developers delivered the basic infrastructure and social facilities for diverse socio-economic groups. Some of these *fraccionamientos*, particularly after the 1960s, introduced shopping malls and private leisure and sports clubs into their developments. The emergence of gated communities in the late 1960s was more noticeable in cities like Guadalajara, with local and foreign businesspersons and real estate investors attracted to the North American lifestyle and the taste for golf courses and country clubs. Since then, these enclaves are no longer exclusive to the wealthiest population; the changes in housing policies in the 1990s that facilitated mass housing construction in peripheral land and adjacent municipalities made gated communities accessible to all.

The proliferation of gated communities in Mexico is connected to urban sprawl and metropolisation. Metropolisation is a common concept in Latin American urban literature but not so much in Anglo literature. Cardoso and Meijers (2021) consider that the concept helps understand policymaking in contemporary urbanisation. The authors present the concept of extensive urbanisation as "diffuse, multicentric, undirected, and fragmented, and evolves by pervasively colonising existing infrastructure and functional clusters rather than sequential expansion" (Cardoso & Meijers, 2021, p. 3); the problem with the concept is that "urban versus non-urban oppositions become barriers to policymaking" (p. 4). Instead, they propose using metropolisation. They define it as "a series of events through which institutionally, functionally, and spatially fragmented urbanised regions become integrated along various dimensions and emerge as connected systems at a higher spatial scale" (Cardoso & Meijers, 2021, p. 4). The gating phenomenon in Mexican metropolitan areas since the 1990s is the result of a combination of structural factors: a national housing policy that facilitated housing provision in peripheral disconnected land without adequate infrastructure and services, a debilitated planning system that facilitated private urban development, a global financial model that enabled new investment and debt-fuelled housing production, growing insecurity and violence, and changes in lifestyles and local efforts to join the global economy (Morales, 2019). This article does not argue there was one specific planned strategy to fragment and gate Mexican cities but that the structural conditions facilitated the gating process in an already fragmented urban reality.

The metropolisation process of the 1970s and 1980s was relatively organic as cities continued growing over adjacent municipalities and irregular settlements, and new social mass housing projects appeared in the peripheries. However, things changed in the 1990s with specific state-led actions such as the constitutional amendment of Article 27, which enabled private urban development over former social agricultural land or

ejidos. Access to cheap land and incentives to private developers in the housing sector facilitated the creation of large-scale isolated residential areas that needed protection from the surroundings. Developers found a "planned solution" in gated communities to respond to new dwellers' concerns about insecurity, infrastructure, and services. The peripheral gated communities in Mexican metropolitan areas are examples of a new urban order of natural, built, and perceived borders. Iossifova (2013) argues that borderlands are spaces of exclusion, and humans create borders and boundaries to differentiate. Mexican modern gated communities represent not only a physical boundary that creates less permeable urban structures and isolates social groups by socioeconomic strata, but it also produces different rules of access and engagement benefiting the wealthiest population, which have spatial preferential use, while the lowest income groups face more obstacles.

Gated communities are not only urban borderlands; they can also be seen as "urban borderlines" (Jalili, 2022) because it is not only the in-betweenness of the physical space but the perceptual boundaries that limit people's actions and interactions. The borders—natural or built—create differentiation and exclusion. For example, access to infrastructure and services can also create functional boundaries. On the other hand, imaginary borders created by social and cultural prejudice can incite exclusion. In Mexico, one of the most impenetrable boundaries is connected to income, education level, and occupation. Gated communities contribute to those physical and imaginary borders, as most of the elite and middle-income enclaves limit public access and include constant surveillance of outsiders while inside. Although Mexican social housing from the 1970s to the 1980s was organised in multi-storey tower blocks, housing production between the 1990s and 2000s, including that aimed at low-income groups, was low-density single-family residential areas. Many of these mass housing estates have been gated for defensive reasons. These peri-urban fortified enclaves contributed to fragmentation due to the impenetrable urban structure and lack of adequate transport systems in these sprawling developments. Metropolitan fragmentation in Mexico is, then, shaped by not only physical boundaries of gated communities and large private commercial areas but also institutional fragmentation, as municipalities are unable to deal with the urban and environmental problems that emerge from the current urbanisation model, as they do not have the resources or planning capacity to provide adequate transport, infrastructure, and public services.

5. The Production of the Fragmented Metropolises of Puebla and Guadalajara

The discussion starts with a historical analysis of how political interests, conflict, and planning have directly or indirectly contributed to socio-spatial fragmentation in both metropolises and finishes with an evaluation of how recent policies have contributed to a fragmented urban life. Puebla and Guadalajara, two cities about to celebrate the 500th anniversary of their foundation—the former in 1531 and the latter in 1542—are examples of settlements created under principles of spatial and social differentiation. Both cities have the same type of urban layout in their city centres; they have experienced social and institutional fragmentation due to religious, political, and military conflicts and power relations. For example, both cities have a strong history of Catholic influence in spatial and social arrangements through powerful religious figures such as the bishops Juan de Palafox y Mendoza in Puebla in the 17th century and Fray Antonio Alcalde in Guadalajara in the 18th century, who promoted the construction of outstanding architectural landmarks and established moral and social standards. The two cities have been the stage for conflicts such as the fight between conservative and liberal groups in the 19th century and the Cristero War in the 1920s, in which a group of armed Catholics fought the government over religious convictions. Both areas have emerged from

conflict and chaos to become investment poles for industry, commerce, and education, with national and international reach.

The two metropolitan areas have different scales but face the same pressing issues: urban sprawl, population growth, crime-related violence, complex inter-municipal governance, and pressure from the real estate industry (see Table 1). The sociodemographic data and the policy analysis conducted during this research show that it has not been easy to accommodate the growing population and strengthen planning instruments and institutions to improve urbanisation processes. There have been valuable attempts, especially in Guadalajara, with its inter-municipal collaboration schemes and the actions emerging from their metropolitan planning institute, IMEPLAN. However, this has not been enough to provide equitable and just planning solutions. In both cases, partial and municipal urban development programs have been blocked or delayed due to a lack of consideration of the current population's needs or because they were designed to fit special market interests. One clear example is the urban development program of San Andrés Cholula in Puebla, which is still under review following several failed attempts since 2018.

5.1. Puebla: From an Angelic-Inspired Urban Grid to a Gated Dystopia

According to popular legend, angels inspired the layout of Puebla's street grid. Puebla (City) of Angels, the settlement's original name, recognises the role of these divine creatures. The angelic-inspired grid was a uniform reticular layout around a central square that predominated in Latin American settlements (see Figure 2). The city was founded in 1531 by the Spanish Crown for peninsular settlers. The reticular grid

Table 1. Basic socio-demographic data on the metropolitan areas of Puebla and Guadalajara.

	Metropolitan Zone of Puebla	Metropolitan Zone of Guadalajara
Capital city	Heroica Puebla de Zaragoza (previously Puebla de los Ángeles)	Guadalajara
Municipalities in the metropolitan zone	38 municipalities in two states (Puebla and Tlaxcala)	10 municipalities
Total population in 2000	2,269,995	3,696,136
Total population in 2020	3,199,530	5,268,642
Number of housing units in 2020	859,413	1,484,581
Population born in another state/country	13.60%	13.7%
Average residents per housing unit in 2020	4.1	3.6
Surface (2010) in km^2	2,392.40	2,727.50
Urban density (pop/ha)	76.60	124.40
Average monthly salary in pesos (MXN)	$7,097	$10,274
Criminal incidence (cases)	Three main crimes: Robbery (131,913) Domestic violence (30,749) Assaults (21,137)	Three main crimes: Robbery (365,805) Other common law crimes (59,996) Domestic violence (55,042)

Sources: Gobierno del Estado de Jalisco (n.d.), SEMARNAT (2016), and SMADSOT (n.d.).
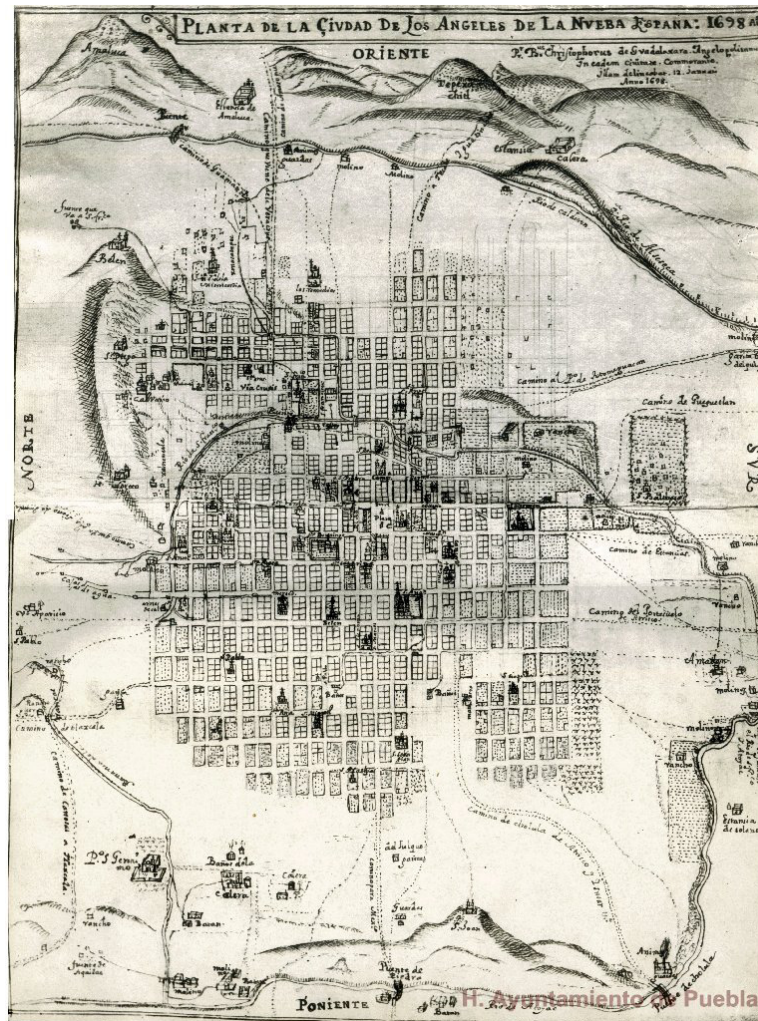
Figure 2. Map of the City of Puebla (de los Ángeles), 1698. Source: Ayuntamiento de Puebla (n.d.).

prevailed during the 17th and 18th centuries, accompanied by abundantly ornamental architecture (Terán Bonilla, 2021). The urban structure continued the original grid until the first decades of the 20th century when some new neighbourhoods introduced innovative street and block patterns. The city's grid is one of the most valued assets, as the historic centre was recognised as a national cultural heritage monument in 1977 due to its harmonic architecture and urban structure (Terán Bonilla, 2021, p. 8). It was later included in UNESCO's list of Humanity's Cultural World Heritage sites in 1987. Both recognitions boosted conservation strategies, tourism investment, and the restoration of listed buildings. However, some claim that the focus on the city centre's conservation of architectural heritage distracted the attention from what was happening in the rest of the city, where fragmentation became a key characteristic of the metropolisation process.

Puebla has a history of divisions and fractions; the first urban border was the San Francisco River (see Figure 2), a fundamental water body for the foundation of the settlement, which also served to separate the indigenous population living on the east bank from the Spanish-descent population on the west bank. This river was transformed into a road in the late 1960s and became one of the neighbourhoods' main functional borders when it became a high-speed road. The city grew moderately during the first 400 years, and the most significant urban structure transformations happened during the second half of the 19th century.

The newly planned neighbourhoods for Europeans and wealthy families, along with the introduction of new infrastructure, such as the train, modified the size of blocks and produced new streets (Labastida Claudio, 2019). A defining element of the 19th century was the redistribution of large portions of land that belonged to different religious orders. Many of these plots were used for municipal projects such as public markets after the Reform Laws promoted by the liberals, but others enabled speculation and enrichment of small sections of society. Social fragmentation was present during the Porfirian era at the end of the 19th century, as the ideas of modernity brought better infrastructure for the newly planned neighbourhoods for elite groups, for example, streetlights, sewerage, parks, and pavements.

Policy and document review during this study shows that planning has contributed to social and spatial differentiation at various moments since the late 19th century. For example, the planned neighbourhoods or *colonias* created for the wealthiest population during the Porfirian period changed the size of streets and blocks and introduced modern architectural styles. On the other hand, the laws and regulations for more functionalist planned neighbourhoods or *fraccionamientos* in the 1940s provided new differentiated urban layouts for different market segments, and the law in the 1970s facilitated private investment to supply basic infrastructure (Melé, 1989, p. 288). The second example exemplifies how municipal authorities incentivise the participation of private developers because the state cannot provide infrastructure in a fast-growing city.

These examples demonstrate how the state facilitated private actors' participation in developing "planned neighbourhoods" in the 19th and 20th centuries. However, the emergence of hundreds of gated communities in recent decades is connected to the ambitious housing and planning policy changes in the 1990s, which aimed to increase market-oriented urban development and private-led housing production. A cartographic analysis of the metro area shows that most gated communities emerged in the late 1990s and early 2000s in peripheral municipalities in areas with deficient infrastructure, public services, and transport (see Figure 3). Urban sprawl emerged due to population growth and conurbation to adjacent municipalities such as San Pedro Cholula, San Andrés Cholula, Amozoc, and Cuautlancingo (Cabrera & Delgado, 2019). However, gated communities have appeared in scattered locations in the whole area. This fragmented urbanisation has brought conflicts with residents from the small pre-existing towns, particularly in San Andrés Cholula, who feel directly affected by the new developments, as these threaten their agricultural land, livelihoods, access to water, and cost of living. Workshops and dialogues with members of these local communities conducted during 2019 showed that community members were generally discontent with the new residential fortresses and opposed the urbanisation model (Durán et al., 2021). They felt that planning instruments were designed for real estate developers' interests and public officials were complicit.

The research conducted in this area in the last decade shows that planning policies have been fundamental in developing peripheral large-scale gated developments. However, interviews conducted in the earliest phase of this research show that people moved to the new gated neighbourhoods because they felt that the central city was losing its liveability. Some interviewees reported the poor state of the streets, growing insecurity, lack of maintenance of public parks and gardens, and inadequate public services (Morales, 2016). This also results from "planning" decisions, as the state no longer invests in these old neighbourhoods and is not interested in creating the conditions for people to stay. Media and the presence of organised crime have played a crucial role in this voluntary displacement because fearmongering was present in most accounts by public officials, residents, and developers during their interviews. Fear is a powerful tool real-estate agents and developers

use to promote gated communities (Atkinson & Blandy, 2016; Low, 2001), taking advantage of the national security crisis. Fear has fomented a whole industry to protect citizens from the dangers of the city.

Planned neighbourhoods were supposed to bring order and quality infrastructure into the city of Puebla. Unfortunately, the gated communities that have emerged in the last decades on the west side of the metropolitan area (see Figure 3) have affected the functionality of the original towns in the peripheries, extinguished the possibility of social interaction, and increased inequalities. Gated communities, particularly cases such as Lomas de Angelópolis, an enclave for elite residents with over 21,000 housing units and La Vista Country Club, provide exclusive amenities such as gyms, pools, country clubs, green areas, and other advantages, enhancing socioeconomic disparities. On the other hand, the areas surrounding gated communities in San Pedro and San Andrés Cholula, Cuautlancingo, and Coronango have unpaved roads, deficient public transport, and limited connectivity due to the streets with extensive fencing, no shade, and no active frontages. This has created tensions that municipal governments have not adequately addressed.

The planned city of the 16th century presented different conditions for social groups. Nonetheless, the city that continued that planning tradition still provided spaces for social interaction. The work conducted in the past decade around gated communities shows that planning is no longer inclusive, and regional and local planning instruments have directly benefited developers of this sort of fortified enclave. In almost 500 years, the angelic-inspired urban grid was replaced by a dystopian collection of islands in a gated network, no longer limited to residential areas but also shopping malls, parks, hospitals, and universities.
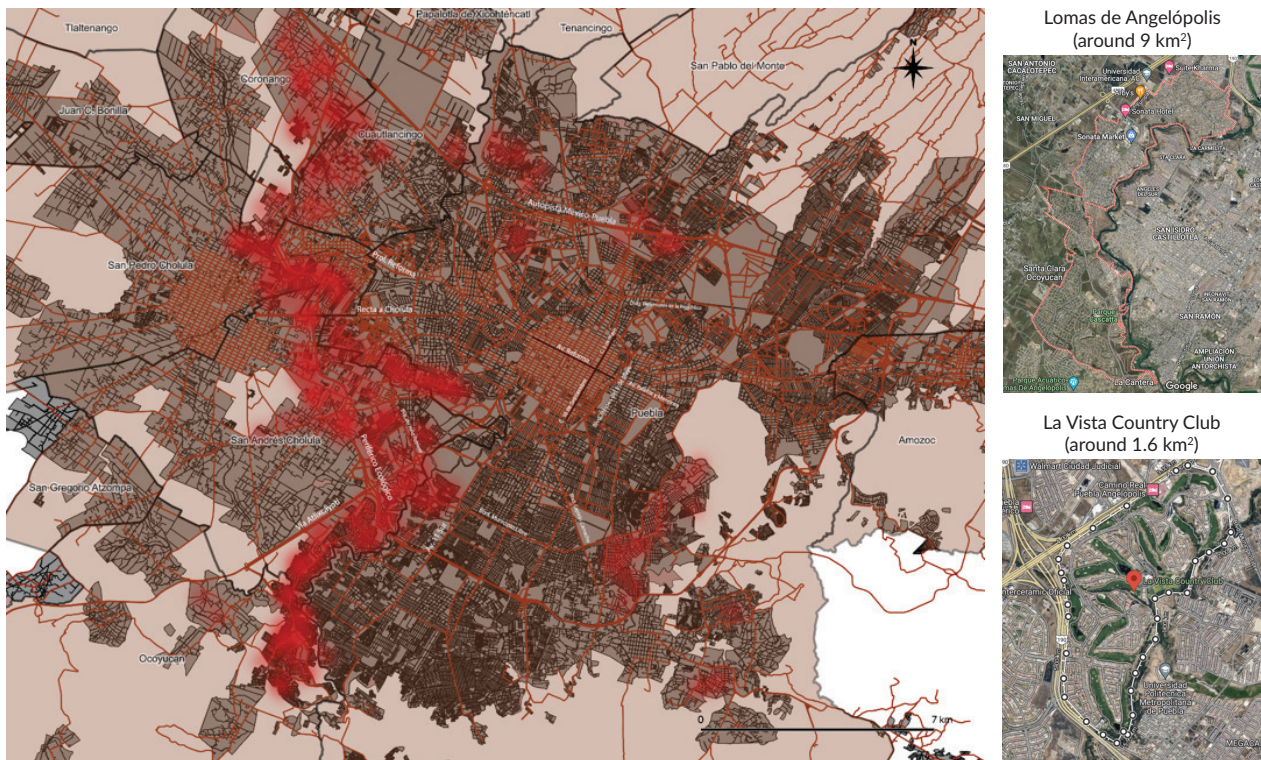

Figure 3. Concentration of gated communities in Puebla's metropolitan area and examples of scale and configuration. Source: Author using information from INEGI and Google Maps, 2023.

5.2. Guadalajara: The Rise of the Defensive Shell of the "Pearl of the West"

Guadalajara was founded in 1542, only a decade after Puebla. The history of the foundation of this city was less "angelic," as there were several failed attempts before the Spanish Crown authorised the location. Spanish ordinances also defined this settlement's street layout and block configuration, but the size of blocks and orientation differed from Puebla's. A notable similarity was that space was organised with a "centre-periphery gradation of social hierarchies" (López Moreno, 2001, p. 21). The new city separated *gente de razón* (reasoning people) from the indigenous population. There was a belief that natives did not have the same mental faculties as Spaniards and were, therefore, incapable of logical reasoning, in contrast with Spanish or Catholics (Pilatowsky Goñi, 2011). The San Juan de Dios River played a double purpose in the new city; on the one hand, it fulfilled the royal requirement of water availability for new settlements (see Figure 4), but it also represented a natural north-south border that segregated social groups: *gente de razón* lived on the west bank and the indigenous population lived on the east bank (Secretaría de Cultura, 2007). The symbolic and spatial differentiation between east and west Guadalajara prevails today; the wealthiest population lives on the west side, and the poorest population lives on the east (M. Jaramillo & Saucedo, 2016).

Government agencies and business chambers portray Guadalajara as a thriving city with high-quality architecture and infrastructure, ideal for investment, technological development, and innovation. The city is known as the "Pearl of the West," and although there is no consensus on where the name comes from,
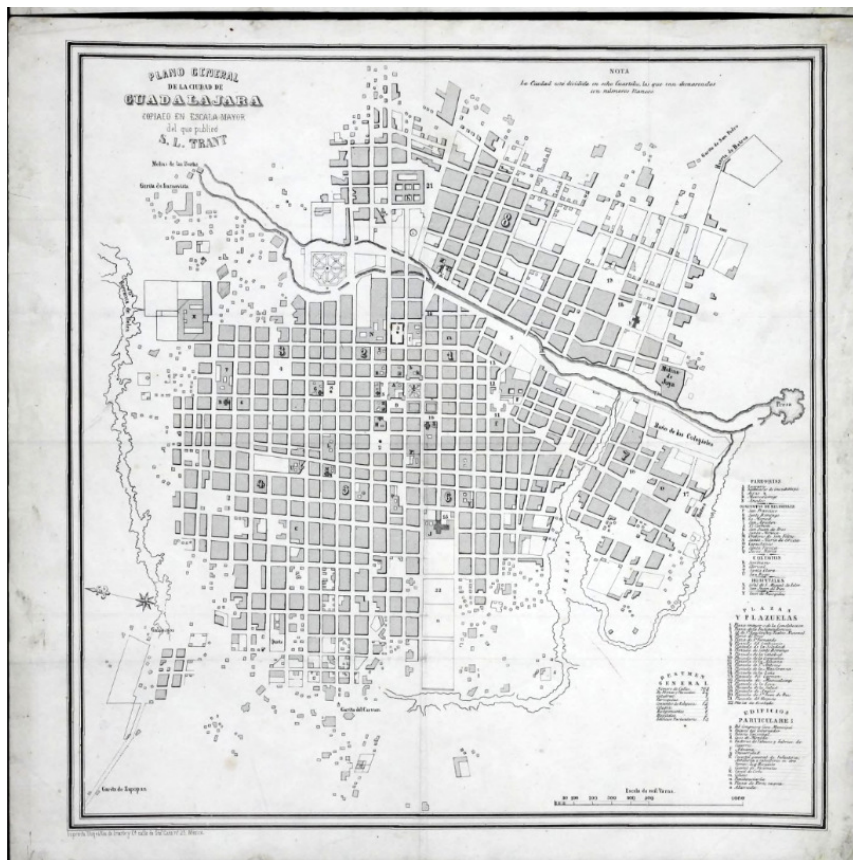

Figure 4. Map of the City of Guadalajara, circa 1800. Source: Mediateca INAH (n.d.).

during recent interviews, residents and scholars agree that it is connected to its splendour, beauty, and uniqueness. However, the city's early years did not stand out for grandeur or beauty. Architecture during the colonial period was discreet and modest because economic resources were limited. Nonetheless, conditions changed in the 18th century as the city became a potent commercial hub. New settlers motivated the "beautification" of the city and the creation of new parks and promenades (López Moreno, 2001). Since the 19th century, the city has become a powerful regional development pole, and it is now the venue of relevant international cultural and sports events, such as the Feria Internacional del Libro (International Book Fair).

The city's original orthogonal street grid (see Figure 4) enabled urban growth in an orderly way for centuries. The newly planned neighbourhoods or *colonias* in the late 19th and early 20th century were driven by increased industrial and commercial activities and the growing demands of new fortunes. The early decades of the 20th century were defined by post-revolutionary reorganisation, industrial development, and entrepreneurial activities, which financed new higher education institutions, roads, infrastructure, and new residential areas. The planned neighbourhoods were an opportunity to create a name in architecture and style. New extravagant civil and residential architecture inspired by European castles and chalets became popular then. This was also an opportunity to create a local style, a regional *tapatío* architecture inspired by local construction methods, the Mexican landscape, and foreign influence from European and northern African gardens and patios. The new neighbourhoods in west Guadalajara aimed at middle- and high-income populations, and the segregation of the poor in east Guadalajara continued. In 1942, with the 400th anniversary of the city's foundation, a series of projects were created to show the city's new vision of grandeur and progress. Some of these projects enhanced socio-spatial configurations that contributed to distinction and differentiation. Architects from the "illustrated bourgeoisie," like Ignacio Díaz Morales, designed important public space interventions (Secretaría de Cultura, 2007), but also one of the new suburban residential areas, Las Fuentes, inspired by the garden city that allowed people to escape from the noise, traffic, and chaos of the central city.

Fractures and fractions are part of the city's history. One of the most critical fractures in the city is Calzada Independencia, a road built over the San Juan de Dios River that runs from north to south, connecting the municipalities of Zapopan, Guadalajara, and Tlaquepaque (see Figure 4). As in Puebla, this road splits the city in two, creating different life experiences in the west and east. Guadalajara can also be understood according to fragments; the city had an urban organisation connected to parishes until the 18th century, when, inspired by the Enlightenment, authorities divided the city into *cuarteles*, a territorial distribution created under the Bourbonic Reforms to manage justice, police, public administration, hygiene, and public order that included several neighbourhoods. These *cuarteles* made it easier to bring order and improve social conduct between the "decent" people and the *plebes* or peasants. The "decent" people of the time, mainly the European descendants that dominated the civil, religious, and civil spheres, were interested in promoting "modern" behaviour patterns (Delgadillo Guerrero & Hernández Ponce, 2019). In the late 18th and 19th centuries, Guadalajara's territorial management changed three times: the first in 1790, in which streets were named and plots were given numeric values; the second division came with the creation of the big four *cuarteles*, which originated in the main square; and the third division was in 1809 when the city was divided into 24 areas. The trend to manage the city in fractions continues. The most recent example is the creation of seven "urban districts" in 1995 (Gobierno de Guadalajara, 2017). The district's core is the *Centro Metropolitano*, which includes the original city up to the mid-20th century.

Roads are useful in understanding the city's modern physical and symbolic fragmentation. For example, the streets Prolongación República/Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla and Prolongación Javier Mina/Benito Juárez/Ignacio L. Vallarta organise urban life in the north and the south. The city's urban structure was modified with the introduction of train tracks and industrial parks. The fragmented nature of Guadalajara was enhanced after the 1960s, with the creation of the first American-style gated community Fraccionamiento Santa Anita in 1967 and the first shopping mall in Mexico, Plaza del Sol, in 1969. These two projects produced the first generation of "consumer citizens" fascinated with exclusivity, the private automobile, and shopping. In recent interviews and a workshop conducted in the summer of 2023 in two of the old traditional neighbourhoods in Guadalajara, participants declared their predilection for gated or securitised urban spaces. The state of Jalisco has a strong presence of drug cartels and reports of criminal activity and disappearances are standard in news outlets. Therefore, unlike Puebla, people are not only leaving the central city because they are interested in moving to peripheral gated communities; residents in some central neighbourhoods would like to retro-gate their surroundings.

Gated communities and shopping malls became the symbols of the new Guadalajara and attracted real estate investment along the Avenida López Mateos, a regional highway converted into an urban road. This street probably shaped the most profound fracture of the urban fabric, as it created a new, larger, more tangible urban border separating the east from the west. Pedestrian activity on the west side of this border is practically non-existent. Residential projects along this road produced an exclusionary urban structure shaped by larger blocks and a few streets. The fractured system provoked a deficient public transport service, leading to personal vehicle dependency, congestion, and pollution. Guadalajara's urban development after the 1960s can be better understood through "splintering urbanism," in which infrastructure can fracture the experience of the city (Graham & Marvin, 2001). Urban life is not only about buildings and streets; some interactions depend on networks, including transport, telecommunications, water, and energy supply. Modern Guadalajara can be seen as an "autocity of motorised roadscapes" (Graham & Marvin, 2001, p. 8) that segregates and excludes instead of integrating and creating networks. This road interconnects residents from gated communities to the city's main work, leisure, education, and shopping areas while limiting mobility and access to those without a car. This power imbalance creates flows for the few and barriers for the many. Urban infrastructure can exponentiate inequalities, as those who can afford access to private mobility options are more connected than others (Kozak, 2018). During fieldwork in 2023, the author joined a group of activists for a walk to identify how difficult it was for pedestrians to move in this car-oriented environment.

As in Puebla, gated communities have increased in adjacent municipalities as part of the metropolisation process. Recent cartographic and photographic analysis shows that most gated communities were developed in the municipalities of Zapopan and Tlajomulco. Although planning instruments existed in the 1970s, such as the *Esquema Director 71*, which aimed to order development in a system of cities, development in these municipalities has been arbitrary and highly beneficial to real estate developers. Between 2001 and 2005, over 100 gated communities were built in Tlajomulco (Núñez Miranda, 2007, p. 127). On the other hand, Zapopan has embraced the arrival of elite and global capital since the early 2000s, with examples such as the high-end shopping mall Andares and the exclusive gated community for the ultra-rich Puerta de Hierro (Iron Door). Observation exercises in these shopping malls and gated communities have proved more difficult than in Puebla, as there is a higher presence of highly armed private security forces, access control, and surveillance systems.

Guadalajara's gated communities have been normalised in recent decades, mainly due to the fear of drug-related organised crime. Ortiz Alvis and Díaz Núñez (2021) consider that the "urban enclosure" phenomenon in residential development in Mexico is connected to the current security crisis. They argue that there is a sort of "urban agoraphobia" in which residents in gated communities seek an "imaginary shield" to protect them from the open city's insecurity while only coexisting among people similar to themselves (Ortiz Alvis & Díaz Núñez, 2021, p. 69). Gated communities in Guadalajara are called *cotos*, a Latin root word that refers to defended or protected. These authors identified three types of gated communities in Guadalajara: "suburban country clubs" built between 1967 and 1985 for the wealthiest; "intra-urban *cotos*" constructed between 1986 and 1999 for middle- and high-income families; and "diversified urban enclosures" since 2000, characterised by the diversity of socio-economic levels. The most relevant real estate projects since 2014 have also been types of gated communities, including high-end vertical condominiums. Some researchers have identified that up to 20% of the territory is occupied by enclosed areas—almost 3,000 gated developments (Pfannenstein et al., 2019). The "Pearl of the West" is now shielded, and the metropolis is surrounded by a belt of gated communities (see Figure 5).

5.3. Main Findings

The two metropolises—Puebla and Guadalajara—share the same Spanish heritage and benefited from investment and private participation in planned neighbourhoods during the 19th and 20th centuries. However, the market-driven planning policies of the last decades, which contributed to the emergence and normalisation of gated communities, have created tensions and social inequalities. The interviews and workshops conducted in Puebla in the past decade show that perceptions of insecurity and distrust in the
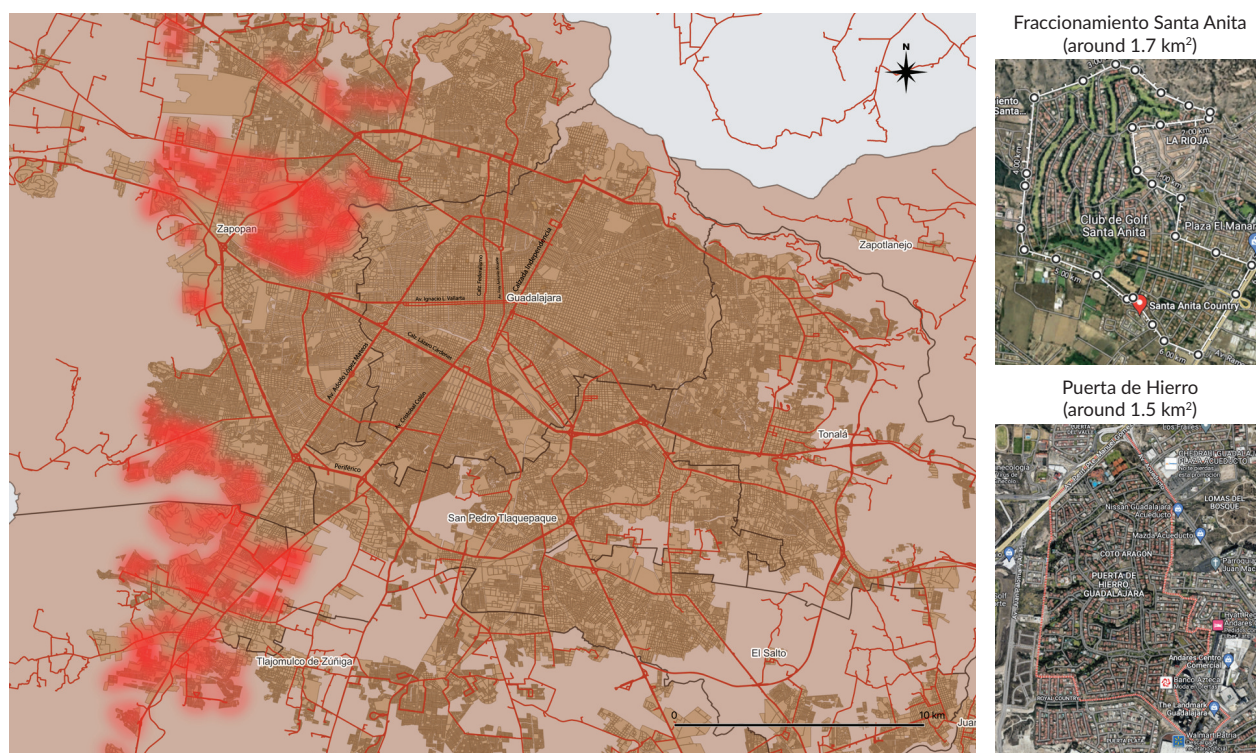

Figure 5. Concentration of gated communities in Guadalajara's metropolitan area and examples of scale and configuration. Source: Author using information from INEGI and Google Maps, 2023.

capacity of the state to manage the cities' problems have increased. The new planning instruments do not include measures to produce more inclusive urban areas, and developers are not interested in investing in social housing. The socio-spatial fragmentation in Guadalajara proves more complicated, as it is not only the large number of gated communities that emerged in the recent decades but the incapacity to address the severe mobility and infrastructure deficiencies that come with the sudden appearance of back-to-back fortified enclaves. Urban planners are facing opposition to promoting more inclusive planning strategies because residents, public officials, and real estate developers consider conditions unsuitable for that kind of development, mainly because some are afraid of the possible connections between real estate development and organised crime.

6. Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

Market-oriented planning policies since the 1990s and limited state capacity have helped to normalise gated communities in these two metropolises. The economic interests behind these fortified spaces leave municipalities unprepared to deal with the impacts of these enclaves. This suggests a need to rethink policymaking and policy implementation in adjacent municipalities, as they usually do not have the technical or financial resources to prioritise projects for their benefit. These local governments' challenges require a long-term vision but mostly a solid budget to contain real estate pressure and provide adequate services and infrastructure. The two cases presented show the connections between policies and social and spatial fragmentation. First, in both cases, authorities could not respond to the demands for security, basic public services, reliable transport, quality public spaces, and infrastructure; this motivated thousands of families to move out of the central city and rely on private administrators in gated communities. Second, both metropolises have not accomplished metropolitan instruments that prioritise habitability and inclusion; Guadalajara has been better at this, with the creation of IMEPLAN, but unfortunately, both cities have not been able to contain this sort of exclusionary fragmented urban model. Third, in both cases, the distance between the poor and the rich has increased dramatically, and the presence of organised crime in real estate has brought governance problems as municipal authorities fear implementing tighter urban policies. Finally, this sprawling and fragmented gated model takes valuable land crucial for climate adaptation and ecosystem conservation. Deregulation and liberalisation made it easier for developers to "gate" the city, but they now also suffer from the traffic, polarisation, and conflict that came with it. Therefore, the same incentives that made these fortified enclaves possible can be used to promote more inclusive and open urban environments.

Conflict of Interests
The author declares no conflict of interests.

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