“I don’t intend to make friends among my neighbours”. The ideal of neighbourliness among residents of residential compounds

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Abstract

Currently in the cities there is a gradual loss of collective feelings of belonging, rootedness and community among neighbours. However, residential compounds are an emerging model of urbanisation at a global level that could promote intra-neighbourhood rapprochement and interaction. In this paper we analyse the discourses of residents and non-residents of residential compounds. The results indicate that there is no desire to establish relationships with neighbours even in this type of residential compounds. There is a generalized ideal of neighbourliness based on cordiality (impersonal and respectful relationships). In addition, socio-economic homogeneity seems fundamental for understanding neighbourhood relations and the conflicts that arise.

Keywords: gated communities; neighbourly relations; social networking; Spain, conflict

Introduction

Neighbour relations have been the subject of sociological reflection since the beginning of sociology. Classical authors discussed the loss of community ties and mutual support

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with the transition from rural to urban life (Durkheim, 1893, Simmel, 1908, Tönnies, 1912). Since modern times, the processes of socialisation and social networking have become more voluntary and selective (Requena-Santos, 2001). It seems that local and neighbourhood relations are becoming less important in an increasingly individualised and globally interconnected world (Castells, 1996). However, the residential environment remains central to understanding support and care networks today (Van Den Berg, 2016; Brey et al., 2023). The literature has put the spotlight back on the issue following the recent mobility constraints caused by the Covid-19 pandemic (Stoiljković, 2022).

In this context, the emerging popularity and expansion of a residential phenomenon has been observed, which has been referred to in various ways (Wehrahn and Raposo, 2004; Dowling et al., 2010; anonymized). An extreme example is represented by gated communities, at times denominated walled cities or fortresses (Blakely and Snyder, 1997; Atkinson and Flint, 2004). These residential compounds are characterised by the physical enclosure, to a greater or lesser degree, of the residential fabric, through the availability of shared facilities within them (gardens, swimming pools, etc.) and by the homogeneous social profile of their residents (wealthy class). Shared amenities foster intra-neighbourhood relations (Kenna, 2010), facilitating a perception of 'us' (social homogeneity), which simultaneously favours the development of feelings of collectivity, belonging and mutual support (Sakip et al., 2012).

The aim of this paper is to study current neighbour relations and how they are understood, paying special attention to the development and interpretation of these relations among those who live in residential compounds. We ask whether these developments, due to their morphology and composition, are conducive to neighbourly relations or the development of a sense of community or mutual support among neighbours. To address this question, we begin with a brief review of the literature

published to date on neighbour relations in urban spaces. Next, we review the characteristics of residential compounds and how neighbour relations occur within them. After describing the methods used, we present the results of our qualitative research, which is divided into two subsections. The first analyses the interviewees' ideal types of neighbours. The second focuses on neighbour relations, especially conflictive ones, to describe and interpret coexistence among neighbours in the place of residence. Finally, conclusions are drawn.

Neighbour relations in urban space

Since the 19th century, neighbour relations in sociology have been framed within broader considerations of the processes of social change in modern times. Authors such as Durkheim (1893) and Simmel (1908) noted the loss of traditional relations (family and neighbour) in the city, regarding them as more superficial, impersonal and neutral. Tönnies (1912) argued that neighbour relations explain the shift from a traditional, communitarian social order (*Gemeinschaft*) to a modern, rational, associative one (*Gesellschaft*). Relations such as neighbour or kinship, which previously formed a network of support or community based on gratitude, loyalty and mutual trust, have become less important today, replaced by more rational and superficial relationships, such as professional or friendship. Similarly, Park (1915) observes that social ties in the city are more extensive, but less deep and solid than ties in rural environments.

This last point about 'strong' or 'weak' neighbourhood ties persists over time (Hipp and Perrin; 2009), becoming more meaningful with the spread of the internet and the daily use of digital social networks. Everything suggested that proximity in physical space was less essential for the creation and preservation of social ties/bonds (Requena-Santos, 2001). However, while Díaz-Ruiz (2005) observed that young people understood

their surroundings in a more instrumental (importance of services or facilities) and even apathetic (without feelings of attachment to the territory) way, older people continued to talk about their neighbourhoods from the memory of their neighbour relations. In their case, neighbourhood ties were strong, similar to family ties, which makes them one of the social groups that feel the loss of these ties most acutely (Brey et al., 2023).

Some claim that this loss of neighbour relations is not real and that this 'illusion' stems more from a nostalgic memory of rural life (Hirvonen and Lilius, 2019); which in turn feeds back into this dichotomous view of 'city life' versus 'country life', the latter seen as a scenario of virtues on the verge of disappearing (Williams, 2001). Fischer (1982) noted a greater extension of social networks among urbanites, as well as a higher density (in hours) of their daily social interaction. Multiple studies have empirically found that neighbourhood networks continue to be a support network for some minority groups and collectives (Young and Wilmott, 1957; Brey et al., 2023). Neighbour relations favour socio-spatial cohesion in certain neighbourhoods (Jaśkiewicz and Wiwatowska, 2018). It has even been observed that they can positively influence well-being and quality of life (van den Berg et al., 2016; Fong et al., 2021) or, conversely, can worsen it, as neighbour disputes are also associated with poor health (Parker and Kearns, 2006).

What does seem clear is that neighbour relations are not equally important according to social status. Greater neighbourly bonding and mutual support has been observed in working-class and ethnic minority neighbourhoods. This is the case, for example, in working-class neighbourhoods (Young and Wilmott, 1957), Italian-American neighbourhoods (Gans, 1962) or, more recently, in immigrant neighbourhoods Verboort, 2012; Kohlbacher et al., 2015). Moreover, the perceived similarity between neighbours, in socio-demographic terms, seems to be conducive to better neighbour

relations (Mollenhorst, et al., 2008). This is clearly seen in neighbourhoods with a high immigrant population (Hipp and Perrin, 2009).

There also seem to be more local ties in older people, who are more likely to have a neighbour in their social network (Völker and Flap, 2007). This could also be explained by the length of residence, which favours the extension and intensity of networks and which tends to be higher among older people (Joong-Hwan Oh, 2003). However, the existence of community should not only be interpreted from a romantic notion of past neighbourly relations, as it may also imply gang alliances or ethnic segregation (i.e. Gans, 1962).

Finally, many urban studies affirm that amenities and forms of land use can foster relations among neighbours (i.e. Jacobs, 1961; Talen, 1999). The existence of '*anchoring conduits'*, i.e., places that encourage routine interactions between residents (parks, bars, supermarkets, schools, shops, etc.) may promote interaction among neighbours (Mouratidis and Poortinga, 2020). However, these only seem to facilitate interaction without significantly increasing social cohesion or attachment to the neighbourhood (Wickes et al., 2019).

Given all this, one would expect residential compounds to act as spaces that enhance neighbourly ties/bonds. Even more so, if we consider the perceived social homogeneity among neighbours typical of these compounds (Le Goix and Vesselinov, 2015). Both aspects imply that residential compounds, as thriving residential models, have great potential to stimulate neighbour relations (Sampson, 2012). In the following section, we focus on what the specific literature has mentioned in this respect.

Neighbour relations in residential compounds

Although we have used the terms neighbourhood and neighbour interchangeably, the two concepts are not the same. Wehrhahn and Haubrick (2014) empirically find that

neighbour is associated with aspects such as proximity, rurality and the memory of past relationships that are desired and longed for today. However, neighbourhood is understood from a more functional narrative and lacks the relational and symbolic factor attributed to the previous concept. Under this idea of neighbour, residential compounds are an emerging model of urbanisation with great potential in the promotion and configuration of neighbour relations (Sakip et al., 2012).

For residential developments or settings to be considered a residential compound, they must comply with two fundamentals features (anonymized). Firstly, they must be residential areas with defined perimeters, either enclosed by walls or fences, or with restricted access to the development through dead-end streets or cul-de-sacs or located in areas far from the nearest population centre. Secondly, they must have spaces and amenities in their interior for the exclusive common use of their residents, such as swimming pools, sports courts, landscaped areas with street furniture, etc. Based on these two main characteristics, a great diversity of more or less enclosed residential compounds has been observed in different cities and urban contexts worldwide (Wehrhahn and Raposo, 2004; Dong et al., 2019), which has given rise to different classifications or typologies that also address this diversity (Blakely and Snyder, 1997; Dowling et al., 2010). Likewise, these residential forms are beginning to be emulated among the middle- and working-class population (Müllauer-Seichter, 2019).

In this paper, we use the classification residential compounds to cover the variety and complexity of this residential phenomenon in the particular case of Spain (anonymized). The study of neighbour relations in this type of residential development has been approached from two perspectives. The first is intra-neighbourhood relations, which are those that occur within the residential compound. The second is the extra-

neighbourhood relations, that is, between residents of the compound and the rest of the neighbours outside.

Regarding the latter, studies suggest that there is little or no neighbourhood interaction between the residents of a compound and those adjacent to it (Rosenblatt et al., 2009; Aguilar-Díaz and Capron, 2022); and this scarce interaction is often due to the fact that some of these neighbours work in the compound as domestic workers, cleaning staff, security guards, etc. (Svampa, 2001). Studies indicate that this social fragmentation of space is also projected discursively by differentiating neighbours into two main groups (Le Goix and Vesselinov, 2015): the members of the compound, who refer to themselves as 'us' and the neighbours living outside the compound who are known as 'them'.

This social division becomes more evident when we consider that the decision to live in these developments is generally driven by a protective interest (Donzelot, 2007) on the part of their residents to limit their social-neighbourhood circles to people they 'trust'. This distinctive rhetoric appears in all types of residential compounds, whether gated, semi-open or open (Dowling, et al., 2010; Thompson, 2013). Physical enclosure contributes to, but does not determine the social segregation of the population (Le Goix, 2005) or the encapsulation of neighbour relations.

Similarly, it would be logical to think that intra-neighbourhood relations in residential compounds, which are internally homogeneous environments (in terms of class) and with shared recreational spaces and facilities, are intense and very close. However, studies by Atkinson and Flint (2004) and Becerril-Sánchez et al. (2013) found that many of their interviewees claimed they did not know most of their neighbours or they only maintained close relationships/ties with some of them (Salcedo and Torres, 2004). This is because much of this intra-neighbourhood interaction is limited to regular community management and maintenance meetings (Gao, 2015). Some studies have even

observed greater social cohesion and sense of belonging among residents in open or symbolic compounds (Dowling et al., 2010).

In fact, as with extra-neighbourhood relations, a certain social division has also been perceived between neighbours in the same residential compound. Svampa (2001) speaks of processes of 'generational and social transfer' in Argentinean *countries* in which residents differentiate among themselves as 'long-time residents' and 'newcomers'. These internal distinctions are most noticeable when neighbourhood relations are conflictive. Changes in management can be seen, especially among long-time residents, as an attack against its identity (Smigiel, 2013). Still, there remains an important paucity of studies addressing conflictive intra-neighbourhood relations in residential compounds (Müllauer-Seichter, 2019), despite the fact that disputes can be a turning point in the future of a community.

Accordingly, in this paper we analyse neighbour relations, both harmonious and conflictive, with a special focus on how they are interpreted and develop in residential compounds. Understanding how neighbour relations in general are understood and valued will also allow us to better understand whether they are very different from neighbour relations in residential compounds, which is our main objective.

Methodology

The techniques used in this study are exclusively qualitative. A total of 20 interviews were conducted with residents and non-residents of residential compounds. The methodological design followed the sociological approach of discourse analysis developed by the Madrid Qualitative School (Conde, 2009).

In line with this approach the sample design was structured (table 1). Basic socio-demographic categories were included, such as gender and age, the latter being quite relevant in the study of social networks (Joong-Hwan Oh, 2003). Household status was

also considered, namely, whether respondents lived alone (single-family households) or were part of a family unit with children. This was not only because spatial networks (including neighbourhood networks) help to minimise feelings of loneliness (Fong et al., 2021) but also because children can be a key resource to support neighbourhood interaction (Russel and Stenning, 2021).

Table 1. Interview design

	Gender	**Age**	**Household type**	**Social class**	**Type of residential area**	**Location**
E1	Male	Adult	Children	Upper class	Individualistic	Alfacar
E2	Female	Young	No children	Working class	Controlled	Cájar
E3	Male	Adult	Children	Upper class	Individualistic	Grenada (Rd Sierra)
E4	Female	Elderly	Alone	Working class	No residential compound	La Zubia
E5	Female	Adult	Children	Upper class	No residential compound	Armilla
E6	Female	Adult	Alone	Working class	No residential compound	Granada (La Cruz)
E7	Female	Adult	No children	Upper class	Individualistic	Alfacar
E8	Female	Elderly	Alone	Working class	Controlled	Ogíjares
E9	Female	Young	No children	Working class	Protected	Granada (San Idelfonso)
E10	Male	Young	No children	Upper class	Protected	Granada (Health Campus)
E11	Female	Adult	Children	Working class	Controlled	La Zubia
E12	Male	Elderly	Children	Upper class	Controlled	Grenada (Golden Ball)
E13	Male	Adult	No children	Upper class	Controlled	Granada (Albaicín)
E14	Female	Elderly	Alone	Upper class	Controlled	Granada (Zaidín-Vergeles)
E15	Female	Adult	No children	Working class	Controlled	Granada (Albaicín)
E16	Male	Elderly	Children	Upper class	Controlled	Grenada (Golden Ball)
E17	Male	Young	No children	Upper class	Protected	Alfacar
E18	Male	Elderly	No children	Working class	Controlled	Santa Fe
E19	Female	Adult	Children	Upper class	Protected	Granada (Zaidín-Vergeles)

E20	Male	Young	No children	Upper class	Symbolic	Granada (Figares)

Source: authors

Social class was considered because neighbour relations are variable between classes (Donzelot, 2007). Thus, we classified our interviewees into two large opposing groups on the social scale: 1) the upper class, comprising people with a high socio-economic position and higher education; and 2) the working class, comprising people with more modest purchasing power and workers without higher education (or whose employment does not require such training).

Finally, we sought variety in the types of compounds where the interviewees lived. Following the typology elaborated in a previous study (anonymized), interviews were conducted with residents of compounds with very strict physical enclosures (*protected and controlled*), encompassing *gated communities,* and of compounds that were more "open" structurally (*structurally self-isolated*) and symbolically (*individualistic and symbolic*). Moreover, variety was sought in the locations, in both municipal districts and neighbourhoods within the municipality of Granada.

The average duration of the interviews ranged from approximately one to two hours and those were recorded and transcribed. All the interviews took place in April and May 2020, a period that coincided with the final stage of the residential confinement of the Spanish population (Covid-19 pandemic), which meant that some of the interviews were conducted virtually.

The sociological approach of discourse analysis aims to analyse the totality of the texts, without fragmenting or coding the interviews. This approach emphasises that all discourse produced is part of a wider system of discourses related with the context in which they were produced (Conde, 2009). This implies that for the analysis of the discourse of the interviews, we consider the social, cultural and historical context in which

they were carried out and the social position of each interviewee, considering their socio-demographic and residential characteristics. Also, as when interviewees talk about a particular topic, it is always more or less explicitly related to other topics (Ruiz, 2017). We focus on the details, the implicit ideas that appear during the interviews, to capture and interpret the interviewees' attempts to evade issues, or the apparent discursive contradictions.

Results

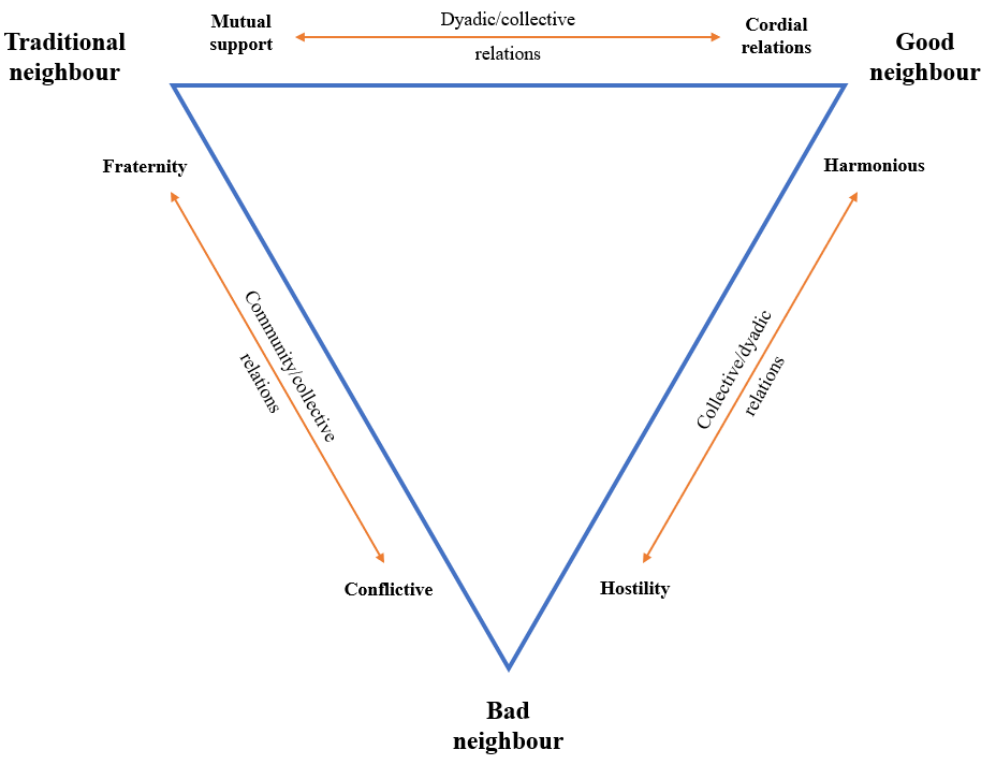
Ideal types of neighbour: cordiality as a neighbourly aspiration

What we first observed when interviewees talk about their neighbours is that they are actually talking about the type of neighbourly relationship or coexistence in their immediate environment. That is, non-residents in compounds talk about their neighbours in the neighbourhood and residents in compounds talk about their neighbours in the compound as well as in the neighbourhood. Bases on their personal assessment of these neighbour relations, the interviewees distinguish three ideal types of neighbours (Figure 1): the *traditional neighbour,* the *good neighbour* and the *bad neighbour.*

At the top of the triangle, are the ideal types of neighbours valued positively by the interviewees, while at the bottom is the antithesis, the bad neighbour, representing the decline of neighbourly relations. On the far left is the *traditional neighbour* who emerges from nostalgic memories of times past based on childhood anecdotes about neighbour relations (Wehrhahn and Haubrick, 2014). The description of this ideal type is often based on the contrast between before (traditional neighbour) and now (good neighbour or bad neighbour) and is described as a very tight and close relationship among neighbours. Interaction is practically daily and there is a sense of unity in the residential space with two intermingled dimensions: the dyadic, in which links are established between pairs of

individuals or households, although sometimes involving a plurality of them, and the predominantly collective one which, on certain occasions, gives rise to community relations.

Figure 1. Ideal types of neighbours according to interviewees



From the dyadic dimension, neighbours act as a support network. Sometimes they even fulfil some of the functions of the family environment, such as looking after young children when parents are working or must leave the house. The following excerpt shows how the interviewees describe this type of neighbour relations.

> - Before, a building was like a small family, now everyone is more independent (...) when I was a child, I remember staying at my neighbours' house... because they were neighbours (...) before there was much more of a relationship in the courtyard... now everyone goes their own way a bit more.
>
> E10, upper class, no children, protected compound

Reference to this traditional neighbour relation is very much conditioned by the time at which the interviews were conducted. The experience of residential confinement by Covid-19 acted as a catalyst for neighbour relations. The isolation and limitation of socio-affective networks to the residential environment led to the re-emergence of the figure of the traditional neighbour as a network of mutual support and the development of a feeling of unity, of collective fraternity, which is the other community dimension. The following excerpts are examples of this.

> - for example, a neighbour has been... "I'm going to supermarket, do you need anything?" ...another neighbour who has a pharmacy "hey look, I have masks that if you want...before giving them to others…"(...) that is...people are there to help.
>
> E7, upper class, no children, individualistic compound
>
> - ...when the confinement began, the neighbours organised themselves and created a WhatsApp group, called "support among neighbours", and everyone joined, especially to organise themselves (...)
>
> E13, upper class, no children, controlled compound

Nonetheless, the reappearance of the traditional neighbour in times of pandemic is not indicative that this type of neighbour relations will persist in the long term, nor is it indicative that the respondents currently crave or seek such neighbour relations. Rather, the emergence of the traditional neighbour could be a momentary response to a situation of need and urgency, as the contemporary ideal neighbour that all interviewees alluded to in their respective interviews is described in very different ways.

The top right of the triangle (Figure 1) corresponds to the ideal of the good neighbour, characterised by a dyadic relationship based on superficial and impersonal treatment, although always respectful. A close and supportive relationship in the

residential environment is not sought, as with the traditional neighbour, but rather a formal, albeit distant, relationship, as the interviewees indicate, a “cordial relationship”. The following excerpts illustrate this.

> - I don’t intend to make friends among my neighbours, you know...(laughs) unless it comes up...which I’m not looking for...
>
> E19, upper class with children, protected compound

> - I like to say hello, to have a good atmosphere... they are not going to be your friends or anything like that, right?... I'm not looking for friends, but at least a good atmosphere, a greeting...I don't know, it's important.
>
> E2, working class, no children, controlled compound

They expect the presence of neighbours to be as imperceptible as possible, that they ‘are not a nuisance’ or that they do not seem to exist. The ideal of neighbourly coexistence, in its collective rather than dyadic dimension, is harmony. Collective coexistence is harmonious, as long as neighbours comply with the rules of cordiality and coexistence. These include, saying good morning or good afternoon, but especially not ‘making a fuss’ or ‘ruckus’. In other words, they should not interfere in collective life or in personal rest, as the following statements show.

> - You’re a good neighbour when you don’t cause trouble, right? (...) the important thing is not to bother each other, you have your problems, I have mine.
>
> E17, upper class without children, protected compound

> - I know some people here on the building, but to tell you the truth I try not to do too much... (...) let’s say I try, whenever possible, to keep my

distance... there is an old saying that says “don’t open doors you can’t close” ...

E4, working class, no children, no residential compound

As we can see, personal space is a fundamental individual value in the assessment of neighbours and neighbourly relations. However, this individuality is distorted when the neighbour becomes too present in the lives of the interviewees. It is here that the *bad neighbour* appears, situated at the lower peak of the triangle, as the one who disturbs personal rest and disrupts neighbourly coexistence, by making noise late at night or not respecting the rules of coexistence. But the bad neighbour is not so much a bad neighbour from the perspective of dyadic relations but rather a bad neighbour collectively. As in the previous statements, the bad neighbour appears in the discourse of both non-residents and residents of residential compounds.

- here there are two things, firstly, form a group that defends itself from the outside, even if they kill each other alive, right?...this is something that happens in families (...) [but] here...for spurious and selfish interests in this community there is no such feeling (...) they [the neighbours] are capable of harming the community because they don’t get their own way....

E16, upper class, no children, controlled compound

- this is a block of very coherent people, very good, very calm...polite people, people who respect schedules (...) on the other hand in the other blocks (...) I ended up fighting with those people and I gave up of course...I didn't want to know anything more about...don’t ask me to help or anything because this is a disaster...

E4, working class, no children, no residential compound

We also see that the description of the bad neighbour is closely linked to the desired ideal of neighbourliness (upper ends of the triangle) from which the interviewees start. We distinguish two different ways of describing the bad neighbour. The first description is found in the first excerpt (E16). In this case, what is important is not the hostility in the relations between certain neighbours, but the conflict that prevents agreements and harms the community. Hence, the ideal of the family community illustrates how neighbour relations should work in situations of conflict. Unity and community come before what is described as 'spurious and selfish interests', which are the real causes of community breakdown.

The second description (E4) is more fatalistic, because once the conflict appears, the breakdown of the neighbourly relationship is accepted without a second thought. This is possibly due, at least in part, to the starting point being a more detached and individualistic ideal of neighbourliness (the good neighbour) in which there is no complicity, friendship or support network among neighbours (traditional neighbour). When the neighbour becomes a nuisance, the reaction is simply to break ties and disregard neighbour relations, which at this point, are characterised by collective, rather than simply dyadic, hostility.

This, in turn, prompted many of our interviewees to express apprehension about living in environments such as residential compounds, since having common areas and amenities requires residents and community members to interact and organise themselves to manage and maintain them. In addition, living in a residential compound can pose a *risk* to personal well-being, as the use of common areas by neighbours, especially their young children, can be a major impediment to personal relaxation.

M. would you prefer something in common?

- no, no... I'd prefer individual areas and not to have any…development nearby, no neighbours...I (laughs), to be honest.

E2, working class, no children, controlled compound

- I don't like...these residential compounds with common areas, the children, the balls, the bicycles, the swimming pools, for me that's...well, it's very nice...but with my work it doesn't suit me. I need to rest and I need peace and quiet, that's what I'm looking for as a priority.

E6, working class, no children, no residential compound

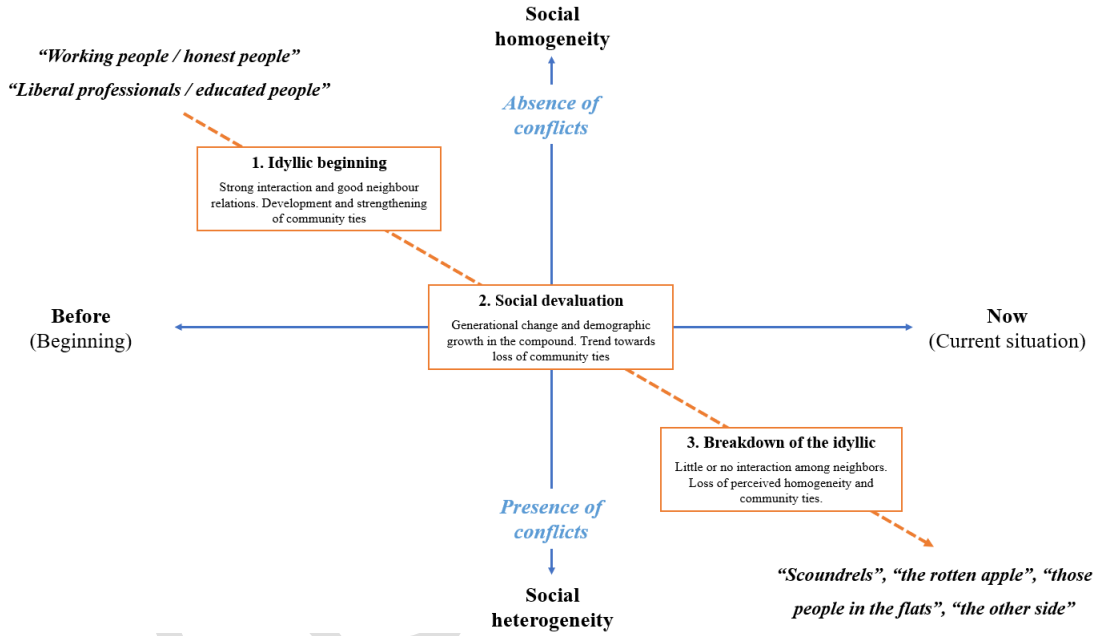
If the best neighbours are therefore not bothersome, do not make noise and do not seek a fraternal or mutually supportive relationship, why do some people choose to live in residential compounds where they have to interact, deliberate, reach agreements and live together in spaces that are for common use? As we will see in the next section, residential compounds fulfil a preventive function which, for our interviewees, favours the development and preservation of good neighbour relations. In the following section, we will see how these ideal types of neighbours appear in conflict situations and how they are described differently according to the socio-professional status in which the interviewees perceive themselves and their neighbours.

Neighbour conflicts in residential compounds

The reference to types of neighbour and neighbour relations is present in all the interviews. However, analysing how these appear and are interpreted, we see a discursive progression that is repeated in a very similar manner. At the beginning of the interviews, conflicts between neighbours do not seem to exist, but as the interview progresses, conflicts begin to emerge. We also find an evolution over time of neighbour relations in residential compounds.

Generally, the interviewees distinguish a first stage in the residential compound, associated with the early years of the development or when they first moved in. This initial stage is characterised by the absence of conflicts between neighbours. In the second stage, relations become strained and conflicts arise. The following figure illustrates these narrative configurations. It also depicts the evolution and decline of neighbour relations both in the evolution of the residential compounds and in the actual interviews.

Figure 2. Narrative configurations of the emergence of conflict in neighbour relations



The horizontal axis contrasts 'before' and 'now'. The vertical axis represents a possible transformation in the social composition, from homogeneity to heterogeneity. Through both axes, the temporal and discursive evolution of neighbour relations in the residential compounds is represented. From the initial moment (idyllic beginning), through the growth or demographic change in the compounds in which new neighbours appear (social devaluation), to the current time in which conflict is already imminent (breakdown of the idyllic).

The upper part of the figure shows the initial statements corresponding to a harmonious coexistence among neighbours, while the lower part represents the

problematic neighbour relations that emerge after the complexification of the social structure of the residential developments. It is important to note that this discursive evolution is observed in all types of residential compounds, from the most protected to the most individualistic or symbolic, and in all social profiles from affluent to working-class respondents. However, the statements are more emphatic among residents in protected and controlled compounds.

The top left half of the figure shows a somewhat more idealised notion of the beginning of neighbour relations at the start of the interviews and the residential experience. At first, relations were good and there was a perceived social homogeneity among neighbours, either because they all belonged to the same social class and were at a similar point in their life course, or because they also shared hobbies and did social activities together. Here an idea appears that runs through all the interviews in the interviewees' discourse on neighbourly coexistence.

The greater the similarity between neighbours (mainly in terms of class), the greater the likelihood of good neighbour relations. The discursive logic always seems to be the same, and consists of a generalised interest in living 'among similars'. This means that sharing the same socio-cultural condition, more or less similar values, ways of life and lifestyles with one's neighbours makes it possible to establish and preserve a harmonious relationship in the residential environment. Differences, on the other hand, are the basis for disputes, disagreements and conflicts. The following excerpts exemplify this idea of similarity in support of good neighbour relations.

> - I prefer something similar to what I've always had (...) people with a similar lifestyle and values to mine...this makes the rules of coexistence similar, the rhythms of life similar, and we don't make noise at certain hours because almost everybody works at a certain time...

E19, upper class with children, protected compound

- ...it was a block of flats of working and non-working people...so, that block was problematic because not everybody has a fixed income (...) that is a problematic community...

E6, working class, no children, no residential compound

As we can see, although being 'among similars' is not only sharing the same class status, for the interviewees it is key. We also observe discursive differences in the way interviewees describe this 'among similars' according to their social class. Among affluent respondents, good neighbours are those with a high socio-educational and cultural level, as seen in E1 when speaking of the neighbours as 'liberal professionals', although other expressions such as 'courteous people' are also commonly used (Figure 2).

In contrast, working-class people mention professional status. Expressions such as 'working people' are frequent, but also 'normal/common people' (as in E11) or 'honest people'. The latter expression reinforces the idea that the use of adjectives denotes a prior self-acknowledgement on the part of the interviewees in a particular social class, which, in turn, serves to socially and discursively dissociate themselves from what they perceive as 'bad neighbours'.

- the environment is very ideal (...) they are couples with small children, very similar to me...liberal professionals, all or practically all of them...we have a pharmacist, we have a judge, we have a teacher...

E1, upper class with children, individualistic compound

M.- What are the neighbours like?

- well...we don't know each other very well, but...normal people, not…working people, everyone does their job and that's it.

E11, working class with children, individualistic compound

A gradual process of loss of social homogeneity and initial social ties is also common in residential compounds. When social profiles become increasingly heterogeneous, disagreements and disputes between neighbours become more frequent, and neighbour relations begin to cool down. This results in a gradual loss of a sense of collectivity or community life.

When conflict arises, it is always interpreted from the comparative exercise between the before (the past), as good times, and the now (current situation), as bad times. The following working-class interviewee exemplifies this evolution of neighbourhood relations through the metaphor of 'the rotten apple': a person who arrives in the residential environment and disrupts the general atmosphere there. This is the figure representing the process of development and culmination of the breakdown of neighbour relations. These are new neighbours (demographic growth) who are dissimilar to the original neighbours. They are another type of neighbour, 'the others' (social heterogeneity).

- at the beginning we got together as a group, we got together as a group of neighbours and it was very pleasant...but since the problem of the garages arose... and there was a general unease and now...all that was lost (...) it's like when you bring a basket of rotten apples from shopping...the next day there are several rotten ones, and a week later you have to throw the whole basket away.

E4, working class, no children, no residential compound

As with good neighbours, affluent and working-class respondents describe 'bad neighbours' differently. For the working class, the main characteristics from which they

describe and discursively distance themselves from their bad neighbours are their employment situation (unemployed), as well as their housing situation (being squatters) or ethnicity. They also refer to bad neighbours (their rotten apples) using more bitter and explicitly offensive expressions, such as ‘scoundrels’ or ’characters’.

The affluent class indicates professional status, especially educational level, or even the type of housing (“those in the flats”) to explain why the neighbour relationship has worsened. Although in their case, they do so in more subtle terms, discussing the loss of unity without the use of derogatory adjectives. For example, in the following excerpt they speak of ‘two sides’ to differentiate themselves from the later arrivals in the compound, who are those who ‘want to break up the community’. All these references to the bad neighbour in terms of social heterogeneity represent what we refer to here as living ‘among others’.

> *M. - And how is the relationship with the neighbours?*
>
> - well, there are two sides...those who want to break up the community (laughs) and those who want the community to continue...but it’s already a lost cause (...) at Christmastime there was a Christmas meal (...) but now it’s over...that was in the beginning...
>
> E12, upper class with children, controlled compound

Structural censorship (Martín-Criado, 1997) may explain this view of the bad neighbour as someone from a social class perceived as inferior, which is not explicit at the beginning of the interviews. In fact, often, when it is mentioned, it is in a hidden, softened way, or even making the interviewer an accomplice in the interviewee’s personal judgements.

This is the case of the following excerpts, which describe a hypothetical bad neighbour who makes noise, but not just any kind of noise, rather the noise of a specific

type of music (reggaeton), making a latent reference to a lower social class. In the second case, involving two interviewees, we note that the man initially chooses not to mention ethnicity, and the woman intervenes to make explicit what is implicit in his words.

> - at the beginning I think...although I can't be sure of course...I think it was more of a need to know what kind of neighbours there were, right?... what kind of people, what you were getting into...
>
> *M. - what exactly do you mean?*
>
> - well...when you move into a place...of course you spend a lot of money (...) so you're a bit afraid of making a mistake...imagine you have a neighbour across the street who plays reggaeton music every day...you want to know who you're living with
>
> E1, upper class with children, individualistic compound
>
> *M: By 'good people', what do you mean?*
>
> - well, that normal people would come...not like when he [real estate agent] put in this one who was a scoundrel...normal and that's it....
>
> [partner intervenes].
>
> - gypsies! to be blunt.
>
> E18, working class, no children, controlled compound

Another striking aspect of the expressions, which would confirm the importance of social homogeneity in the discourses of neighbourhood relations, is that in both classes, when conflicts arise at the beginning, they are normalised. The interviewees attempt to downplay the importance of overt conflicts in the residential environment when there is social homogeneity of which they feel part.

> - there was a meeting…a misunderstanding...they arrived a bit more...some neighbours came...to talk to each other...to be heard

and...the meeting was tense (...) but it was resolved, talking and yes, there are people who are rational and I tell you, above all courtesy and respect, that is what is most...most prevalent.

E3, upper class with children, controlled compound

- variety yes, huge...there is variety because...unemployed people (...) there are squatters, there are water hook-ups...like everywhere...

E18, working class, no children, controlled compound

In the previous excerpt, the affluent interviewee speaks of 'small misunderstandings' when in fact this person is alluding to verbal and almost physical aggressions witnessed in neighbourhood meetings. The interviewee nonetheless emphasises that what is most common in the community is courtesy and respect. In the case of the working-class interviewee, these situations not only make neighbourly coexistence difficult, but also the financial future of the community itself, although this is portrayed as happening 'everywhere'.

Conclusions

This study analyses how neighbour relations are interpreted and valued in urban spaces as well as the role the interviewees consider the residential compounds to play in achieving improved coexistence and neighbour relations. The results indicate that both residents and non-residents of compounds have the same ideal of neighbourliness based on cordiality, that is, a formal and respectful but superficial and distant relationship with neighbours. We also note that this current ideal of neighbourliness (the good neighbour - cordial relationship) is far from the one that the interviewees associate with the past (the traditional neighbour) when, according to them, neighbourly relations were closer, more familiar and communal. Some interviewees allude to this traditional neighbour from the

nostalgic memory of their childhood similar to some classical authors (Simmel, 1927; Tönnies, 1979) when reflecting on the processes of socialisation and construction of bonds/ties in past or traditional societies. Others, instead, associate it with the first years living in the compound.

Although, as other authors found (Stoiljković, 2022), the confinement (Covid-19 pandemic) helped them not only to get to know their neighbours but also to strengthen relationships with them. However, perhaps this feeling of cohesion or community tends to degrade over time, since the ideal of neighbourliness most valued today by all those interviewed is the good neighbour, characterised by cordial but cold, impersonal and superficial daily dealings between neighbours.

Secondly, the existence of residential environments (Sampson, 2012) with common areas that promote interaction and the creation of a sense of community and belonging in the space, does not imply that this is determinant or can be extrapolated to other residential contexts. Residential compounds require continuous interaction among neighbours for the management of common areas, which can also cause tension and arguments between neighbours (Müllauer-Seichter, 2019).

Interviewees cite the risks of living in these patterns of urbanisation rather than advantages *per se*. This premise would clash head-on with the idea that residential compounds are cohesive environments with a strong sense of belonging and community (Bauman, 2003). Nor can we underestimate the influence of class status on the development of neighbourhood ties/bonds. Our interviewees express the desire to live in internally homogeneous 'among similars' residential environments, as they acknowledge a greater prospect of harmonious neighbour relations and coexistence. The likelihood of conflictive neighbour relations increases when neighbours are recognised as being from another social class (social heterogeneity and living 'among others'), specifically if they

are from a lower social class. This suggests that the residential compound has a preventive function to achieve good neighbourly coexistence, quality of life and personal well-being.

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