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An 'age-regation' process as theoretical understanding of the gated retirement village

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Gating the elderly appears to be a common and inevitable part of international urban life. In our study we have used the structure-agency relationship to identify and analyse the salient elements of the process of gating. In order to emphasise the dichotomy of the process in which aging people congregate together and, simultaneously, segregate themselves from urban life, we coined the term "age-regation". We provide a comprehensive and logically structured theoretical framework, in which the theoretical bases of the gated retirement village are discussed within two overarching constructs, namely age (identity, lifestyle) and the congregation/segregation enclave (physical, social, psychological, political, economic, mobility, racial).

'n 'Veroudering-as-afsondering-en-uitsluitingsproses' as teoretiese veronderstelling van die uitsluitingsaftreedorp

Die uitsluiting van bejaardes blyk internasionaal 'n algemene en onafskeidbare deel te wees van stedelike lewe. In ons studie het ons struktuur-agentskapverhoudings gebruik om die treffende elemente van "afkamping" te identifiseer en analiseer. Om die digotomie van hierdie proses (waar bejaardes versamel en terselfdertyd hulself afsonder van stedelike lewe) te beklemtoom, het ons die term "veroudering-as-afsondering-en-uitsluiting" gekonstrueer. Ons stel 'n omvattende en logies gestruktureerde teoretiese raamwerk voor waarin die teoretiese basis van "uitsluingsaftreedorpe" bespreek word binne twee oorhoofse konstrukte, naamlik, ouderdom (identiteit, lewenstyl) en samesnoering/segregasie-enklawe (fisies, sosiaal, sielkundig, polities, ekonomies, mobilisering, bevolkingsgroep).

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Urban segregation has been studied and explained by referring to inequalities in socio-economic, racial, ethnic and gender aspects (Goldhaber & Schnell 2007), the contribution of planning to spatial inequalities (Sandercock 2003), and criticising the spatial justice of cities and the right to the city (Lefebvre 1996, Mitchell 2003). Social scientists view age as one of the elements that influence socio-spatial segregation patterns in cities (*cf* Golant 1984 & 1986, Rudzitis 1984). The interest in spatial age-segregated studies declined in the 1980s. Since then the topic of space, age and retirement was neglected and remained mainly in the hands of scholars of gerontology (Walters & Bartlett 2009). The drastic changes in postmodern social conditions of urban life contributed to the emergence of gated retirement villages in many parts of the world in the past two decades (in the USA already from the 1970s), and attracted the attention of scholars of urban spatial studies, among others, to different aspects of the phenomenon such as late-age immigration to the Sun Belt cities in the USA (McHuge & Mings 1996, McHuge 2000); the role of place-based community in a retirement village as a contributor to self-actualisation (Townsend 2002); the reasons for living in gated retirement villages (Low 2003); societal attitudes and values of place in old age (McHuge 2003); the living experiences in a retirement gated development (Grant 2005 & 2007), and the housing and satisfaction from the different care aspects (Bernard *et al* 2007). The literature on gated retirement villages emphasises that the crucial reason for "gating" the elderly is the insecure condition of contemporary cities. Gated retirement villages provide a lifestyle suitable for the elderly with distinctive elements such as special facilities and amenities, with particular age-based functions, all of which assist in generating place-based social interactions. The demand for gated retirement villages along with the growing numbers of older persons, especially in the aging developed world, is captured in the statement that we need to prepare ourselves for the "age quake" (UN report 1998).[1] This points to the fact that this type of organisation of urban space will increasingly continue to develop and will dominate urban space in the future.

The emergence of gated retirement villages, whose basic characteristic is age-segregation, reflects changes in the way in which

1 <http://www.un.org/New Links/older/99/older.htm>

society conceives the concept of the traditional family and its role in everyday life, and the interpretation of obligation to elderly parents in the twenty-first century. In addition, it reflects both the re-rise of materialism, individualism and the "loss of community", and the way in which society perceives oldness, and captures its image. Western society sanctifies progress, growth, and independence; it deplores regression, erosion and dependency. Consequently, it reveres youthfulness and vitality and abnegates and dismisses old age and senility. The lens through which society views elderly persons is of ageism (Hagestad & Uhlenberg 2005). It blurs their physical presence, enlarges their resemblance to medieval people, and presents them as those who grasp the altar's corners of life (Hazan 2005). Western society uses a camouflage terminology to describe oldness as "active retiree" or "successful retiree". These euphemisms are the fig leaf or perhaps an antidote to stereotypes of decline and dependency, which permits the elderly to continue to participate in society and justifies their existence in place and time (Hazan 2005). The process of gating the elderly has been traditionally examined from the perspective of the solitary individual and his/her motives for moving to a gated retirement village, such as his/her welfare in the third age (ranging from physical security to successful aging), present and future benefits, to those in frail condition, and providing a lifestyle that suits his/her needs and demands.

This article broadens our perspective to include not only the solitary individual, but also his/her relationships within the group in space, as well as the dominant role of external forces, including the establishment, entrepreneurs and others, all of which result in the gated retirement village. The article critically examines this socio-spatial phenomenon by studying their manifestations in order to shed light on the actors (the elderly), their actions (congregating/segregating) and the acts of others towards them (state institutions, organisations, private economy sector). This enables us to investigate not only the spatial and social relations of those residing within the gated retirement village but also their interactions with their external spatial and social surroundings. To focus on the complexity of the socio-spatial process of gating the elderly, we have coined the term, an age-regation process (age + congregation/segregation). To

aid in elucidating and summarising the manifold elements of these interrelations we have developed a schematic framework.

1. Gated retirement village: an age-congregated or an age-segregated enclave?

By definition, a gated retirement village is a residential area, purposefully planned for the elderly, fenced off from its surroundings by walls and gates with access controls that restrict or prevent entry. This provides the elderly with feelings of security and protection from the "other" in the outside world (Low 2003). The first planned retirement villages were established in the USA approximately fifty years ago in the Sun Belt southern states of Florida, Texas, Arizona and California, creating the Sun City communities and the Leisure World, among others. Gated retirement villages were aimed at people in the third age who sought to escape the violence of urban life and to live in a warmer climate zone with a vigorous lifestyle.[2] In the past decade, the fortress mentality of elderly persons spread to other parts of the world – Canada (Townshend 2002), Britain (Bernard *et al* 2007, Evans & Means 2007), Australia (Walters & Bartlett 2009), New-Zealand (Grant B 2006, Grant J 2007), Latin America (Caldeira 1999) as well as South Africa, although there is a paucity of research on this phenomenon in this latter instance.

There are several advantages for elderly persons choosing to reside in a gated retirement village. Low (2003) points to the physical security (high rates of crime and being a soft target) as the main reason that influences the decision of elderly to move to a gated retirement village. Seeking to live among peers (Hagestad & Uhlenberg 2005) contributes to the attraction of the place. Other benefits relate to the 'easy-care' lifestyle in these places (Low 2003, McKenzie 2006). In addition, gated retirement villages provide economic security by keeping the property values stable and being a "less risky investment" (Franz 2006: 73), a crucial factor for retirees who live on a fixed income. In addition, retirement villages provide leisure and an exclusive active lifestyle (golf course, tennis courts, swimming pool and a private country

2 *Cf* McHuge & Mings 1996, Blakely & Snyder 1997, Low 2003, McHuge & Larson-Keagy 2005.

club) that meet the needs and requirements of the elderly (McHuge & Mings 1996, Low 2003, Grant 2006). They can be considered a club realm (Webster 2002) and provide solutions to possible future health problems. Limiting the admittance to a retirement village ensures that only retirees can enjoy its special amenities.

Gated retirement villages have been criticised for various reasons, primarily for being cut off from society at large (Bernard *et al* 2007), for creating social and spatial separation and segregation between different social groups (old and young), by drawing on lines of economic inequality (income), different lifestyles or cultural difference (Grant 2004a). In addition, it separates generations, reducing cross-age interactions (Hagestad & Unlenberg 2005 & 2006), and contributes to developing negative stereotypes of aging (Laws 1995, Walters & Bartlett 2009). This produces images of a "voluntarily aged ghetto" (Friedan 1993), "warehousing" of older people (Gauchat 1999) or apartheid communities (Lemanski *et al* 2008). The act of walling and gating residential areas raises feelings of fear and anxiety from others instead of contributing to confidence (Low 2003). The residents are "pressured" to conform to the regulations of the village and often to a property owners' association that may contradict democratic values. In addition, a gated retirement village describes a spatial form of an enclave. Marcuse (2005: 17-8) defines an enclave as

> ... an area of spatial concentration in which members of a particular group, self-defined by ethnicity, religion or otherwise, congregate as a means of protecting and enhancing their economic, social, political and/or cultural development. An exclusionary enclave is one whose members occupy positions of superior power – wealth or ethnic, racial or social status and exclude others from unauthorized entry.

This definition of an enclave can be related to a gated retirement village, but other socio-spatial patterns, as defined by Marcuse (2005), can also provide a partial or complete description of a gated retirement village: withdrawal (voluntary and deliberate separation of a socially and economically dominant population group), walling out (formatting an exclusionary enclave or a citadel), fortification (the voluntary coming together of a population group for purposes of protecting, strengthening and symbolising dominance) or a ghetto (Marcuse 1997a & 1997b). Thus a gated retirement village

is an age-congregation socio-spatial phenomenon by nature, yet it produces an age-segregated entity.

This study is not limited solely to its inhabitants but seeks to understand it as part of our society. The following questions arise. Is it a voluntary and desirable solution or the reverse? How is it organised, operated and sustained in our society? It has led us to realise that the complex variety of everyday life practices that are involved in the creation of a human society have a relatively small number of common denominators (perhaps embedded in human nature), which permit their classification into a small number of characteristics. However, the major analytical difficulty arises from the fact that the same root motivation permeates many of these practices, thus providing an obstacle to determining an invariable relationship between a given practice and a given characteristic. For example, the basic element of fear, usually classified as a psychological characteristic, may directly affect the spatial and physical environment, affect the desire to migrate, and have racial overtones.

2. 'Age-regation' process: an analytical description

Gating the elderly involves structure-agency relations, which are exercised by the state and its representative institutions, and meaningful communication between the elderly and the remainder of society. These contacts of the elderly with governing institutions and with society take place on a daily basis and over time become embalmed in routine practices imbued with "elderly" meanings until they ultimately become a social norm. These gating practices are exercised by society towards the elderly but are also practised by the elderly towards the outsiders and towards other old persons. These practices involve different techniques, conscious and unconscious, that aim to modify and control the images and stereotype of the elderly and their place in both space and society. By creating a dominant agenda of "separate country" and "successful aging" the social and spatial order "put the elderly in their place"; they categorise them, mark them, attach them to their own identity, impose a law of truth on them which they ultimately recognise and which others also ultimately recognise in them. Thus, they create the "old subject" who is directed to congregate in a gated retirement village. By inculcating the dominant habitus

(Bourdieu 1989) the elderly are guided to choose to move to a gated retirement village, while still retaining a semblance of free choice.

Gating the elderly creates a heterotopian environment in which the social space is disciplined by their particular lifestyle and regulations, and the old persons become immured in their new "disciplinary careers". The process of gating the elderly requires a new terminology that will reflect the recent evolution of the structure-agency relations, which have positioned elderly persons anew in urban life. We thus suggest the term "age-regation" in which aging people congregate and simultaneously segregate themselves from urban life due to changes in their habitus, in their spatial and social order and in the specious regulations of the state. It may be inferred from the continuous development of individual and social practices regarding the elderly that the nature of the gated retirement village is a process, a "constantly becoming".

Figure 1 suggests a multitude of gated retirement village manifestations. The "age-regation" process comprises two primary dimensions: the spatial dimension and the age dimension; the congregated/segregated enclave itself and the demographic or age factor. By identifying the manifestations of the gated retirement village, and analysing these by using the structure-agency relationship, they can be grouped into clusters (of subcharacteristics) with a common denominator reflecting their root motivation. Combining these clusters into meaningful characteristics or attributes provides the theoretical underpinning for the two primary dimensions which form the bases for the establishment of the gated retirement village. The spatial dimension is viewed as resting on the physical attribute, in close conjunction with the political and economic attributes which bring it into existence, but equally important are the human attributes involved in making a societal entity, which we categorise as social, psychological, mobility and racial. But the factor making the village unique is, of course, the age dimension, whose attributes we divide into two: the intellectual push, which we term identity/image, and the magnetic pull, the enticing lifestyle. However, we must stress the complexity ensuing from two aspects of a given life practice. It can appear in a number of subcharacteristics, albeit in slightly different forms, and the fact that it can function simultaneously as cause and effect at the level of both meaning and action, until they

become a norm of behaviour of all the participants: the elderly, the others and the state. We summarise our analysis from the point of view of the principal characteristics or attributes to the cluster of subcharacteristics of their manifestations down to the level of the individual practice.

3. Physical characteristic

The desire for safety and security is one of the main reasons for the decision to move to a gated retirement village (Graham & Tuffin 2004, Grant 2004a & 2004b). With the rise in crime rates and being a soft target, elderly persons seek a protected environment in which they can avoid the anxieties of the city and live a confident and secure life in retirement (Grant 2006, Bernard *et al* 2007). Thus security bulks large in the construction of the gated retirement villages and includes (all the security elements are not always provided) walling-off and fencing from the surroundings by means of two- to three-meter-high brick walls, electric wires, fences, bars, barricades and ditches, with controlled and authorised access to the village twenty-four hours a day, by means of gating, armed guards, booms and key entry system or punch code. Along the walls and gates there are armed guard patrols, guard dogs, closed circuit TV, cameras, spot- and searchlights, and other security technologies (Grant 2004a). Above all, a large sign welcoming those who are authorised to enter the village warns that the place is a protected and self-governed environment.

Walls and gates, guards and authorised entry, security technologies and prohibiting signs all function as symbols of the socio-spatial order, proclaiming the division, separation and isolation of social space. Caldeira (1999: 120) terms this space a "fortified enclave" in order to affirm its symbolic meaning. Some individuals are permitted only to observe from a distance but not to enter. As spatial visible barriers, the walls and gates are the signs and symbols whereby gated villages interact and conduct dialogues with their surroundings, who is allowed to enter and who is excluded, where we spatially belong, and where we are denied. In addition, the walls and the gates symbolise the production of a separated, segregated, different world, "islands to which one can return every day, in order to escape from the city and its deteriorated environment and to encounter an exclusive world of

pleasure among peers" (Caldeira 1999: 120). But spatial order usually corresponds to social order. As Bourdieu (2000: 131) explains, "the site where a thing or an agent 'takes place', exists, in short, as an indicator of position or rank in a social order". Thus a gated village also points to the symbolic location of the resident individual in the hierarchical social order, analogous to the position of an individual in physical and social space.

Gated villages are constructed aesthetically as neat and nurtured environments in contrast with deteriorated, polluted areas of the city. These locales are characterised by architectural features such as similarity in the building style, ease of maintenance and reduced investment costs in the designing and construction of artificial spaces such as lakes, creeks and golf courses (Grant 2006). These unimaginative architectural features provide for some, the feeling of artificial life spaces, deridingly termed "plasticized" places (Laws 1995), Disneyfication or even placelessness (Relph 1976).

Architectural design has been recognised as a powerful tool in constructing social power relations, even to the extent of generating submissiveness (for example, the "panopticon" in a prison). It encompasses the built environment, shaping perspectives and producing different senses of place for different individuals in public and private spheres. At its extreme, it is argued,

> ... the architectural policing of social boundaries has become the 'zeitgeist' of urban restructuring – a master narrative in the emerging built environment of the 1990s (Davis 2005: 268).

However, the architecture of urban and suburban spaces may generate in some of the neighbourhoods a hostile environment impeding the development of democratic participation and exacerbated by the loss of parks and other public features of the municipality (Bickford 2000, Madanipour 2003); it may manufacture "walled cities" and citadel cities of segregation and purity (Marcuse 1997b), and it may develop into an "architecture of fear" (Marcuse 1997a). Thus, gated villages are designed as fortified spaces with one entry from a certain authorised direction in order to hide the internal private space, to separate it from public space and to control its purity, while the immediate outside area is made off-limits by means of ditches, lack of shade or public furniture.

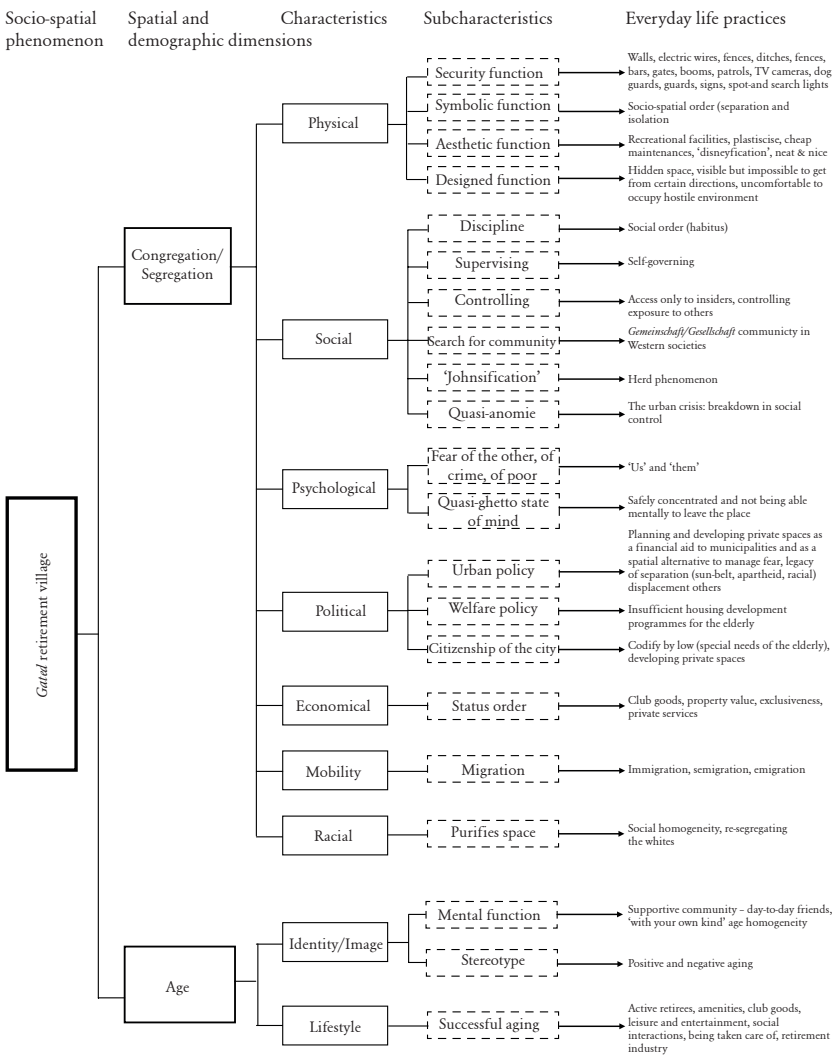

Figure 1: A framework for understanding the age-regration process

4. Social characteristic

Discipline, argues Foucault (1977), creates "docile bodies" which serve the economics, politics and warfare of the modern industrial age and thus enable social structures to be preserved. Following Foucault, we can then view gated villages as disciplinary structures of society in which urban space is being managed through separation and fragmentation, and individuals are imbued with the recognition of their place in the hierarchal social order, but also with the recognition of the place of others. Thus, a gated retirement village can be viewed as part of the production and reinforcement of disciplined social order.

The supervision of gated villages constitutes a "territorial organization" of the community members' property rights (Manzi & Smith-Bowers 2005) such as homeowners association or common interest housing developments which control and regulate the village's house type, taste culture and resident behaviour (McKenzie 2006). These associations are also responsible for the supply of private civic goods (Mycoo 2006) and represent the individuals in matters of management and control of the village.

Because of the extent of their control over the individual, they are deemed to be a new kind of self-governing institution – shadow governments or micro-governments – that operate as the managers of a private city inside the main city (Le Goix 2006). These associations are criticised for not being democratic or representative of the entire village (McKenzie 2006) and for exerting pressure on residents to conform to the appropriate norms of the village.

In a search for community in the modern world, gated communities are often considered a solution for the loss of the place-based community in industrial societies, as they provide a secure environment, geographical proximity for social interactions (which, in turn, contribute to the well-being, especially when aging) and a variety of opportunities for exercising communal life (Walters & Barlett 2009). The search for community implies Tonnies' (1957) ideal types of *Gesellschaft* community and *Gesellschaft* society. *Gesellschaft* community refers to the traditional communities that were rooted in particular places and whose members were connected through ties of blood and so conducted in-depth social relations. By contrast, *Gesellschaft* society describes a modern society, in which communities

are instrumentally created, motivated through utility contracts and rationality. Tonnies (1957: 65) explains pithily the difference between the two situations: in *Gesellschaft* the individuals "remain essentially united in spite of all separating factors, whereas in *Gesellschaft* they are essentially separated in spite of all uniting factors". *Gesellschaft* seems to represent modern life, which sanctifies individualism and rationalism and neglects proximal and kinship relationship, widening the gap between the generations – those in *Gesellschaft* communities "live together apart".

The illogical tensions of class, race and ethnicity create a widespread emotional fortress mentality leading to a general move to gated communities (Low 2003). This fortress mentality influences the individual's decision to move to a secure and comfortable village often as a unit with their group of friends; they seek to justify their choice of living on a moral basis: "look at my friends who were randomly robbed living in a 'negated' development" which we can term "Johnsification" is recognised (Low 2003: 11).

Gated communities reflect a severe condition of unrest of urban society termed *quasi-anomie*. This unrest is translated into terms such as urban crisis and decline in moral values which are part of the post-industrial urban life (Sandercock 2003). Bauman (2005: 164) describes how the city in the past one hundred years has become associated more with danger than with safety: "friends, enemies and above all, the elusive and mysterious strangers veering threateningly between these two extremes, mix now and rub their shoulders on the city streets. The war against insecurity, dangers and risks is now waged inside the city". This state of *quasi-anomie* refers to Emil Durkheim's concept of anomie that is the opposite of social solidarity, in which, at a personal or societal level, norms weaken and become less binding for individuals, and so usher in alienation, isolation and segregation. In this light, gated communities can be viewed as a reflection of the condition of the social unrest permeating contemporary urban society.

5. Psychological characteristic

Gated villages are a socio-spatial response to fear of the others, to the potential danger they represent in the production of disorder in the city. Sandercock (2003: 108) argues that fear of the others

(criminals, strangers and the poor) causes individuals to build "walls, literally and metaphorically, around their space to keep out those who are not like them", and thus generate socio-spatial polarisation and fragmentation. The fear of strangers is rooted in their very strangeness: their unpredictable intentions, their ways of thinking, and their response to shared situations (Bauman 2005).

Gated communities may reflect a quasi-ghetto state of mind or perhaps, as a more apt term, "gated minds" (Brunn 2006: 6). In this instance, parallel to the physical separation, the barriers in the minds of the individuals not only affect their behaviour but also tend to limit their living space. We do not suggest that gated communities are in fact ghettos, but that the way they are perceived in their residents' minds forces the comparison: how they make sense of the place they live in, as a most secure and protected place from others, and can never conceive of leaving it.

6. Political characteristic

Urban policy encourages and supports the building and extending of gated communities for the elderly. Although this urban form has been widely criticised for contributing to social segregation and the fragmentation of society and space, it is a preferable type of development for local governments and developers in the private sector. Municipalities in financial difficulties welcome the construction of private infrastructures by creating policies for these developments and even join real-estate associations in campaigns to create a market for the project (Bickford 2000: 359). An additional motivation is that affluent developments ensure that "good people" of the "right status" will inhabit the place and will maintain the high value of the property. In addition, these developments usually invest in landscaping, and have attractive entry features, which contribute to land values in the entire area (Grant 2005). For developers of the private sector, gated communities are attractive because

> ... they recognize the opportunity for niche marketing: they effectively combine the aesthetic and common appeal of a private controlled development (with its attractive amenities and common

> maintenance) with the lure of a homogenous community of residents: people of similar ages, wealth and lifestyle (Grant 2005: 282).

With the decline of welfare state policy, gated retirement communities increasingly become a preferred solution as it eases the economic pressure on the reduced welfare budget. It is acknowledged that "older people's social and material welfare is increasingly a matter for personal negotiation rather than to be taken for granted as might have been done in the past [...] with security provided by state and family" (Walters & Barlett 2009: 231).

Gated communities are also perceived as an attempt of urban policy to debase basic citizenship rights on the pretext of the existence of fear of others in the city, by creating separated spaces for "us" and "them" and by displacing unwelcomed social groups to other areas of the city (Sandercock 2003).

7. Economic characteristic

Gated communities have become a status symbol of an exclusive habitat for middle- and upper-class social groups (Manzi & Smith-Bowers 2005). The construction of status symbols is "a process that elaborates social distance and creates means for the assertion of social differences and inequality" (Caldeira 1999: 119). Aggressive marketing of residences in gated communities by the private sector stresses the status symbol, while describing the lifestyle as an exclusive world of pleasure among peers with private civic services of their choice (Mycoo 2005). Webster (2002: 409) describes gated communities as a club "with proprietary forms of industrial and commercial community which are a manifestation of the club realm that give legal protection to the economic rights over shared neighborhood attributes". But gated communities are not simply the physical expression of an affluent elite; they are a production of the state, which has the ability to impose upon its residents status division with regard to space. Marcuse (2005: 23) describes the duality of this process:

> ... governments may be responding to the desires of the holders of economic or political power, desires that are likewise reflected in parallel market patterns; the powerful benefit both from the

state's actions and from private investors' actions in the marketplace outside the direct state apparatus.

8. Mobility characteristic

Three types of migration into a retirement gated community can be identified: immigration, emigration and semigration. The first relates to retirees who move between countries, who immigrated for good, or are merely seasonal or snowbirds immigrants as part of a circle migration (Mchuge & Mings 1996). Emigration relates to retirees who move between areas in the country due to family changes (empty nest) and may reside in a retirement gated community. Semigration relates to retirees who are mainly part of the elite groups who wish to withdraw from disorderly society, spatially and mentally, by migrating to a "bubble" of a retirement gated community without any citizenship commitments to society.

9. Racial characteristic

Gated communities serve as a tool for maintaining social homogeneity and purifying private spaces (Sibley 1998). In their efforts to market the gated community, developers and local municipalities evoke the image of home, a place of security, comfort and relaxation, and a place that is purified of fear, discomfort or uncertainty (Bickford 2000). In addition, Bickford (2000: 356) argues that the demand for purity is not only a result of bias on the part of the residents but "is provoked, energized and sustained by political institutional practices and policies".

10. Identity/image characteristic

How do the aged perceive themselves? What mental self-image do they have in the retirement gated village? Are they on a slippery slope sliding towards the inevitable end – a dreary and depressive state – or do they have a wholesome, healthy attitude towards life, as they did when they were younger and active with family and social responsibilities, and with the need for earning a livelihood? In contemporary Western society, the position of the aged as "elders", based on the traditional lifestyle of families, has changed radically as has the understanding

of the obligations to parents. The burgeoning solution of the past fifty years has been the move to the gated retirement community. These communities provide a mental, supportive milieu by the residents themselves; the day-to-day non-kin social relations replace family support, as well as long life friendships that are no longer in geographical proximity (Philipson 2007, Walters & Barlett 2009). The retirement milieu provides the company of peers that share similar life experiences, a common outlook on life, with similar opinions, prejudices, and predilections, leading to feelings of warmth and belonging, almost a substitute family (McHuge & Larson-Keagy 2005), as well as peers that share similar health conditions.

Gated communities can also be perceived as a "means of escape" for older people who can avoid the stigma of physical and mental deterioration: "if everyone is old – no one is old" (McHuge 2003: 181). In addition, the individual's accumulated "social capital", as well as the daily social interactions contribute to his/her well-being, especially when aging (Hagestad & Uhlenberg 2005). Since individual identities are wrapped up in place, living in a gated retirement village may promote the development of a variety of negative age stereotypes which relate to dependency and decline (Hagestad & Uhlenberg 2005), of an aged ghetto (Friedan 1993), of a "separate country" (Smith 1995), of "warehousing" of older people who are "just sitting around" waiting for the end to come. Contrary to this widespread stereotype in our society (Grant 2006), new positive images promote successful aging and active retirement stereotypes. For example, McHuge (2003) emphasises how the retirement industry in Arizona and in other Sun Belt locales promotes a stereotype of ageless selves plated with a veneer of a romanticised, idyllic vision. Grant (2006) shows how the government of New Zealand promotes a positive aging strategy which fights, among other strategies, to dismantle the notion that old age is mostly about decline. The elderly assert: "none of us wants our age to subsume our entire identity. We don't want to be our age. We want to be ourselves" (Grant 2006: 109).

11. Lifestyle characteristic

Gated retirement villages have been developed to provide a certain lifestyle, with a successful aging environment and the necessary

amenities for the elderly in the present and in the future when they are frail. Some may provide an exclusive high-cost lifestyle (Blakeley & Snyder 1997, Blandy *et al* 2003), but all retirement villages provide "easy-care" lifestyle by the village management that manages and maintains the landscape and the buildings (Low 2003: 209). The variety of social and physical activities is presented as possessing life-giving qualities (McHuge & Mings 1996, Grant 2006) and includes golf course, tennis courts, swimming pool and country club. The successful aging agenda has produced a retirement industry which includes marketing, advertising, promoting, and selling of all kinds of products for the elderly, including the gated communities, as the best solution for an "ageless" life (McHuge 2003).

12. Conclusion

The process of gating the elderly is the principal solution of Western society in the twenty-first century to the problem of aged parents, and of the aged, in general. It creates a separate and fragmented social space for the elderly, "a separate country" which is accepted as natural and its consequences are regarded as benign. We view this process in the context of the theoretical structure-agency relationship which, in our opinion, provides a valid and cogent basis for the analysis of society: its institutions, cultural patterns, as well as the social and physical manifestations of the gated retirement village. We found that the latter are mainly of the instrumental type, inferring that the "age-regation" process takes place in a segregated, fragmented social context, while simultaneously contributing to the fragmentation.

This article portrayed a comprehensive picture of the variety and number of factors leading to the establishment of the gated retirement village, as well as the path from the individual everyday life manifestations to the theoretical basis underlying the spatial and demographic dimensions. Gating the elderly appears to have positive outcomes for the elderly: socialising with peers, feelings of being secured and sheltered, living an active lifestyle, and satisfaction with the maintenance of the residence. On the other hand, the "age-regation" process has many negative consequences for the elderly and for the entire society. It blocks the natural, social instinct of the elderly to meet, interact and engage with other parts of society and

thus develops and energises prejudices, stereotypes and stigmas of elderly persons and of ageism, in general. In addition, it reduces age-cross interactions, fostering alienation of various segments of society. It excludes the elderly from cultural and social development (internet, e-mail) and thus they become marginalised. For the entire society, age separation weakens and blemishes civilisation and creates an alienated and insensitive society, which is not responsive to its diverse parts. Without understanding this situation and seeking a remedy to change it, society can be compared to the reality described by Saramago (1997: 309): "I don't think we did go blind, I think we are blind, blind but seeing, blind people who can see, but do not see".

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