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ARTICLE

Security or tranquillity? what people value in residential compounds

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Abstract
The phenomenon of residential compounds is increasingly prevalent in today's society. Fear of crime is one of the main explanations for the proliferation of gated communities, the most closed type of residential compound. They reflect a privatisation of public space and the desire of the most privileged groups to control access to their residential enclaves. Considering that in Southern Europe this phenomenon exhibits more morphological and social diversity and that crime levels are lower, this paper analyses what residents of these compounds value and explores security as a key residential value in this context. For this purpose, an empirical analysis of 20 interviews was conducted in 2020 in the Granada metropolitan area (Spain), where previous studies have highlighted a wide variety of residential compounds in the urban landscape. Contrary to the general assumptions reported in other studies, our results show that there are no significant concerns about security amongst the residents of residential compounds. Instead, their priorities emphasize a widespread interest in residential comfort, which encompasses various dimensions such as spaciousness, tranquillity and location. This interest is shared by both residents and non-residents of these residential compounds. Therefore, tranquillity emerges as central aspect of residential satisfaction, challenging the stereotypical view that gated communities are primarily associated with security anxieties.

Keywords Gated communities · Fear of crime · Residential satisfaction · Comfort · Spain

1 Introduction

Residential compounds are a rapidly growing urban trend worldwide, characterised by their separation from the surrounding area (though not always fully enclosed), shared amenities like swimming pools and gardens, and a socially homogeneous group of residents. These compounds can vary in their level of enclosure (Wehrahn & Raposo, 2006)

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and are found across different social classes, from the wealthy to the lower-income groups (Müllauer-Seichter, 2019). In the academic literature, the most commonly studied type of residential compound is the gated community, which is physically separated from the outside by fences, walls, and security systems, and typically inhabited by the wealthy classes (Roitman, 2013).

Research highlights that the rise of more enclosed residential models is closely tied to the desire for security (Bandauko et al., 2022; Blakely & Snyder, 1997), largely driven by fear of crime (FOC) (Karimi & Emami, 2022; Martínez & Chiodelli, 2021). These communities have been extensively studied in areas with high crime rates and feelings of insecurity (Caldeira, 2012; Capron, 2021). In recent decades, growing concerns about safety have fueled the spread of enclosed spaces (van Ham et al., 2021; Vesselinov et al., 2007), particularly in regions like the United States (Massey & Tannen, 2018), South Africa (Bandauko et al., 2022; Landman, 2020), and Latin America (Morales, 2024).

In Southern Europe, particularly in countries like Spain and Portugal, gated communities are more common than in other parts of Europe (Cséfalvay & Webster, 2012), though they are still less prevalent compared to other international regions (Vesselinov, 2007). However, in these countries, gated communities often take more open and diverse forms, with pseudo-enclosures or symbolic boundaries, meaning there are not always fences or physical barriers separating them from the surrounding urban areas (Wehrhahn & Raposo, 2006; Baldán et al., 2024). This diversity may be influenced by the generally lower crime rates in these areas. Nonetheless, despite the lower crime rates, perceptions of insecurity in Southern Europe remain notably high (España et al., 2010; van Dijk et al., 2008).

The existing literature on this topic is, nevertheless, limited. Research has not yet explored whether residents of these compounds in Southern Europe or Spain value security as an important factor. To address this gap, a qualitative study was conducted in the Granada metropolitan area, a typical urban development in Spain and possibly in Southern Europe; its medium size and intense metropolitan growth, driven by a service-based economy, make it a representative example (Feria-Toribio & Martínez-Bernabeu, 2016). This paper seeks to answer two key questions: What do residents value about living in these residential compounds, and is security a crucial factor in the spread of this phenomenon in Spain? By answering these questions, we can identify the key factors that contribute to residential satisfaction in these urban models, which is of particular interest to the real estate development sector (Jansen, 2013). It will also help us better understand the expansion and characteristics of these communities, which is important for shaping housing policies (Riazi & Emami, 2018) and advancing academic research on the subject.

2 How people value their residential environment

The question of what and how individuals value housing and their residential environment has been a broad topic of study since the 1960s. Early research focused on residential well-being and quality of life in London's slums (Willmott & Young, 1960) and Boston's West End (Fried & Gleicher, 1961). The discourse of the inhabitants showed a clear dissociation between their residential aspirations and preferences and what they

valued about their living environments. However, as residential mobility was not an option for them, they adapted to and accepted their residential environment, finding some degree of satisfaction. These early findings highlight the complexity involved in studying what people value in their residential settings, both in terms of terminology and methodology. More recent literature employs a series of key concepts to explore this issue: attributes, the evaluation of these attributes, preferences, and residential satisfaction. Each of these will be examined in detail below.

The residential attributes of a dwelling are the specific features or elements that people value positively or negatively. These include factors like the size of the home, number of rooms, access to services, green spaces, benches, perceived pollution and social interactions with neighbours (Aragonés et al., 2017; Sadeghlou & Emami, 2023). These attributes apply to different spatial levels, not just the physical features of the home but also the environmental and social qualities of the immediate surroundings and neighborhood (Azmi & Hamdan, 2022). While some authors distinguish between tangible or intangible attributes, attribute categories, attribute indicators and their value or degree of authenticity, in practice this can complicate their study and is not always necessary (Spoormans et al., 2023).

These attributes are valued either positively or negatively and ranked according to the general values of the individuals, varying according to the social context and the socio-demographic characteristics of the individuals. The concept of "values" as developed by Schwartz (1994) can be applied to housing (Spoormans et al., 2023; Wegener et al., 2024). Values are abstract or objective constructs, either conscious or unconscious, that shape our (1) interests, (2) behaviours (3), evaluations and justifications of those behaviours, and that (4) are acquired through socialization and personal experiences (Schwartz, 1994). Examples of these general values could be hedonism, power or security (Collen & Hoekstra, 2001). Naturally, individuals will not share the same value systems (Rokeach, 1973); what is considered good, desirable, or legitimate varies based on the socio-cultural characteristics of each region (Jansen, 2013) and specific groups (Hu et al., 2016), with socio-economic factors driving more differences than demographic factors (Al-Betawi et al., 2022).

The means-ends chain approach is often used to explain the relationship between attributes and values (Collen & Hoekstra, 2001; Sadeghlou & Emami, 2023). In this approach, values are seen as goals, and attributes are the means to achieve them. The intermediate step is the consequence, which explains how certain attributes do or do not satisfy those values. Following the classic example (Collen & Hoekstra, 2001, pp. 290–291), if one seeks 'privacy' (value), what one needs is 'more space' (consequence) for which one needs to have 'X rooms' (attribute). These consequences can be motivational for daily activities (playing, shopping), functional (more afordable, more practical) or psychosocial (social relations, pride, social control) (Spoormans et al. 2023).

When analysing how people value housing and residential environments through interviews or surveys, it is essential to consider two phases (and scopes of study): first, the phase involving preferences, and second, the phase assessing residential satisfaction.

Studying residential preferences involves analysing individuals' desires and aspirations regarding housing, neighborhoods, or cities (Sadeghlou & Emami, 2023). These preferences are difficult to pinpoint because they reflect personal tastes and ideals and are influenced by both micro and macro situational factors (Jansen, 2013). Preferences are shaped through an ongoing process of negotiation and evaluation based, to a large extent, on ideal intentions as well as past and present decisions (Collen & Hoekstra, 2001). Coulter et al. (2011) note that terms like preferences, expectations, ideals, and desires are often used interchangeably in the literature, even though they represent different concepts with

varying impacts on actual residential mobility. However, preferences tend to align with actual behavior (Kendig, 1984) and are a reliable predictor of residential choices (Mulder, 1996), likely because people try to reduce cognitive dissonance, making their preferences match their current situation or financial limitations (Priemus, 1986).

In contrast, residential satisfaction refers to the contentment that people experience with their current residential situation (Aragonés et al., 2017; Jansen, 2013), often after they have moved in. This is sometimes called revealed preferences, as it reflects how people value their housing or environment (see Collen & Hoekstra, 2001; Sadeghlou & Emami, 2023).

The empirical study of satisfaction is often based on indicators of well-being and subjective quality of life, which are used to evaluate the success of residential projects (Galster, 1985). However, the study of satisfaction is also complex, because it can be influenced by factors such as length of residence or attachment (Wegener & Schmidt, 2024). Additionally, when a residential environment exceeds expectations, people's aspirations for their living situation tend to rise (Galster, 1985). This reveals that, while preferences and satisfaction are distinct areas of study, they are inevitably interrelated.

The literature on residential compounds is still limited and tends to focus primarily on gated communities. There are case studies, such as Tan's (2016) research in Malaysia, general comparisons such as Chapman and Lombard's (2006) work in North America, and surveys by Aulia and Ismail (2013) or Osama-Osman et al. (2021). Qualitative studies are even rarer, with examples like Jacob and Chander's (2020) study in Chennai, India. While it is not always clear whether these studies are discussing preferences, values, or residential satisfaction, there is a general consensus that the key value experienced by residents in these developments is the desire for security (Muiga & Rukwaro, 2016; Osama-Osman, 2022). In the following section, we will explore the significance of security in residential compounds in more detail.

3 The desire for security in residential compounds

The term security linked to housing and urban space is polysemic (Karimi & Emami, 2022). It can refer to various aspects and be studied from different perspectives: as an indicator of well-being (Bonaiuto & Fornara, 2004), a human value in residential preferences (Sadeghlou & Emami, 2023), a factor affecting satisfaction (Aragonés et al., 2017). Homeownership, in particular, can provide a sense of security (stability), which supports life plans (Fuster et al., 2023).

The literature on residential compounds often speaks of insecurity in terms of fear of crime (Tanulku, 2018). Perceptions of insecurity reportedly have driven the phenomenon of fortifying the urban space (Blakely & Snyder, 1997). Physical separation offers protection against criminality, but elective self-exclusion or segregation also diminishes fear of the potentially dangerous 'other' (Chiodelli, 2015; Karimi & Emami, 2022; Le Goix, 2013). This is not new; as early as the Victorian era, the upper-middle classes in London made attempts to restrict access to public squares near their residential areas due to the rapid growth of the population and delinquency in the city (Blandy, 2006). This model was replicated in contexts of high inequality and criminality (Vesselinov et al., 2007), first in the United States (Blakely & Snyder, 1997; Massey & Tannen, 2018) and later in the rest of the world, for example, in Brazil (Caldeira, 2012), Mexico (Morales, 2024), Colombia (González-Calle, 2024), but also in South Africa (Landman,

2020). In some of these places there are even extreme versions, such as the 'fortified enclaves' in São Paulo, where gated communities employ a large number of armed security guards (Caldeira, 2012). In contrast, the lower prevalence of gated communities in Europe (Cséfalvay & Webster, 2012) may be due to lower crime rates (Abdullah et al., 2012) and less inequality in the region (Van Ham et al., 2021).

Nevertheless, the relationship between crime rates, fear of crime, perceptions of insecurity and the desire for security is complex. Actual crime levels in a particular place do not always align with the perception of insecurity. The International Crime Victimization Survey (van Dijk et al., 2008) noted that the general rates for home burglaries and violent robbery are not higher in the United States than in most western European countries. However, countries like the United States, Canada, England and Wales are conspicuous for their increase in home security devices in in recent years (van Dijk & Mayhew, 1992). In addition, the presence of security devices or services can heighten feelings of insecurity by highlighting social inequalities (Frisch, 2021). For example, it has been observed that while the presence of security guards in closed urban developments made the residents feel more secure, it also produced a higher awareness of potential insecurity (Sarpong, 2017).

In Europe, the crime rate and the subjective feeling of insecurity amongst European citizens is lower than in other locations; the latest Eurostat report on quality of life (2015) showed that 74.8 per cent of European residents said that they felt safe when walking down the street at night. Although crime rates remain lower in Southern European countries such as Spain, Portugal, France, and Greece (van Dijk et al., 2008), Spain and Portugal, in particular, exhibit notably high levels of public pessimism regarding delinquency. Despite a documented decline in actual crime rates, Spaniards continue to perceive a growing sense of insecurity, highlighting the disparity between objective crime statistics and subjective perceptions of safety (España et al., 2010). This disconnect may partially explain why Spain and Portugal have a higher prevalence of residential compounds compared to other Southern European countries. (Cséfalvay & Webster, 2012; Martínez & Chiodelli, 2021).

The literature suggests that while gated communities are less prevalent in the world's more secure regions, this phenomenon is accompanied by changes to the morphological structure, such as enclosed communities located in city centres and more open or symbolically closed communities (Moore, 2022; Rojo-Mendoza et al., 2019). This indicates that the residential landscape in these countries is more heterogenous and complex, characterized by varying levels of enclosure (Wehrhahn & Raposo, 2006; Baldán et al., 2024). Given this complexity, it becomes essential to explore the value residents in Southern European countries place on security within such varied residential compounds. While this trend may partly reflect a form of social stratification, where the upper-middle class seeks to avoid interactions with the middle and working classes (Donzelot, 2004; Le Goix, 2013; Martínez & Chiodelli, 2021; Vesselinov et al., 2007), recent decades have also seen an increase in residential compounds targeting working-class populations and ethnic minorities (Majiet, 2023; Müllauer-Seichter, 2019). This underscores the importance of analysing what residents value in residential compounds, particularly with regard to the significance they attach to safety and security.

4 Materials and methods

This work presents a qualitative study of the importance of security, along with other values related to the residential environment, for people who live in residential compounds. The research is grounded in 20 in-depth interviews conducted between April and May 2020, during the phased exit from the Covid-19 lockdown in Spain. (as a result, some of the interviews were done virtually). The selection of interviewees was facilitated through personal and professional networks. In some cases, interviewees also provided contacts of former neighbours who had relocated to other residential compounds. The average length of each interview was between one and two hours, and all were recorded and transcribed for subsequent analysis.

A structured sampling design was developed to capture the diverse social and residential circumstances relevant to the study's objectives (Ibáñez, 1979; Conde, 2009). A key criterion was ensuring sufficient variety in the types of residential compounds in which each interviewee lived (Table 1). To that end, a typology of residential compounds was used that was previously developed and presented in earlier works (anonymized) specific to the Granada metropolitan area. This classification comprises five types of residential compounds, from those with very strict enclosures (protected), which are the classic gated communities, to those with more open structures (self-isolated and symbolic residential compounds). Interviews were also conducted with people not living in a residential compound, to identify any possible significant discursive discrepancies regarding residential satisfaction and the importance attributed to security (Tan, 2016).

Other criteria (Table 1), such as the gender, age, household type and socioeconomic status of each interviewee, were also taken into consideration. The households were categorized as single-person homes, families with children and families without children. In terms of socioeconomic status, we distinguish the interviewees into two contrasting socioeconomic groups: 1) the upper-middle class, which includes managers, professionals, and technicians; es decir, workers with authority and/or high qualifications; and 2) the working class, consisting of individuals with basic education who work in manual or service jobs, whose employment is often precarious and does not require such training. Besides, special attention was paid to whether the interviewees lived in environments with children, as previous studies (Boschman, 2018) have confirmed the notable influence this factor has on residential satisfaction. Additionally, and given that the study was conducted in the Granada metropolitan area, a variety of locations was also sought. In the case of the city of Granada, an effort was made to find interviewees living in different types of neighbourhoods (Fig. 1)

Granada is a typical example, in the Spanish metropolitan landscape, of a centralized metropolitan area with extensive suburban development. It comprises nearly 50 municipalities, according to the definition established by Feria-Toribio and Martínez-Bernabeu (2016), who identified 44 metropolitan areas in Spain in 2011 based on indicators related to residence/job mobility (the latest census, which provides the necessary data on the degree of spatial desegregation). The Granada area has nearly 600,000 inhabitants, more than half of whom live in the suburban periphery. The urban space is minimally industrialized, with a large service sector – the university and hospitals are amongst the largest employers – and the professional middle class is clearly predominant. Due to its historical development, Granada reflects the urban processes characteristic of Southern Europe, especially regarding the way that the residential segregation, so strongly associated with residential compounds, has taken place (for more information see Baldán et al., 2024; 2025).

Table 1 Interviews design

Interview	Gender	Age	Household type	Social class	Type of residential area	Location
E1	Male	Adult	Children	Upper-middle class	Individualistic	Alfacar
E2	Female	Young	No children	Working class	Controlled	Cájar
E3	Male	Adult	Children	Upper-middle class	Individualistic	Granada (Rd Sierra)
E4	Female	Elderly	Alone	Working class	No Residential compound	La Zubia
E5	Female	Adult	Children	Upper-middle class	No Residential compound	Armilla
E6	Female	Adult	Alone	Working class	No Residential compound	Granada (La Cruz)
E7	Female	Adult	No children	Upper-middle 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-middle class	Protected	Granada (Campus de la Salud)
E11	Female	Adult	Children	Working class	Controlled	La Zubia
E12	Male	Elderly	Children	Upper-middle class	Controlled	Granada (Bola de Oro)
E13	Male	Adult	No children	Upper-middle class	Controlled	Granada (Albaicín)
E14	Female	Elderly	Alone	Upper-middle class	Controlled	Granada (Zaidín-Vergeles)
E15	Female	Adult	No children	Working class	Controlled	Granada (Albaicín)
E16	Male	Elderly	Children	Upper-middle class	Controlled	Granada (Bola de Oro)
E17	Male	Young	No children	Upper-middle class	Protected	Alfacar
E18	Male	Elderly	No children	Working class	Controlled	Santa Fe
E19	Female	Adult	Children	Upper-middle class	Protected	Granada (Zaidín-Vergeles)
E20	Male	Young	No children	Upper-middle class	Symbolic	Granada (Fígares)

Fig. 1 Location of interviewees in the Granada metropolitan area

All of the interviews began with the same initial general question about what the place where the interviewees live is like (without mentioning the residential compound in which they lived). This allowed them to speak freely and situate themselves discursively in the residential setting. Some interviewees began by talking about the house itself, while others discussed the residential compound, the neighbourhood or even the municipality. The interviews were thus open-ended with no specific questions, but rather a list of topics to be discussed, which were only raised if they did not come up spontaneously in the conversation. In the course of the interviews – and only if this did not come up spontaneously – the interviewers asked about security in general terms. This allowed the interviewees to explain how they understood the topic or whether they associated it with living in a residential compound.

The analysis of the interviews was interpreted using an analytical framework based on sociological discourse analysis developed by the Madrid School of Qualitative Social Research (Ibáñez, 1979; Conde, 2009; Ruiz, 2017). This focus made it possible, firstly, to reconstruct the interviewees' social discourses according to their social position (age, gender, household composition, social class, etc.) and, secondly, to take into account the historical and spatial context in which they situated themselves discursively (Conde, 2009). Furthermore, the focus was based on the idea that all discourse forms part of a system of discourses, meaning that when the interviewees formed an argument, it was always related to something else, although they may not have spoken about these issues explicitly (Ruiz, 2017). This type of analysis, then, looks at all texts as a whole, paying attention to the details, the ideas implicit in the discourse, the avoidance of some

subjects and any apparent possible contradictions, instead of focusing on fragmenting or codifying each interview. To analyse the data, a circular approach was employed, integrating empirical observations with theoretical frameworks (Ibáñez, 1979). This process involved multiple readings of the interview transcripts to identify narrative configurations related to the focus of the study. These configurations were represented through conceptual schemes or diagrams that illustrated relationships, associations, and the terminology used by the participants and were continually refined through successive readings to ensure a comprehensive explanation of the entirety of the texts (Conde, 2009).

5 Results

5.1 What one values about where they live: comfort

The first observation was that most of the interviewees, whether or not they lived in a residential compound, began by talking about the characteristics that they most valued about the neighbourhood or municipality where they resided. These residential attributes (Sadeghlou et al., 2023) included the availability of services and facilities (supermarkets, schools, restaurants, etc.), the proximity to and/or methods of commuting to work, and the type of entrance to their home, amongst other factors. Less-valued features were addressed later inr the interview, once the discussion had progressed.

The inhabitants of residential compounds placed more stress on the attributes of the urban development itself, such as the type of dwelling (apartment or single-family home) and the availability of communal amenities (swimming pools, tennis/paddle tennis courts, playgrounds, etc.) and the security equipment or service. Regarding individual dwellings, both residents and non-residents of compounds mentioned other attributes such as size, number of rooms and similar factors. Some interviewees mentioned the socioeconomic or professional profile of the area inhabitants or the relationships with their neighbours.

In all the initial descriptions, the interviewees spoke about how comfortable or pleasant they found living where they did, although their use of the term ‘comfort’ did not always have the same meaning. At times, comfort was used to describe a good location, but at other times it was used to emphasize how comfortable it was to live in a quiet, low-traffic area or one with natural surroundings. Occasionally, the interviewees used the word to refer to the spaciousness of their homes or having access to a garden, terrace or balcony where they could get out and ‘relax outside’.

> The feeling that they [the compound residents] have all the space they need and at the same time all the facilities they need. If you want to go to church, it’s there, school for the kids, it’s there, Triunfo Square is right there…it’s a way of living halfway between city life and being comfortable…in the summer, you have the swimming pool…
> (E9. Young working class woman, protected compound)
> I think it’s very comfortable, I have all the square feet I want [the home] (…) I can go outside, with my beer, lie down on the sofa in the garden…it’s very comfortable, it’s not the same as living in a flat with fewer square feet…life in our house is very comfortable for us.
> (E1. Adult upper-middle class man, individualistic compound)

The reiteration of the concept of comfort and its different meanings in the discourse of the interviewees led to a more detailed analysis that concluded that it acted as a polysemic concept related to residential satisfaction (Fig. 2). People situate their satisfaction across three different spatial scales, with comfort encompassing three key dimensions: (a) *spaciousness*; (b) *tranquillity*; and (c) *location*.

Firstly, for a dwelling to be comfortable, it must be *spacious*. This means, on the one hand, that there is *living space* (size of the dwelling, number of rooms, access to a terrace, garden, swimming pool, etc.), but also that each individual has a sense of *personal space*, where they can isolate themselves from the people with whom they live (privacy). Usually, these references to spaciousness were associated with the dwelling. In the case of inhabitants of residential compounds, however, spaciousness also included the shared spaces and communal facilities. This is represented by the dotted orange line in Fig. 2, which overlaps the living area between the dwelling and the immediate surroundings). The importance of housing as a component of comfort has also intensified, particularly in light of the population's experience of home confinement during the COVID-19 pandemic (Cheshmehzangi, 2021). The following excerpts illustrate the notion that the more square feet of living space available, the lower the likelihood of rencounteringother family members (personal space → privacy) and the greater degree of comfort.

> This has some really big space advantages, of freedom, right? Being all together in the same house, well if some are upstairs and others downstairs, they can't even see you if don't want (laughs). In a flat, you hide in your room or you don't have any other option but to share…
> (E5. Adult upper-middle class woman, non-residential compound)
> It's so comfortable living like this…I have so many square feet…now with the lockdown, I took my office and I put the kids in school there (…) My in-laws also happened to be visiting and they stayed here, all these months…they were here since early March, all those months…what's more…we didn't even have to walk past each other.

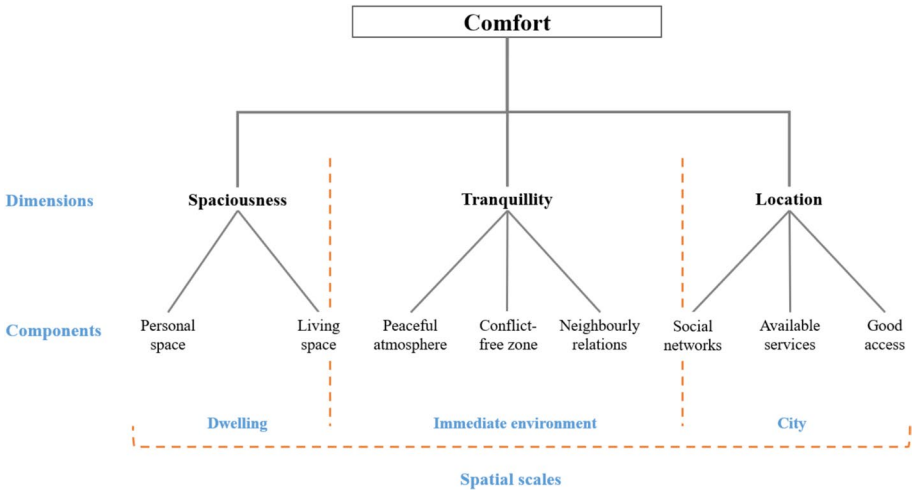

Fig. 2 Facets and components of residential comfort

(E1. Adult upper-middle class man, individualistic compound)

The second facet of comfort is related to *tranquillity*, which is shaped by the immediate residential surroundings, the intermediate space between the dwelling and the city. This refers to the residential compound, in the case of people who live in compounds, or the neighbourhood for both residents and non-residents of compounds. The following excerpts show how the interviewees perceive a *tranquil environment*. They describe it as a place free from traffic noise, general street noise or nightspots.Tranquillity was associated with living in a *conflict-free zone*, more closely related to living in a neighbourhood or area without problems or dangers of any kind.

> This is a quiet area (…) There's not a lot of racket, not a lot of cars going by…I'm not saying that they don't drive by at all, they go down the road from time to time, the bus drives by…but it's not a highly trafficked area, so that's it…peace.
> (E7. Adult upper-middle class woman, individualistic compound)
> Above all, it's quiet and the neighbourhood is more or less…good (…). There's not a lot of noise from…from people getting into fights.
> (E6. Elderly working class woman, non-residential compound)

This absence of conflict, then, is closely linked to what is commonly called a 'perception of security' (Azmi & Hamdan, 2022), which ranges from risk and the fear of being the victim of a crime, burglary or similar, to the mere discomfort of living in a foreign or alien environment.

> Like everything around here, security is part of the enclosure…you need a key to get in…you have the custodian, who's here from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m.…he controls everything for you…he knows which residents are coming in, which residents aren't, who lives there, who they are…
> (E8. Adult working class woman, controlled compound)

We also noted a third component of tranquillity associated with *neighbourly relations* (Jacob & Chander, 2020), which involves the relationships or rapport between neighbours. The interviewees described a sense of peace when their relationships with their neighbours were cordial and when there was no conflict or tension.

> The community is fairly quiet…for now…with the neighbours we get on well with (laughs)…when we moved in [one of the neighbours] left us some rather unpleasant notes that we didn't like very much…
> *M. Um…is the subject of neighbours important, or…?*
> I think it is something important (...) it makes living together more pleasant....
> (E2. Adult working class woman, controlled compound)

The third and final facet of comfort is *location*, which is also made up of three different components that are also interlinked. The first component concerns *social networks*, which emphasizes the interviewees' interest in living near their family members or close friends, also known as attachment or rootedness (Jacob & Chander, 2020; Vidal et al., 2013). A second component is related to the *available services*, such as supermarkets, health facilities, schools and other nearby services. The final component is *good access*, allowing for quick travel from the home to work or other places, although it can also mean living close enough to work to be able to walk there (Aulia & Ismail, 2013). The following excerpts illustrate each of these three components related to location.

M. Why this particular area?

> Because it's the area where I lived…it's my area, where I lived…where my family has always lived, later I lived in other parts, other areas of Granada, but until I became a mother…and I came back to this area again and I chose it because, beyond having my family nearby, I knew it well and it's an area with really good services… it's very comfortable.
> (E19. Adult upper-middle class woman, protected compound)
> The downside…to get to Granada you have to drive…you don't have any other options, because although it's true that there's public transport, but the public transport, uggh…the bus leaves every half hour, every hour, etc., etc. and it's just not very comfortable…
> (E1. Adult upper-middle class man, individualistic compound)

In sum, individuals describe their residential satisfaction through different attributes that are discursively located in the dwelling, the immediate environment or the city. These attributes are comprised of three general dimensions—spaciousness, tranquillity, location—and contribute to residents' comfort in the residential environment. Comfort emerges as the most important vvalue in the residential sphere for both residents and non-residents of residential compounds. However, the importance assigned to attributes and dimensions changes according to factors such as the stage of the life cycle (Aulia & Ismail, 2013; Osama-Osman et al., 2021) and ways of life (suburban or urban). These factors also influence residential satisfaction, as will be discussed in the next section. This variability prompts us to question the importance or role of residential compounds (if one has them) on residential satisfaction─whether they enhance or potentially diminish the satisfaction experienced by their residents.

5.2 Residential compounds as comfort enhancers

It is important to emphasize that the interviewees were discussing what they valued about their current living situation, which should not be confused with their residential preferences or expectations. Preferences are formulated prior to decisions, and evolve throughout the housing search and decision-making process.

In line with this, we noted that the interviewees refer to residential satisfaction in terms of comfort according to their ways of life. Unlike lifestyles, ways of life (*modes de vie*) reflect the factual dimension of daily practices, rather than the symbolic one (Juan, 2021). In turn, these ways of life were occasionally assigned to certain life stages. For example, some interviewees associated suburban life with the stage of adult life when having children and raising them in a larger space (single-family home) becomes possible (Chiodelli, 2015). At the same time, they compared this suburban life with what they viewed as 'life in the city', which they associated with a more youthful, or university, stage of life, when they did not pay as much attention to attributes as space, pollution or noise. The following comment illustrates what the interviewee saw as the positive and negative values related to her residential setting.

> I lived in the centre and rented, and I didn't like (laughs) the traffic, the people rushing everywhere, and in the end I looked for…maybe because I'm 30 now (laughs) and I was looking for more peace and quiet, and well…before, I was a student, I had the university nearby…but now, I have my own car and I'm looking for more peace and quiet, without all the hustle and bustle and especially the traffic, and Cájar is a town that, well, it's really quiet …

(E2. Young working class woman, controlled compound)

Here, the typical life of a young student is valued negatively (living in a flat in the centre), while adult life is valued positively, despite often being associated with a worse location (living on the periphery), but with more peace and quiet. This indicates that ways of life provide the interviewees with a vocabulary of motives (Mills, 1959) to value and justify their understanding of residential comfort. The following excerpt explains how this process of defining and valuing comfort unfolds when discussing location (available services) and tranquillity (quiet environment).

> It really depends on what you like, some people prefer to live in the centre…with all the hustle and bustle, and some people like to live a a little further away (…) People who live in the centre have all the shops a stone's throw away, and we don't have that (…) Living on the outskirts has its disadvantages…the comfort and tranquillity…you take one thing or the other and you choose what's best…
> (E12. Elderly upper-middle class man, controlled compound)

From this discursive line, residential compounds seem to play a strategic role in enhancing comfort in some or all of its meanings. According to the interviewees, residential compounds act as a kind of catch-all that allows them access to certain amenities that would be out of reach in other residential situations (no residential compound). Figure 3 shows two common, though not exclusive,examples in which moving to a residential compound improved comfort. Complete comfort would be represented by a perfect equilateral triangle in which spaciousness, tranquillity and location are optimally balanced. It should be noted that these diagrams, often used in quantitative analyses, are adapted here as approximate qualitative representations of the expressions of the interviewees.

The first diagram represents the change from living in a flat in the city centre (blue triangle) to living in the same location, but in a residential compound (orange triangle). Living in a flat in the centre is often associated with a lower degree of tranquillity (background noise such as traffic, the hubbub of people, nightlife, etc.) and a lack of space in the home, as flats usually have fewer square feet than a single-family home. The primary advantage of living in a flat in the city is the convenience associated with its central location. While the location remains a constant, the residential compound provides a greater sense

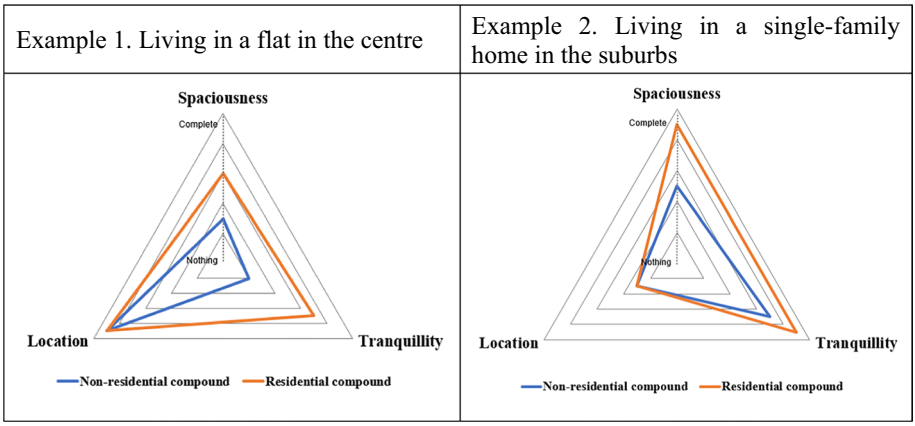

Fig. 3 Impact of residential compounds on comfort, for two typical housing arrangements

of spaciousness and tranquillity, fulfilling a dual function. Firstly, increased spaciousness reduces the feeling of spatial restriction and increased tranquillity comes from the distance or separation from the outside world, which is considered an extremely noisy place. As illustrated by E19, outdoor spaces provide a feeling of living in a tranquil environment, which is impossible to find in an ordinary building.

> You go inside [the residential compound] and you're not going into a closed space like a block of flats, with the elevator, the stairs (…) You go in and you see a green space, the pool is always well cared for, the green space is maintained, and there are some open-air passageways (…) It's an open space, it's still an open space with plants and trees…so in that respect it is very pleasant…
> (E19. Adult upper-middle class woman, controlled residential compound)

The second example illustrates a more modest shift, from a single-family home in a suburban area to a similar setting, but in a residential compound. Here too there is an increase in comfort. The improvement primarily comes from enhanced spaciousness and tranquillity as the compound offers more communal spaces and facilities, along with a greater buffer from outside noise. However, the location is still suburban, meaning residents continue to rely on private vehicles and public transport for mobility. The following comment provides an example of this scenario.

> I always lived in towns (…) And we didn't have much space…the other house (laughs) was very small and we didn't all fit well (…) We were looking for one additional room (…) And, well, if you get a swimming pool with it, that's even better (laughs).
> (E11. Adult working class woman, individualistic compound)

These references to ways of life consistently lead interviewees to talk about certain attributes that enhance their residential satisfaction, which they always value in terms of comfort, but never from the perspective of security in terms of 'fear of crime'. This, then, raises the question of the role of security in the discourse of the interviewees.

5.3 Two non-corresponding conceptions of security

Security, understood as fear of crime or delinquency, rarely appeared in the discourse of the interviewees, regardless of whether they lived in a residential compound or the degree of enclosure. This type of security, which we have termed 'being safe', is only mentioned when the interviewers deliberately asked about it. This suggests that this sense of 'security-being safe' is not amongst the reasons that the interviewees chose to live in a residential compound.

> *M. And the subject of security is something…?*
> I take security for granted, like everywhere (…) I think here, in general, in Spain and in Granada, life is…life is very safe.
> (E10. Adult upper-middle class man, protected compound)

Moreover, the idea of being safe only appeared spontaneously in the context of the less expensive, working-class compounds (Majiet, 2023; Martínez & Chiodelli, 2021). The following comment is one of the few examples of this. The interviewee referred to the fear resulting from having conflictive neighbours with the consequence that living in a compound does not provide the expected level of protection.

> What happens is that…they threaten you…because one of the gypsies here [residents of the residential compound] was taken to court…and you're afraid, because they threaten you…and the law, the way the law is…well… you're afraid, you just get scared!
> (E18. Elderly working class man, controlled compound)

According to the attributes and dimensions used to measure residential satisfaction in terms of comfort, security-being safe lies at the intersection between the immediate surroundings and the city (Fig. 4). In other words, it reflects the ability of the residential compound to shield its residents from a potentially hostile environment (Karimi & Emami, 2022; Le Goix, 2013).

However, a second meaning of security more frequently emerged in the interviews, which revolved around knowledge and familiarity with the environment where they lived, which we refer to as *security-being reliable*. Whether it stems from growing up there and having family members nearby, knowing your neighbours, or having confidence that you share a similar way of life, these factors are closely tied to a sense of rootedness, a sense of belonging and familiarity (Bahar, 2018; Sakip et al., 2012). While the interviewees did not explicitly call this 'security', they often used terms such as 'comfort' and 'tranquillity' interchangeably to describe it. For this reason, the concept of security in this context is largely identified with the tranquillity dimension.

The following excerpts are a sample. The first interviewee brought up 'security-being reliable' when he explicitly mentioned tranquillity, emphasizing his familiarity with the area (certainty), because he grew up there and his parents still lived there (social networks). The second interviewee said that her neighbourhood was safe because the residents shared the same social class, lifestyle and values.

> Here the security is well…we know the area because of our parents, we grew up around here (…) It's true that we were more certain that this was a quiet area…
> (E20. Young upper-middle class man, symbolic compound)
> this isn't an area with people…people I've been with my whole life…it's my class (…) It's not a really posh area or an area where I feel there might be…risks…it seems like a safe area…
> *M. 'Safe' how?*

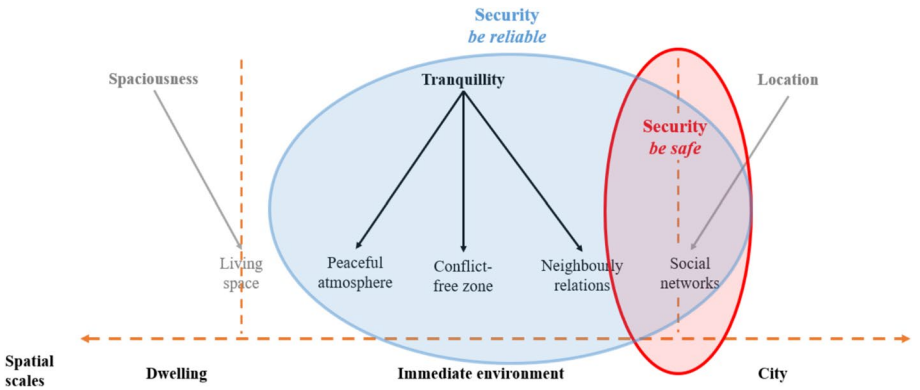

Fig. 4 Security in the discourse of the interviewees

> Safe as far as the people with a lifestyle…for me comfort, or what I value as comfort, safety…it's that they're people with a similar lifestyle and values like mine…
> (E19. Adult upper-middle class woman, protected compound)

This conception of 'security-being reliable' is linked to social homogeneity within the residential setting. Residential compounds enable their residents to have stronger social control over the residential environment (Le Goix, 2013), with social homogeneity ensuring this security and 'tranquillity', which is one dimension of comfort.

However, it is important to clarify that social homogeneity is not limited to the socio-professional profile of the neighbours, but is also connected to family ways of life. This is particularly evident in families with children living in residential compounds. The delimitation of these compounds allows children to play freely without the constant supervision of their parents.

> The peace of mind comes…you know everything, so you know where you live, who lives where, in the block, who doesn't, if they're your children or not…
> (E8. Elderly working class woman, controlled compound)

Clearly, the desire for security-being reliable is closely related to social homogeneity and self-identification in terms of class (Donzelot, 2004). Moreover, this sense of social class may be spatially anchored in the residential compound, as reflected in the discourse of the interviewees, but it may also extend beyond the boundaries of the compound to be projected out to the neighbourhood or municipality.

6 Conclusions

This study aimed to gain a deeper understanding of residential compounds by exploring what people value about living in them. We initially observed that all of the interviewees assessed their residential situation through the concept of comfort. While the specific attributes of housing and the urban environment likely correspond to broader values (Schwartz, 1994), the interviewees did not mention these. Instead, they used general and somewhat ambiguous terms such as "comfort" or "convenience," which align with what the academic literature identifies as "residential satisfaction" (Aragonés et al., 2017; Sadeghlou & Emami, 2023).

A more detailed analysis shows that this concept includes three different dimensions: spaciousness, tranquillity and location, each consisting of two or three components that refer to specific residential attributes. In turn, these dimensions apply to different spatial domains: the housing itself, the neighbourhood or immediate surroundings and the city. Furthermore, the definition and evaluation of comfort is constructed in a myriad of ways, based on the interviewees' ways of life (Juan, 2021) and their stage in the life cycle (Osama-Osman et al., 2021). In addition, while comfort is present in the discourse of both residents and non-residents of residential compounds, these dimensions play a valuable role in enhancing residential comfort. They help to achieve a greater sense of comfort by intensifying the sensations linked to some of these dimensions, be it spaciousness or tranquillity. In this sense, they act as a 'shortcut' to greater comfort ie. residential satisfaction.

We also questioned whether security-being safe, understood as fear of crime or delinquency, was relevant in the Spanish context of our research in explaining the proliferation of this residential model. The findings suggest that security is not a primary concern, not even among residents of protected compounds or gated communities with security guards.

This contrasts with the widely held belief that security is the most important residential value among residents of gated communities (Jacob & Chander, 2020; Tan, 2016), especially in regions in which insecurity is a significant social issue (Capron, 2021; Landman, 2020). It is certainly important to consider the context of our study: low-crime societies in Europe, particularly Southern Europe, where residential compounds range from gated to open and cater to a diverse array of social groups and classes. This contextual distinction likely explains why security, in contrast to other contexts, does not emerge as a central factor in residential satisfaction.

The term security does, however, appear in the discourses of the interviewees, but it refers to security-being reliable. This notion refers to a type of security grounded in knowledge and certainty about the residential environment (Bannister & Fyfe, 2001), which provides individuals with a sense of tranquillity. A sense of belonging, established social networks, and familiarity with the neighbourhood, district, or village contribute to the development of this feeling of security (Karimi & Emami, 2022). Living in a residential compound, whether physically or symbolically enclosed, facilitates the cultivation of knowledge and certainty about one's residential environment. Previous research on gated communities has shown the importance of these feelings of collectivity in enhancing residential well-being and quality of life (Rafiemanzelat, 2017). However, the source of security is not found in physical barriers but rather in the social control of the environment.

This sense of belonging can can give rise to various forms of collectivity, ranging from stronger connections such as sense of community (Rafiemanzelat, 2017; Sakip et al., 2012), or lead to weaker or more superficial ones, like social homogeneity in terms of class (Donzelot, 2004). It appears that this security-being reliable, or the desire for tranquillity, may be associated with living with people of similar backgrounds. However, this issue warrants further analysis and will be explored in future publications.

In summary, the growth of residential compounds of this type cannot be attributed solely to a desire for security. Instead, it appears to reflect a different residential mobility strategy that should be explored in greater depth: one centred on the desire for tranquillity derived from living among individuals with similar backgrounds. In addition, these findings may be applicable to other Southern European contexts, where crime rates are also low. However, several aspects require further investigation, such as whether there is a deliberate search for self-segregation and how this contributes to urban segregation within cities (Vesselinov, 2007). Additionally, further research is needed to assess how this trend affects neighborhood relations and whether there is an underlying pursuit of collectivity (Martínez & Chiodelli, 2021). It is also possible that other factors, such as status, ethnicity, or self-identification, play a more significant role than security in shaping residential preferences within these low-crime environments.

Despite their limitations, the findings shed light on the dynamics of residential compounds in these contexts and provide valuable tools for future research. The qualitative analysis reveals that certain terms—such as security, tranquillity, and comfort—carry inherent ambiguity, which complicates their use in quantitatively measuring residential satisfaction.

From a policy perspective, the design and regulation of urban spaces by both public and private agents should prioritize the development of elements and facilities that foster a sense of belonging and security-being reliable. In other words, urban planning should focus on the aspects most highly valued by residents, while de-emphasizing physical barriers such as walls, fences, or strict boundaries between residential compounds and their surrounding urban environments. This approach is especially relevant in European contexts, where the sense of insecurity is less pronounced.

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Declarations

Conflict of interest The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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