Integrating Large Private Developments in the City

ABSTRACT. Throughout the ages, cities have been challenged by social and cultural changes. Resistance to it has been crucial in the differentiation that currently exists between the 'traditional' city and the 'vulnerable' city, which is increasingly disaggregated. There are new ways of producing urban space, these are gated communities, shopping centres, business centres, in sum, urban products associated with the privatization of the city. It can be questioned how we can make cities from theme parks, business centres, shopping malls, gated communities… The approach proposed to the theme is a less orthodox, through a process of analysis and systematization of knowledge it was obtained a panel of recommendations that may contribute for a better integration of the condominiums in the city, if not by themselves, hopefully, through the ability of triggering the discussion on how can we tackle this issue.

KEYWORDS: Public space privatization; urban design; city.

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1. Introducing the theme

This research addresses the issue of the incorporation of condominiums in the city. In this context, condominium[1] refers to developments in the city, with privatized collective space.

The problems associated with condominiums arise strongly linked with the privatization of public space and its impacts in the city. It has been widely discussed in the academic environment, having been assigned different nomenclatures for the same phenomenon.

When defining public space, Anna Minton (2006.9) presents it as a concept, which can be traced back, at least, to the Ancient Greek Agora, while throughout history, forums, parks, markets, squares and streets have been regarded as public spaces. Access is clearly a key component of public space, as is the central question of who controls the public space, determining how the space is used. Criticism is directed to the privatization of public spaces as it is a way to create sterile and uniform spaces that inhibit genuine public access and that lack of the traditional streets diversity (Minton, 2006.10).

The modern movement, in the first half of the twentieth century, and the public policies in the second half, designed an urbanism that was confused with housing and public works (roads, accesses, bridges, etc.). The 'making of the city', as an integral and integrator product, was forgotten or at least relegated to the background and, with it, the public space (Borja et al., 2003.48).

These dynamics and, specially, their results in the city have been strongly criticized in the academic milieu. There are various aspects that justify the 'error' of the conversion of the citizen in consumer and the urban life in a real estate product (Borja et al., 2003.39). Borja and Muxi (2003.19) warned, also, to the dangers of the temptation to leave the urban development to the free competition and economic values of the market, since the public space is especially profitable in social, cultural and civic terms.

Atkinson et al. (2004.1) note that the policy debates on minimizing the socio-spatial segregation and encouraging social mix to promote sustainable communities have, in general, ignored the top of the housing market and the aggregation of families that are seen as having reduced negative externalities. The residential ghettos are not exclusive of low income sectors. The city becomes socially fragmented and dysfunctional, at the same time as the socializing public spaces are weakening (Borja and Castells, 1997.209). We are witnessing new ways of urban space production, designed for specific sectors of society. These have a characteristic in common - the predominance of monofunctionality and are substituting the city, as autonomous entities whose connections with it, are in most cases, ad hoc. The enclosure of public space is therefore a consequence of the self-centred society that characterizes the present day. Edward Soja (cited by Mary Ashton (1999:66)) stated that despite the theme parks are displaced from the urban scene (generally located in the metropolitan periphery) the principle of hyper-reality was removed from the rationality and firmly united form of the theme parks, to be introduced in the geographies and biographies of everyday life, explaining the ephemeral nature of urban cultures in general.

But, not all authors criticize these developments, for example Blandy et al. (2003.6) express that condominiums can also serve the important role of encouraging the middle and high classes to return to the city centres as well as those who have left for fear of crime.

Bowers and Manzi (2006.14), for their part, claim that rather than face enclosure as a phenomenon that threatens public space, this can be seen as a broader process of concretization of security that can be applied to any institutional context. These authors have a more opposing posture in relation to the one from the traditional academic milieu, as they think that the purpose of the 'club' is to capture and maximize the utility function for its members (Manzi and Bowers, 2006.9). This, by failing to create a direct benefit to the society that is left out, led to many concerns regarding the production of negative externalities for the wider society. In the point of view of these authors certain condominiums, in specific locations, may have a neutral effect, or generate 'positive externalities' through the creation of employment opportunities or the ability to attract new businesses to certain places.

2. Questions

The private developments such as gated communities, shopping centres, business parks, entertainment parks and other 'urban product' are settling down as real urban dynamics and spreading out in the urban environment. If they, allegedly, bring major disadvantages with regard to urban life and the city soul, should it be ignored? Aren't there ways to minimize the negative impacts identified? The city can not be unaware of the global phenomena witch carries costs that the city will have to absorb, as those arising from the proliferation of these 'urban products'. Is there a way to minimize these impacts, as the city will, hardly, be kept safe from the widespread of the broad privatization of its public duties? Given this scenery this study intends to find solutions that allow a better urban integration of these developments, minimizing their negative impacts and trying, if possible, to reverse weaknesses in a favourable way to the city.

3. How

To the concretization of this objective, the search initiated trough a deepening of the knowledge about the city's history, and socioeconomic circumstances that provided conditions for the emergence of condominiums. The understanding of the recent dynamics aims to anticipate the pressures that cities will be subjected in the near future.

Although the research was based, above all, in a bibliography analyses, it also had an experimental component that allowed the testing and refinement of concepts of urban design, and led, ultimately, to the elaboration of recommendations for the integration of condominiums in the city.

4. When

The search for the historical journey that might have lead to the phenomenon of condominiums and consequent privatization of public space includes the identification of different periods and movements that may be associated to it.

The exploration started going back to the fortified cities in Europe where it could be found some parallelism in formal terms, however, the temporal separation between the two phenomena suggested that there wasn't a relationship between the two.

In Seventeen and Eighteen Centuries, mainly in London, appeared the British Residential Square within which the open spaces of the squares of the XVII Century were converted into closed private parks. This represents an early form of privatization of the public space and a clear will of social segregation.

At the end of XVIII century emerges, again in England, a new model of land use: the 'romantic planned suburb' that a few decades later, was exported to the United States of America. These suburbs joined the wealthier classes. "Park Village" was the first experience, planned from scratch, and introduced a new element - the enclosed space. This element would return, years later, serving as morphological and conceptual basis for the condominiums.

The post-industrial Urbanism offered several alternatives to the cities looking for solutions to the problems caused by the socio-economic transformation from industrialization. This demand has led to proposals of new cities supported in theories that would be called utopian. One of the examples is the garden city of Ebenezer Howard. These appear, by various authors, compared to gated communities, especially in terms of the urban planning that supported it. In this context there are solely formal similarities particularly on the extremely planned, contained and clearly outlined urban form, although without fortifications in the Garden Cities.

Later, under the socialist ideals, the Charter of Athens came to defending public land, yet, paradoxically, one can question if the modern movement was indirectly 'responsible' for the future development of one of the most peculiar forms that took the privatization of public space, the so called vertical condominium as these buildings have clear similarities with the 'machine à habiter' from Le Corbousier.

Recently, the postmodern city presents a fragmented, discontinued, and self-contained space therefore, the postmodern urbanism can be seen as a more ephemeral and diverse discourse when compared with the structure of modern urbanism. The urban design, in this context, reflects a variety of perspectives and approaches. It starts to assume the privatization of the city related with the new centralities, major architectural projects and mega-structures, such as hotels, business towers, shopping centres, airports, theme parks, gated communities, resorts, among others.

The city presents an urbanism of products where each development is tailored for a particular market, where the specialization and the use of extreme dimensions are used as means of differentiation. In general, cities are being subjected to great changes and these are taking different names such as 'Quartering', 'Edge Cities', 'Generic Cities', 'Skyway Systems' among others. These are events that will, deeply, mark the future and evolution of cities and how we live them.

5. Types

There are several developments in the city with privatized collective space, among which: residential condominiums/gated communities, business improvement districts, shopping centres, leisure parks, theme parks, business centres and gated resorts. Each development was typified and compared in order to establish a working basis for the subsequent identification of typologies. The diversity is due to the adding of various functions and occurs largely by the need for differentiation, in a market where competitiveness is on the top of the agenda. To the study it was relevant, mostly, how these developments relate to the city and not the nuances presented. There was the need to group the projects by types in order to analyze

how they fit into the city, and how this relationship may be more fruitful for both sides. To typify these developments several criteria were tested and it was built a matrix of analysis. This matrix was based in a summary of characteristics of each type of condominium and the features that stood out as descriptor elements of the various developments that were: the morphology; what they have of collective; the location; the dominant function; types of access; hermeticity, moment of privatization.

The observation of the matrix showed that all condominiums have equipment, services and private infrastructure so these are characteristics that do not differentiate them. Another important aspect relates to the timing of the privatization of the collective space, which, with the exception of Business Improvement Districts (BID), is part of the initial concept of projects thus, only these assume the privatization of spaces that were public. In the process of systematization and reorganization of information the feature of 'what they have of collective' was abandoned since it wasn't relevant to the differentiation.

Based on the matrix, the search for patterns preceded trough the grouping of the various types of condominiums. In the analysis based on morphology, with one exception (theme parks), condominiums with the same morphology follow an identical pattern for the location and hermeticity. Distant from these patterns where the theme parks that are located in the outskirts of large cities and are assigned for recreational and touristic uses and, in the same functional scope, the touristic gated communities. These kind of condominiums have characteristics that apart them from all other developments, namely: the location (often outside the city limits), access - in case of theme parks that depends on the payment of ticket, the area of influence (normally overflows the region and even the country), the target users, frequency and level of demand, the great need of space and limited flexibility in terms of inclusion in the city. Due to the inflexibility to change these were left out from the study. The analysis of the evidence showed the existence of patterns of events over which becomes coherent the grouping of developments. The criteria where these standards are evident are: morphology/urban form; location in the city; hermeticity; Function.

From the analysis there were identified five types of condominiums, which summarize the features with more emphasis on the relationship with the city:

– **Hermetic Central condominium**

Derived from the modernism although having lost many of the characteristics of the movement, in particular regarding the urban context, these elements are typically in the urban centre, corresponding to high densities and can cover an entire city block, part of one or just a building.

- Hermetic Central Residential or Business (building or city block)

This category aggregates the hermetic condominiums that are located in the central areas of cities, and have a residential or business function, since both have a common concept in relation to their urban integration, the internal organization of buildings, and also in terms of access which, in both cases, is highly conditioned. From the developments identified will fall into this typology: vertical residential condominiums; Office towers.

- Hermetic Central Commercial (building or city block);

The hermetic central commercial condominiums differ from the previous, apart from the function, especially in the form of public access, which is essentially free

(keeping the right of admission). From the projects identified will fall into this typology: traditional shopping centres.

– **Open Central** (commerce / business)

They are characterized by a similar approach to the (traditional) street environment, and rely on a morphology that fits into the urban fabric. These projects are geared towards the tertiary sector and allow free access to the public (limited only by right of admission) and are not likely to be physically closed. From the projects identified will fall into this typology: new generation shopping centres; Business Improvement Districts.

– **Hermetic Peripheral Horizontal**

This kind of developments is greatly identified with the new urbanism, and locates typically in the periphery of the urban centres. They are characterized, mainly, by low-density, and are associated with locations with high levels of accessibility. According to the function there are two subcategories: Hermetic Peripheral Horizontal Residential Condominium and Hermetic Peripheral Horizontal Commercial/business Condominium.

- Hermetic Peripheral Horizontal Residential

These are residential developments located on the outskirts of cities, essentially introverted as they have little relationship to the outside. Access to the interior of these developments is strongly conditioned. From the projects identified will fall into this typology: Gated communities.

- Hermetic Peripheral Horizontal Commercial/ Business

These projects differ from peripheral hermetic residential condominiums, mainly by the ease of public access (keeping the right of admission) and the activities that take place. From the projects identified will fall into this typology: business parks; horizontal shopping centres (malls).

There is an almost generalized consensus, in the urban context of the European Welfare, about the idea that spatial segregation is negative. Debates on the concentration of social groups have often been targeted only for disadvantaged minorities. But in the same way the debate is being raised there is a search to present alternative approaches to the creation of places that are able to work with diverse social and economic change instead of trying to hide it under the rug (Blandy et al., 2003.24).

Even though disperse there have been some authors who have launch valuable ideas to the integration of condominiums in the city. Amongst those there are: Anna Minton (2006.13), Gordon Brown (2007.12), Blandy et. Al (2003.24), Jordi Borja and Manuel Castells (1997.210-211), Jan Sircus (2001.126-128), Atkinson et al (2004.30), Jorge Carvalho (2003.215-217), "Compendium 1 - Urban Design" (English Partnerships, 2000.42).

In summary the guidelines for a better integration of condominiums found in the literature above, include:

– The need to redirect these developments to urban centres, in order to become part of the urban mix.
– Choose a location that establishes connection to nearby centres.
– Find and absorb the "big boxes" in transition areas of the commercial heart.
– Find locations accessible by public transport, from the main roads and which are at a short distance from the maximum housing possible.

– Work with the original diversity, local identity and culture.
– Incorporate ambitious and socially heterogeneous housing programs.
– Design simple structures that allow a logical sequence of events.
– Consider a clear visual communication, easily understandable and consistent with history.
– The location should be planned and its articulation with the environment should be well thought.
– The location should consider the reduction of the mono-functionality.
– Give preference to locations where at least one side does not require front.
– These developments should constitute themselves as facilitators of the creation of new centres.
– Ensure active street fronts, covering the street level perimeter of the facades that face the streets with smaller units.
– Externalize the most active uses and increase transparency to the street.

6. Testing

The analyses continued with two steps, first each type was evaluated according to the contribution (positive or negative) to the concretization of the principles identified for the urban form. This attempt proved not to be sufficiently objective, as some aspects of evaluation are more obvious, as is the case connectivity, but others, such as identity and legibility, are much more attached to the design of the development than the concept of condominium. Therefore one might conclude that the care dedicated to the design of each project is more important to the insertion in the city, than the choice of the concept and typology of condominium.

The guidelines were also tested through case studies of condominiums. From the confrontation of principles for the urban form, with specific cases of condominiums, it appeared that the framework of principles designed allowed a cross-sectional analysis in terms of their inclusion in the city. As expected there are many nuances within the various types of condominium. In general terms all projects have a complex geometry and are extremely wide, which hinders its adaptability to the changing socio-economic requirements of the city.

Although the sample used is not wide enough, it makes clear that one of the major problems of condominiums, as observed in the theoretical analysis, is the relationship with public space, namely, as to the connectivity and quality. The same applies to the ability to adapt to new uses resulting from the widespread adoption of too complex forms.

The clash of principles with concrete examples allowed also to become aware that the performance of each development in relation to their urban integration depends, in a high degree, on a set of elements that highlight each type from standard.

7. Recommendations

The postmodern city provides the context for social, economic and cultural changes brought by the new globalized economy. In front of these changes is the increasing privatization of the public sphere (Minton, 2006.5).

To Atkinson et al. (2004.36) if urban planning fails to address these concerns, the gated developments can become a symbolic challenge to progress, in other areas of policies that aim at social inclusion and equitable forms of growth.

Collectively these trends represent crucial changes in how public life and space are conceptualized, and the principles associated with them. Tridib Banerjee (2001.154) argues that future plans and designs for public space must be based on understanding the causes and consequences of these trends and the changes in the nature of public life.

To Anna Minton (2006.3) the key problem at this time for the planner is to develop awareness of the costs and benefits associated with this type of development, and for those involved in the making of policies the need to put appropriate guidelines referring the symbolic impact in relation to other planning objectives and policies.

One may wonder, what are the values that guide action, as far as where to go, and what models of urban life are proposed to citizenship (Michael Cohen (2000) cited by Borja et al. (2003.33)).

It is clear that the condominiums are appearing with a strong and growing dynamic, with negative consequences to the city. Assuming that one cannot counteract this dynamic and, as a conclusion of the research, some recommendations for a better integration of condominiums in the city were designed:

The location of new developments should be planned:

– Promoting Integration into the existing city;
– Building centralities where they do not exist;
– Ensuring good accessibility to the outside (public transport, road network).

In the relationship with the environment it must be ensured:

– The functional and social mix;
– The continuity of the existing urban fabric;
– A good accessibility avoiding spatial segregation;
– Respect for the local identity;
– The contribution to a significant human presence;
– A qualitative and quantitative improvement of public space.

In terms of internal characteristics condominiums should:

–Maximize the number of interfaces with the outside, promoting the externalization of the most active uses;
– Promote active and well maintained fronts with the public space;
– Avoid complex networks ensuring legible circulations;
– Promote a clear separation between collective space and private space;
– Have public spaces that promote the meeting and hang about of people;
– Adopt functional units with simple and flexible geometry.

Notes

[1] Condominium:
"the system of ownership by which condominiums operate, in which owners have full title to the individual apartment or house and an undivided interest in the shared parts of the property.
Origin: modern Latin, from con-'together with' + dominium 'right of ownership' "
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