On the basis of the literature (produced mainly by sociologists, architects, and geographers) about gated and cohousing communities, this work analyzes how these communities differ from each other. The analysis suggests that cohousing and gated communities are different in the nature of relationships between residents and in the reasons why they arise, even if there are some points of similarity. The risk of a degeneration of cohousing in the gated type is linked in particular with a complete transformation of the grass-roots model (typical of cohousing) to the top-down speculative scheme (typical of gated communities).

Introduction

This article aims to show that cohousing differs from gated communities even if there are some similarities, in disagreement with what was previously found by Chiodelli (2009, 2010). In fact, both Chiodelli’s papers regarding cohousing, “Enclaves private a carattere residenziale: il caso del co-housing” (Residential private enclaves: the case of cohousing) and “Abbasso il cohousing? Analogie e differenze fra cohousing e le cosiddette gated communities” (Down with cohousing! similarities and differences between cohousing and the so-called gated communities), point out that the similarities are in relation to their “contractual characters” and a prevalence of the upper-middle class in both cases.

This article intends to clarify the roles of both cohousing and gated communities in the landscape of existing neighborhoods. In general, the literature describes gated communities as products of market mechanisms, which influence public policies to create “efficient urban neighborhoods” where everyone feels safe. On the other hand, cohousing communities are usually described as independent from speculative developments and more based on the concept of sharing (material and immaterial) to create a “community lifestyle” inside and a network of relationships with the wider neighborhood (outside).

It is important to address the differences between these kinds of communities, mainly in relation to the effects that they produce inside and outside their borders. At the same time, there is a need to investigate their similarities to
understand whether the two communities are matched or not and to identify both common positive and negative aspects. This might be helpful also in terms of social housing policy to better understand the functioning of these communities to promote innovative projects.

In summary, the true nature of cohousing and gated communities is the main point this article aims to focus on. In particular, does cohousing follow the same logic and respond to the same needs of gated communities?

To discuss this point, the meaning of both cohousing and gated community concepts will be specified; afterward, the common and different factors in both models will be outlined, with reference to the existing literature produced by sociologists, geographers, and architects and finally, from this, some conclusions will be drawn.

**What Are Gated Communities?**

Sociological literature offers a wide range of alternative definitions of gated communities: the result of the “[white] culture of fear” (Blakely and Snyder 1997; Davis 1998, 1999; Wilson-Doenges 2000; Bauman 2001; Low 2003; McKenzie 2005; Sanchez, Lang, and Dhavale 2005; Boni and Poggi 2011); a consequence of the capitalistic society (Harvey 1999; Le Goix 2005; Wu and Webber 2004); an emerging feature in neoliberal cities (Genis 2007; McKenzie 2005; Rosen and Razin 2008); a privatization of the public space that produces social exclusion (Blakely and Snyder 1997; Marcuse 1997; Bauman 2001; Low 2001; Glasze, Frantz, and Webster 2002; Le Goix 2005; Vesselinov 2012); a phenomenon linked with the urban sprawl (Le Goix 2005; Libertun de Duren 2009); a physical manifestation of an “exclusive way of life” among rich people (De Rooij 2000; Le Goix 2005; Libertun de Duren 2009; Parker 2006). Opposed to the latter point, as Sanchez, Lang, and Dhavale point out, data released by the U.S. Census Bureau as part of the 2001 American Housing Survey (AHS) show that “low-income renters are actually more likely to live in walled or gated communities compared to affluent homeowners” (2005: 81). Probably, the choice of a “gated lifestyle” is related to a desire of safety more than everything else.

Each of these definitions emphasizes a different way of interpreting the phenomenon. However, both agree about the link between social segregation and gated communities.

Gated communities are a more usual phenomenon of the U.S metropolitan area (California, Florida, Texas, Arizona, and New York) (Pertman 1994), although examples can be found worldwide: not only in South America (Caldeira 2000; Landman and Schönteich 2002; Salcedo and Torres 2004), South Africa (Hook and Vrdoljak 2002; Kupping 2008; Landman and Schönteich 2002; Lipman and Harris 1999), Asia (Connel 1999; Dick and Rimmer 1999;
Waley 2000; Leisch 2002; Miao 2003; King 2004; Wu and Webber 2004), but also in Europe (Aalbers 2001; Gooblar 2002). According to Simon Parker, gated communities are the equivalent of gated and guarded residential areas (2006). In these terms, gated communities are exclusive enclosed developments with fancy homes, security guardhouse, (electronic) gates, and private facilities inaccessible to outsiders. Inhabitants take decisions through internal agreements to manage their common services, promoting forms of “self-segregation” in which “social groups choose to live in homogeneous enclaves in terms of lifestyle” (Parker 2006: 251). In the same way, Low defines gated communities as residential developments “surrounded by walls, fences or earth banks covered with bushes and shrubs, with a secure entrance. In some cases, protection is provided by inaccessible land such as a nature reserve and, in few cases by a guarded-bridge” (2003: 11). Caldeira, who studies gated communities in Brazil, often defines them as “fortified enclaves” (Caldeira 1996a,b, 2000).

According to Davis, the “culture of fear” encourages the privatization of public spaces and the grant of new racist enclaves (euphemistically called “urban villages”) with the consequent creation of an “apartheid architecture” (1999). Davis refers to the “renaissance of Downtown” that besides, having “killed the street,” has “killed the crowd” radically eliminating the heterogeneity of the population and creating “neighborhoods of luxury”. The walled and gated residential neighborhoods become more often “city-fortresses,” with boundary walls, limited access points, checkpoints, and private police (2009). Harvey’s definition underlines that gated communities are the result of the capitalist society in which the upper-middle class, “terrorized” by crime, drugs, and risks of the urban context, tries to build “immune communities” to protect itself against such threats. At the same time, it causes the segregation of “dangerous classes,” kept far away from that “exclusive gated world” (1999). Bauman refers to the residents of condominiums that give up the urban life and choose to live in “quiet and safe havens” (2005). He identifies the need of security such as a decisive push factor for the creation of new communities protected by “armed guards” and where public places are replaced by private-controlled properties (Bauman 2001). According to Young, the “cultural” and “capitalist” revolutions have contributed to the creation of a “dystopia of exclusion,” through tangible (barriers, high prices for goods and services) and intangible barriers (“cultural stereotypes” about “dangerous people”). It led to a progressive “privatization of public space in terms of shopping malls, private parks, leisure facilities […] together with the gating of private residential property” (Young 1999: 18–19). The “dystopia of exclusion” tends to identify and spatially circumscribe the outside threat by delineating boundaries of “protected niches” that exclude “dangerous people.” This “segregation” has to be seen as a “defensive exclusion” and has produced two main consequences. On the one
hand, there are “armored havens” where people (potential victims of crime) escape; on the other hand, there are “ghettos” where crime is concentrated. This theory is supported by Davis when he refers to “fortress cities brutally divided between ‘fortified cells’ of affluent society and ‘places of terror’ where the police battles the criminalized poor” (1999). Harvey defines the phenomenon of gated communities as an “urban apartheid” that incorporates in the United States more than 32 million individuals who live in “a residential community association” (1996). Harvey’s analysis shows a trend to multinuclear societies where people prefer to live in their walled “niches.” In this vein, Renaud Le Goix (2005) emphasizes the importance of security within gated communities whose residents feel part of a “club,” rather than a “community.” He highlights that the main reason behind gated communities is a “preventive protection of the neighborhood” and “residents are supplied with their own security, roads, amenities, etc., in a private governance effort to avoid the spillovers of urban residential and industrial developments: crime, increasing traffic, free-riding of the amenities, urban decay and decreasing property values due to unwanted land-use” (Le Goix 2005: 23).

According to these definitions, the aim of gated communities is to “wipe out the different” to which is “arbitrarily” attributed the role of “threat.” In these terms, it is easy to understand how walls and gates, as physical barriers, become symbols of prevention and protection of intrusion by the uninvited (Garreau 1991; Blakely and Snyder 1997; Lang and Danielsen 1997; Stark 1998; Low 2001, 2003). In gated communities, people share facilities, services, and security systems that are different in each community because they depend on internal agreements. Gated communities might be interpreted both as the “private” answer to the market and policies’ failures and as a “privileged elitist status” over the “others” (Le Goix 2005). In fact, as McKenzie argues, the City of Las Vegas and Clark County promote common interest development housing to maintain low taxes minimizing demands on local government (2005).

Low’s empirical findings show that residents of gated communities are homogeneous, mainly from the middle and upper-middle class, and they “are looking for a place where they feel comfortable and secure, but this seemingly self-evident explanation reflects different underlying meanings and intentions” (2003: 10). In other words, people choose to live in gated communities to satisfy their individual needs and desires, but likewise, there is a strong element of prestige and desire to protect themselves.

In contrast to the aforementioned theories, Logan points out a positive interest in studying gated communities and common interest developments in specific contexts to consider their different meanings (as cited in Manella 2008). In fact, he observes that it is very difficult to prove that those who live
in a gated community have limited relationships with people from the outside. On the other hand, gated communities might be much more closed if they arise in contexts characterized by high crime rates and inequality as forms of defense from the outside. According to this view, gated communities, especially those that stand outside the urban center, arise, not as a response to the need of exclusivity, but because people look for “something new”: “escape from the crowded city” (if they stand outside), or simply an attempt to saving money (often it is easier to buy a house cheaply in the suburbs where more often these communities are located). For Logan, it is very hard to prove that people who live in a gated community are merely looking for an exclusive, isolated and protected place to live. In this vein, there are some authors that point out the different aims of gated communities in each country: Wu and Webber point out that in China, the foreign gated communities indicate a high level of status and a greater presence of amenities in comparison with non-gated developments (2004); using the 2001 AHS, Sanchez, Lang, and Dhavale show that gated communities are more prevalent among downscale renters than upscale owner markets, and the concern for crime is higher among gated renters in comparison with non-gated renters and gated homeowners (2005); Rosen and Razin argue that gated communities in Israel are the results of an unregulated (by the state) market mechanism: They lead the privatization of the space, according to neoliberal urban forms, based on class and prestige. Third-sector organizations are emerging in the development of gated projects related to social and environmental justice (2008).

According to these approaches, gated communities are a product of market mechanisms and developers, which influence public policy. In synthesis, for many scholars, security is one of the major ingredients in the formation of gated communities and this need begins to create an “efficient urban neighborhood” where everyone feels safe. However, the explanations for gated communities could be different in each country in relation to the research of prestige, market logics, and policy system.

What Are Cohousing Communities?

Regarding cohousing communities, just a limited literature exists mainly produced by architects who focus on physical layouts, available common facilities, legal forms, decision-making processes (Fromm 1991; McCamant and Durrett 1998, 2011; Bamford 2001; Field 2004; Meltzer 2005; Scotthanson and Scotthanson 2005; Williams 2005; Lietaert 2007; Sarginson 2010), on internal social dynamics (Blank 2001; Field 2004; Williams 2005, 2008; Bouma and Voorbij 2009; 2011; Sarginson 2010; Jarvis 2011; Chatterton 2013), and relations between cohousing and the environment (Bamford 2001; Brown 2004; Chatterton 2013; Meltzer 2005; Sarginson 2010; Williams 2008). Only
Chiodelli points out the connection between cohousing and gated communities (2009, 2010).

The cohousing idea originated in the 60s in Denmark, and mainly spread in Sweden, Holland, Denmark, Great Britain, North America, and to a lesser extent, Germany, Norway, Australia, New Zealand, and Japan. Cohousing communities consist of private homes around a common network of services (shared kitchen, dining rooms, child care facilities, libraries, laundries, gymnasiaums, cafeterias, offices, gardens, guest rooms, etc.).

Cohousing communities combine rented and privately owned homes and, in some cases, completely “all-rented” communities. Usually, ownership (or rental) contracts set an amount of work expected from each adult member per month (babysitting, preparing a community meal, gardening, conducting maintenance work, and bookkeeping) (Sargisson 2010). In addition to shared services, one of the recurring features is the car-free area: Usually, the parking area is limited and located outside to preserve natural areas and to ensure play areas for children. Moreover, car-sharing and bike-sharing systems are often available. Usually, residents in cohousing communities share weekly meals (prepared or not together) in the common space. The number of shared meals and the ways they are prepared changes in each community (Blank 2001). The size of the sites varies depending on the number of inhabitants, services, economic resources, and on whether the community is built on an existing site or on a new one.

According to field, the basic conditions for a cohousing are identified as follows:

1. intentionality;
2. design for facilitating the processes of socialization;
3. presence of private and common facilities;
4. group size to support the community dynamics;

Usually, a cohousing community takes a long time to be fully developed, because it requires the provision of a cohesive group, common goals, and a physical site (Brenton 2008). Each group defines both physical structure and internal tasks: The key elements are the interaction and participation in the common life.

Bamford points out the “intentional designed neighbourhood” as one of the main characteristics of cohousing projects (2001). Sargisson defines intentional communities as “groups of people who have chosen to live […] together for some common purpose” (2000: 1). The common aims in cohousing communities can be identified, firstly, in the intention to create a “friendly
neighbourhood” to restore and redefine relationships among neighborhood units (what we can call neighborliness) as well as a means to escape “alienated, isolated and disconnected social life in the city” (Sargisson 2010); secondly, in the creation of community life, while maintaining an element of privacy. In fact, groups take part in each aspect of the community development: designing physical layouts, managing sites collectively, and sharing common facilities and spaces, but they have private homes and they do not have a shared economic system (usually, they manage a common fund in relation to basic essentials). Williams (2005) and Jarvis (2011) point out that cohousing shares some purposes and design strategies with new urbanism. Like cohousing, new urbanism aims to encourage social interaction in a “community environment” also through design principles. Jarvis defines cohousing as a “clustering of smaller-than-average private residences [which are used in order] to maximize shared open spaces for social interaction, common facilities for shared daily use, and non-hierarchical consensus-based resident management” (2011: 560). In the same way, Williams refers to cohousing as a “nonhierarchical” housing system, which, in addition to the design structure, encourages social interaction within neighborhoods (2005). As Sargisson points out, cohousing is based on a concept of sharing (not only spaces, but also properties, decision-making processes, and experiences): It is not wedded to any particular tenure structure and it tends to be different from the products of the speculative development of individual homes for commercial sale or rent (2010). Participation in the decision-making process is thought for some scholars as a key element in social interaction (Fromm 1991; McCamant and Durrett 1998; Brenton 1998), but can also be a catalyst for conflicts (Williams 2005). The number of inhabitants is crucial because it allows for a “community lifestyle,” even though some members are absent and they do not take part in common activities. At the same time, the group cannot be too large because the decision-making process could become problematic. According to field, the “ideal” number is between about 10 and 40 adults to develop proper social dynamics (2004). Almost all scholars (Field 2004; Fromm 2000; Jarvis 2011; Lietaert 2007; Meltzer 2005; Renz 2006a,b; Sargisson 2010; Scottshanson and Scottshanson 2005; Williams 2005) point out the difficulty in managing the decision-making process collectively, even if the majority of communities refer to “consensus system” (see Pickerill and Chatterton 2006). “Consensus” is the heart of the system of governance in cohousing communities even if it requires time, patience, and a strong willingness to solve eventual internal conflicts (Sargisson 2010).

The self-management takes into account many aspects of the cohousing daily life, not only the decision making about the site and internal life, but also the informal mutual help among cohousers (Jarvis 2011; Williams 2005). Informal help is defined by Hoch and Hemmens, as “the qualities of the social
relationships within which helping occurs […]. Formal and informal helps appear more parallel than complementary in that both provide help for virtually the same kinds of problems” (Hoch and Hemmens 1987: 433). This happens within cohousing communities where the level of informal mutual help may depend on the degree of heterogeneity, residential stability, age of the community, and personal factors (Williams 2005).

The Italian cohousing Web site (www.cohousing.it/content) indicates, as characteristics of cohousing, the “economic benefits” as guaranteed by sharing services and reducing costs. However, it could be argued that the high cost of the sites and construction is sometimes responsible for the failure of groups. For this reason, those inhabitants of the communities born spontaneously, without any kind of public aids, are mainly from the medium-high economic–social status. In fact, as stated on Cohousing Partners Web site:

Cohousing homes typically cost more than other new condos or townhomes, for several reasons: cohousing neighborhoods offer generous common facilities that are unheard of in traditional attached housing developments. Cohousing projects typically incorporate environmentally sustainable features that cost more in the short run, although they often pay off over time. (Cohousing Partners 2012a).

As Williams highlights, “residents bear all financial costs and risks associated with the project (2008: 270). They raise their own capital for the development and are personally liable for ongoing costs”. At the same time, in Northern Europe (Denmark, Sweden, and the Netherlands), some cohousing communities are state-financed, forming part of the state social housing policy (see Sargisson 2010), and the social housing sector adopts cohousing principles in a top-down logic (Williams 2008). In the United Kingdom, where cohousing mainly follows a grass-roots model, some communities are able to keep costs down: Lilac cohousing (Leeds) creates affordable housing through a Mutual Home Ownership Society (see Chatterton 2013). Threshold center (Gillingham, Dorset), Cohousing Woodside (North London), and Baltic Wharf Cohousing Group (Totnes, Devon) collaborate with housing associations; Hedgehog Co-op (Brighton, East Sussex) is a self-build community. In the first case, a minimum net income is required and it ranges from £15,000 for a one bed flat to £49,000 for a four bed flat (Chatterton in press); in the second (Cohousing Woodside and Baltic Wharf Cohousing Group are still developing), a housing association provides social housing; in the third, households have been engaged in the building process. Generally, people who live in cohousing communities tend to be characterized by both economic and ideological (from the political ideas to religious faith) heterogeneity, although the intention to create a “community life” often involves the adhesion to a common “ideological base” (at least minimally), such as, in some cases, the environmental care.
To verify if “good housing” might “have positive external effects” (Gibb and Hoesli 2003), it is necessary to consider the relationship between cohousing and the local context where it settles. The declared aim of many communities is to achieve not only a high degree of harmony within itself, but also communication with the outside world to break down the barriers (physical and “psychological”) between the “inside” and “outside.”

A Comparison between Cohousing and Gated Communities

According to Chiodelli, gated and cohousing communities cannot be distinguished (2009; 2010). However, Chiodelli’s analysis focuses on the common structural factors as residential functions, contractual communities, and associations, while completely ignoring goals, safety aims and developing processes that produce differences between cohousing and gated communities.

Before accounting the similarities and differences between cohousing and gated communities, it is important to emphasize that both types of community have their own organization that cannot be generalized. This means that it is possible that some cohousing can be closer to the gated communities model, and others can be completely different from it.

The first common feature concerns the sense of safety, although both models have different sources. In fact, gated communities defend their spaces against external threats by erecting barriers and using control systems to create a sense of safety; in cohousing, often, there are no barriers around the communities, but there is, in the same way, a high perception of safety. In fact, as stated on the Cohousing Bristol Web site, “Safety is in knowing your neighbours – not in walls and barriers” (Cohousing 2012). Around the houses, there are not barriers or boundaries, and usually, there are not barriers around the entire community. However, four of five communities studied by Bouma and Voorbij in the Netherlands have safety systems for entering buildings (2009). At the same time, even if gates or control systems are present, cohousing projects are usually oriented to the wider community, firstly, organizing many activities that involve people from outside, and secondly, keeping the gates open during the day. This means that cohousing communities intend to create relationships with the wider context beyond any fences: The high rate of people present (internal or external) contributes to increase the sense of safety among residents. Although in cohousing communities, tools and technologies for surveillance are not much diffused, it has been suggested that people from outside are urged to follow the rules because they are monitored by an invisible eye that belongs to the community. Unlike gated communities, cohousing does not have any evident control points (e.g., places where there are cameras): The “surveillance” inside seems to be exercised in an “invisible” way. In fact, as stated on Cohousing
Partners Web site, safety and security depend on a “neighbourhood watch system”:

we know all our neighbors, we have an excellent neighborhood watch system built into our communities […]. Then there’s more than one person to watch out for the property of an absent resident. All eyes on the common areas’ means that even in quite an urban area, many cohousers will feel comfortable leaving their front door unlocked when they go to the common house to pick up laundry, and will not require that their community be accessible only thorough a locked gate (Cohousing Partners 2012b).

Digging deeper, the findings obtained by Williams in two communities in California show that physical design creates surveillance opportunities: “densities and accessibility were the key design features influencing the strength of support networks in the community” (2005: 203). Following the model scheme created by Kathryn McCamant and Charles Durrett, the cohousing physical layout has in the center the common spaces (and buildings) by which residents exercise control on the surroundings. But at the same time, there is a reciprocal control between the surroundings (homes) and the center (common spaces) to guarantee internal order (1998; 2011). The “overseers” (inhabitants) benefit from such control as well and exert a “power” by “watching” their visitors. In other words, the architectural design in addition to the cohousers’ “intentionality” to become a “friendly neighbourood” (but always “watching” the common stuff) creates a safe environment within the communities.

In contrast, Low explains that in gated communities, the sense of safety increases, but not a “real” safety, because, theoretically, anyone could elude controls and jump the walls. In this vein, Blakely and Snyder argue that fancy and high surveillance technologies have a symbolic role because they increase the perception of safety (1997). Low points out that her research team found it difficult to obtain an entry into gated communities and to contact residents in relation to the closure of these communities. When she describes her sister’s house in a gated community (San Antonio, Texas), she points out the presence of a wall, which encircles the house, and the blocked views from the first floor (2003: 4). Inhabitants of gated communities depend much more on surveillance systems (or guards) that focus on the outside to keep out the “unauthorized.” Following Abu-Ghazzezeh, we can state that when residents feel they share something, they possess the psychological security to be surrounded by people they can trust (1999). This could be true in both types of communities, but in cohousing communities, the sense of security depends more on a high degree of trust, both internal and external. In fact, generally in cohousing, there are “semi-public” spaces (and public within the community) accessible from the outside (Jarvis 2011; Ruiu 2013; Sargisson 2010); while in gated communities, “public spaces are privatized” (McKenzie 1994; Blakely and Snyder 1997). People in gated communities, as well as in cohousing, share facilities and
services, and each community differs from others in terms of size, security systems, and amenities in relation to the internal agreements. However, different from cohousing communities, in gated communities, facilities or spaces are available only for their residents (Low 2003: 12). Gated communities are entirely “private” and they tend to produce social exclusion because they do not make available facilities for outside (Blakely and Snyder 1997; Marcuse 1997; Bauman 2001; Low 2001; Glasze, Frantz, and Webster 2002; Le Goix 2005; Vesselinov 2012). This thesis is supported by Williams who underlines that in cohousing communities, the activities and spaces are often open to the outside to encourage an integration with the wider context, “unlike gated communities, where residents from the wider community are excluded” (2005: 201).

Although it is possible that some cohousing can be closer to the gated communities model, vice versa, we can state that in cohousing communities, safety is based on neighborhood watching more than on surveillance systems, while in gated communities, the sense of security depends on barriers and on using control systems. In fact, the issue of safety within cohousing seems to have much more to do with Jane Jacobs’ definition about the “eyes upon the street” rather than with a system of surveillance (Jacobs 1964). She refers to a “look” that takes place in public rather than private or semiprivate spaces: She particularly refers to the street and sidewalk. The spontaneous social control helps to “inhibit” those behaviors considered inappropriate by the “community.” Cohousing, usually, does not have fences because it aims to create “public” places enjoyed also by “foreigners.” These intentions can be supported by Jacobs’ reflection about the creation of activities, cultural and entertainment places, to attract as many people as possible on the streets, because people need reasons to use streets and sidewalks. Usually, within cohousing communities, there are organized activities, meetings, services that are “public” and potentially accessible to people who do not belong to the community. On the contrary, it seems to be that in gated communities, the sense of safety increases in accordance with the “denial” of access and the “reclusion” in protected places.

In short, cohousing was not created to ensure safety; however, in gated communities, even if some scholars do not stress safety as the primary goal (see Rosen and Razin 2008; Sanchez, Lang, and Dhavale 2005; Wu and Webber 2004), a majority of scholars indicate safety as one of the primary aims, in particular in the United States, Latin America, and South Africa (Low 1997, 2003; Davis 1998; Caldeira 2000; Ellin 2001; Coy and Pohler 2002; Landman and Schönteich 2002; Jurgens and Gnad 2002; Landman 2004; Lemanski 2004, 2006; Rodgers 2004; Coy 2006).

The second common feature regards the exclusion of the poorest people: In both cases (in most of the projects), costs of access are higher, even in
relation to the facilities available. Findings obtained by Rosen and Razin show that “the new gated communities are predominantly a product of market mechanisms, representing class-based segregation rather than ideology, ethnic identity or security considerations” (2008: 1718). In the same way, cohousing is often characterized by high costs of access (costs of dwellings, maintenance, and services), in particular, if it is a private initiative (grass-roots model); however, it tends to be different from products of the speculative development of individual homes for commercial sale or rent. In fact, cohousing is almost always managed by non-profit organizations. Williams underlines that cohousing communities tend to be homogenous in terms of race, religion, income, and education. This is the reason why some groups are “excluded” from joining cohousing communities “because they felt they would be socially and culturally isolated” (2008: 272). Likewise, some cohousers point out the prestige in living in cohousing communities in relation to the higher resale values and the presence of “luxurious” facilities. However, different forces produce cohousing projects from the forces that generate gated communities: in the first case, it is often grass-roots forces that produce cohousing projects (if they were born in private contexts); in the second case, top-down logic (from market to target) produces the “desire” to live in gated communities. Some scholars emphasize gated communities as an “emerging feature of the neo-liberal city”: Market and third-sector organizations are influencing the production of gated spaces (Rosen and Razin 2008: 1718). The interest of developers in these communities depends on the opportunity to “pursue higher density in order to maintain profits despite rising land costs” (McKenzie 2006: 187). In addition, homeowner associations provide those facilities that would normally be government responsibilities because services are directly managed by members (McKenzie 2005; McKenzie 2006). This means that gated communities produce a significant change in local governance, because they provide those services and infrastructure that were provided by institutions before. This could be true for cohousing communities as well, however, with the important difference that their services are often open to the outside, while in gated developments, they are owned, managed, and enjoyed only by residents. In addition, in gated communities, the top-down logic encourages a speculative system because developers maximize profit through mass production (McKenzie 2006). On the other hand, grass-roots and social oriented systems, often used in cohousing communities, place cohousing out of any speculative logic: When groups adopt resident-led models, they are responsible for every aspect (from recruitment to operational processes). Even though they collaborate with external partners, they are involved in all phases of the process. The other side of the coin regards the speculative cohousing model that emerged in the United States in which developers are responsible for the production (Williams 2008). The speculative approach
might degenerate into the same logic on which gated communities are based that could cause the community to lose the reason why it was born.

The third common feature focuses on what Chiodelli calls a “contractual character”: in both cases, inhabitants decide through internal agreements, how to manage their joint services (2009; 2010). In cohousing and gated communities, there are rules regarding the public life and shared spaces (so, everyone has to consult the other residents before making changes to the common area). As Sargisson points out, the nature of commitments within communities varies from group to group, and sometimes, groups specify a minimum time commitment per month (2010). Often residents sign a “contract” when they buy the house and it includes a wide range of collective activities and work (for example, gardening, cooking, maintenance work, babysitting, and cleaning). Jarvis calls this system the “infrastructure of daily life,” that involves all aspects of cohousers’ “public life” (2011). These sets of rules and agreements affect the behavior of members because they create the cohousers’ community life (Bouma and Voorbij 2009; Meltzer 2005). In cohousing, as well as in gated communities, the contractual character reviews the rules that are necessary for the “correct” functioning of the communities, but in cohousing communities, it aims also to promote the “social life” inside (and outside). In cohousing communities, the rules might be read as the key to “recruit” (or self-select) members and verify the “compatibility” of them (Williams 2008). It means that the cohousing lifestyle is not suitable for all, because people need to share values (see Bouma and Voorbij 2009; Sargisson 2010). Similarly, in gated communities, not everyone is suitable for a “gated lifestyle,” but it is more linked with the feeling of being part of a “club” rather than a “community” (Le Goix 2005). In contrast, in gated communities, developers are not interested in recruiting members in relation to specific values. At the same time, as outlined above, cohousing communities that are developed by external developers in a speculative way tend to be very similar to gated projects.

Furthermore, in gated communities, the intimate link between the residents and the sense of community is not a key element. The evidence from Wilson-Doenges indicates that the sense of community does not increase inside gated communities (2000). However, Low finds that a group might develop a strong sense of community, in relation to the physical proximity and shared spaces. But this is not a predetermined aim; it is a secondary result. As Lang and Danielsen argue, the paradox of gated communities implies a reinforcement of an “inward-focused community culture” and an involvement in local community life only in relation to relevant issue to their community (1997). Once again, gated communities look inside, more than they do outside. In contrast, people usually decide to create a cohousing development to build a “strong” sense of community and an “intentional” friendly neighborhood (Field 2004; Jarvis
The common life could be explained by material needs: Individuals choose to live in a community with people that share same values. As Biraghi points out, it is “obvious” that a community creates a strong sense of security because people manage their spaces directly and trust their neighbors (2011). In this vein, Brenton underlines that the participative process “becomes the means by which they get to know each other, develop a sense of ownership and grow a sense of group cohesion and commitment to their neighbours” (2008: 5). This system allows people to get to know each other in contrast to developers and housing associations whose approach is to bring strangers together.

The big difference between gated and cohousing residents is the motivation behind the creation of such facilities: In the first case, even though scholars identify different motivations, none of this relates to the willingness to be a part of a community. In the second, we can define cohousing as a “community” because the primary goal is the mutual exchange (both material and immaterial).

The possibility that cohousing can “degenerate” into a gated community is linked with the speculative market system that produces top-down logics. This risk is tangible in American projects, which often create cohousing communities that are the results of marketing forces, making the sense of community lower because people do not know each other.

**Conclusion**

Contrasting to Chiodelli’s argument, the comparison between cohousing and gated communities suggests more differences than similarities. The differences between cohousing and gated communities can be summarized under four categories: sense of safety; degree of closure to the outside; sense of community; motivations; and aims.

In relation to the issue of safety, we can conclude that often gated communities are residential systems where safety is “the star” around which the system revolves (in particular in the United States, Latin America, and South Africa), while cohousing “being a community” is “trust-centric.” Unlike gated communities, within cohousing projects, the “surveillance” is exercised in an “invisible” way that is closer to the “social control” as defined by Jane Jacobs.

In relation to the issue of the degree of closure to the outside, unlike gated communities, activities and spaces in cohousing are often open to the outside to encourage the integration within the wider context. This shows that cohousers’ willingness to take part in the wider neighborhood produces effects on it: When they make their facilities available for the outside, they inevitably affect the external context (especially if the communities arise in the countryside or in suburbs). In fact, they offer facilities and spaces to the wider neighborhood
trying to create friendly relationships with it. Therefore, cohousing might produce positive externalities in the wider context increasing the degree of trust among neighbors (often “perfect strangers,” in particular in urban contexts) through the participation in common activities and events. In this vein, the trust might be considered as the lubricant of the social and exchange relations inside and outside the communities.

In relation to the issue of the sense of community, cohousing communities consist of “intentional” groups that decide to build a “strong” sense of community and a friendly neighborhood through a collaborative and participatory system. Cohousers live together with people that share the same values and their sense of community becomes stronger also because they manage their spaces directly and trust their neighbors. In gated communities, the development of the sense of community is not a primary aim, but it could be a secondary result consequent to the proximity of people.

The “contractual character” and the prevalence of the upper-middle class, indicated by Chiodelli as the trait d’union between cohousing and gated communities, do not emerge from the literature review as key elements for this approach.

However, despite these differences, it is possible that some cohousing examples can be similar to the gated communities model, vice versa. We can state that in gated communities, the sense of security depends much more on barriers and using control systems than cohousing communities where more often the control is exercised by an “invisible eye”; the “contractual character” in gated communities is linked with the membership of a “club” where people are requested to respect certain rules, while in cohousing, the “contract” regards the “infrastructure of daily life,” which involves rules and agreements about cohousers’ community life as well as promoting the “social life” inside (and outside). The exclusion of the poorest people in gated communities is mainly the result of market mechanisms, while cohousing tends to be different (much more social and grass-roots oriented) from the products of a speculative scheme. However, poorer people are often excluded from cohousing communities because the absence of external funds (private or public) may increase the costs of access (because the projects are entirely financed by residents). These higher costs can become invisible barriers that avoid the access of poorer people. In both cases, the exclusion can be related to economic reasons: While in gated communities, to become part of the system, the need of a higher income threshold is often crucial (so, people tend to exclude themselves), the situation within cohousing is that the economic aspects tend to appear secondary to the community building. In the latter case, the high economic status seems to be hidden behind the intentionality to become part of a community; however, in gated communities, higher prices could become an explicit factor of exclusion.
In cohousing communities, this mechanism does not exist *a priori*, but it emerges when cohousers need the money to implement the project.

In short, gated community members buy an “admission card” to become part of the club; cohousers more often create their club and, even if everyone could access, only those who can afford the costs become members. However, the greatest risk that cohousing communities become gated developments is linked to the speculative system. It can be argued that the engagement of external developers could produce a loss of the sense of community and intentionality, as well as the lack of cohesiveness within the group, which could happen likewise in gated communities. In addition, the top-down logic and mass production could be promoted by governments because cohousing provides services to the wider community directly managed by its members.

An empirical research about the comparison between gated and cohousing communities could be helpful. Besides identifying the different aims and structures, it is important to understand how to support the birth and the growth of these two types of communities. There is a need to investigate the potential roles of the public actor and the partnerships between the private and public sectors in the development process to avoid those speculative consequences mentioned above. These preliminary results aim to provide a first demarcation between the two types of communities and underline, depending on the literature considered, how these communities differ (or are similar) each other.

**ENDNOTE**

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**REFERENCES**


DIFFERENCES BETWEEN COHOUSING – GATED COMMUNITIES


Differences between Cohousing – Gated Communities


