

## SECURITY AS AN URBAN SOCIAL IMAGINARY IN THE CLOSED RESIDENTIAL COMPLEXES IN VALLEDUPAR

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**Abstract** - *The purpose of this research article is to interpret security as an urban social imaginary linked to the social relations of closed residential complexes in Valledupar. The methodology of the text is oriented from the parameters of the interpretive paradigm and the use of the ethnography method to understand the different texts, images, and interviews related to the research topic. The theoretical arguments are supported by the contributions proposed by Berger and Luckmann, (1986), Castoriadis (1989), Roitman (2003), Pinto (2005), Foucault (2006, 2010), Baeza, (2004), Castells, (2004)., Guerrero, (2006), Martinez (2013), Busto, (2014), Martinez (2021), among other authors, who conceptualize and theorize about urban security and social reality.*

**Keywords:** *Security, urban social imaginaries, closed residential complexes in Valledupar.*

### INTRODUCTION

The urban space is a city area built through collective exchange, whose determining elements are the number of inhabitants and the jobs of those who inhabit it, in the urban space the neighborhood is built. According to the sociologist Martínez, (2021), in his doctoral thesis titled “Urban social imaginaries linked to closed residential complexes in Valledupar”, the neighborhood, in addition to being a territory that is part of the city, is an urban space thought for and designed so that residents can interact to achieve well-being, in the midst of social, economic, cultural and political differences. In the neighborhood, man builds open and closed residential complexes, and urban social imaginaries are created in them according everyone’s need.

In residential complexes, social imaginaries are built, which turn out to be socially constructed schemes that allow humanity to perceive, explain and intervene in what each differentiated social system is considered reality (Pinto, 2005).


Security can be studied as a social imaginary related to the absence of danger or trust in something or someone. Interpreting the words of Foucault, (2010), in his text “The birth of biopolitics” it can be said that security is related to freedom, and the state, where states must govern under the guarantee that individuals or the community is exposed to the least possible dangers. This means that the state must seek mechanisms to provide confidence and security to its governed.

The accelerated construction of closed residential complexes in the city of Valledupar is a phenomenon that is transforming the appearance of the city; in the last three decades, more than 200 complexes have been built, causing changes not only in the urban landscape, but also in the symbolic universes of the people who inhabit them specifically in relation to security.

In this article, a subjective study is carried out to interpret security as an urban social imaginary linked to the social relations of closed residential complexes in the city of Valledupar with the interaction of two scientific disciplines, of the social sciences (Urban Sociology and Anthropology). The research methodology was oriented from the parameters of qualitative research.

### 1 Methodology

The research methodology is oriented from the parameters of the interpretive paradigm and the qualitative approach, (subjective and interpretive world), the use of the ethnographic method as a tool that facilitates the interpretation of customs, beliefs, social practices, social and religious



representations, knowledge and behaviors of a group of people or particular culture (Martinez, 2014) and the application of data collection techniques such as observation and semi-structured interviews that were carried out with key informants to know what they think, say and do in relation to security inside closed residential complexes, in order to interpret reality based on individual and collective subjectivities. Taking into account that Valledupar is a very extensive territory with more than 200 closed residential complexes, the decision was made to select as a unit of analysis, four (4) complexes created and inhabited in the last 20 years in the city, with at least 30 houses each, the four residential units selected were: Alto de Ziruma, San José Los Bloques, Calleja Real and Azúcar Buena.

## 2. Discussion and results

Security for Foucault (2006) is the set of mechanisms through which, what in the human species constitutes its fundamental part, will become part of a policy, a political strategy, a general strategy of power.

Foucault himself (2006) states that, in modern security societies, control is no longer exercised directly over the population, but rather by conditioning the environment.

Security can be interpreted as a basic need that humanity has, related to the requirement for well-being and is determined by the favorable or adverse results that transcend the territory.

Security will always be delimited by the human being and his need to feel safe from any harm that affects him physically or psychologically, this means that security will always be analyzed from subjectivity, according to the perception of threats and not based on objective or real situations. In this way, the State and society would seek to free themselves from threats and maintain integrity and independence from those that they manage to perceive, seeking the survival and very existence of the State taking into account the government, the population and the territory.

Interpreting the arguments provided by Berger and Luckmann, (1986), Castoriadis (1989), Baeza, (2004), Pinto (2005), Martinez I. (2013) and Martinez H. (2021), it can be stated that urban social imaginaries are theoretical and methodological tools that allow interpreting social reality; They are instruments that allow us to study from subjectivity how humanity creates cultural manifestations and the interrelation with its urban environment through the symbolic, allowing us to understand how people perceive and value the society in which they live, in addition to the aspirations or fears to which they live. they face each other.

Urban social imaginaries are collective constructions that generate meaning and a pattern of behavior. Human beings are the construction subjects of reality, they are active agents in the processes of reconstruction of reality. According to (Hernández and Valdivia, 2004), social imaginaries have an essential function, supported by the capacity to generate archetypes, roles, expectations and stigmatizations. The aforementioned categories are based on human experience. Social imaginaries can typify and categorize reality, configuring scripts that articulate what seems possible, probable, credible and normal to the population.

The previous reflection allows us to say that security is also a social imaginary constructed by man in a sociocultural context, which potentially becomes a generalized social scheme that forges archetypes, roles, expectations and stigmatizations, based on security and fear.

The imaginaries of security have relevance within what human beings perceive as quality of life, man seeks at any cost to feel safe and protected, about this Castells, (2004), comments: “being protected in this sphere means being safe from the imponderables that could degrade the social status of the individual. Therefore, the feeling of insecurity is the awareness of being at the mercy of these events; if one is not protected against these contingencies, one lives in insecurity” (Castells, 2004, p. 35). Regarding this, Busto, (2014), in his master’s thesis states that:

*The city is a place to reside and to be imagined, cities are configured with images from the perspective of the “other” or “the other”, and it is in that configuration where what is determined for a social group is safe or unsafe, and these perceptions are formed by the relocation of danger and the limit between safe and unsafe zones (Bustos, 2014).*

The security imaginaries are constituted by the interaction that subjects have with their environment and with others, but within this framework urban violence has a direct participation, since currently,



the uncertainty and violence that occur in cities is increasingly discouraging, “fear seems to have become a driving force of the new contemporary city, especially in Latin American cities built around poverty, wars, traffic and other endemic evils” (Guerrero, 2006, p. 107).

Safety can also be interpreted as an organized system where humans create actions to eliminate, reduce or control risks. Taking into account the previous lines, it can be said that closed residential complexes also emerge as an alternative endorsed by the state, to somehow manage the security of their residents, who are segregated from other citizens through bars, walls and safety devices.

The issue of security is a common and similar element found in the four closed residential complexes studied, becoming an extremely important social imaginary that is worth investigating and interpreting in this type of residential development in the city of Valledupar.

To observe security as an urban social imaginary of social relations, it is necessary to remember what Pinto (2005) argues, when he states that social imaginaries have to do with an alternative rationality of spontaneous knowledge. It is a kind of unquestionable collective unconscious whose origin cannot be determined through the objectivist method of cause, effect and consequence. That is, they are collective actions that govern the identification and social interaction systems that allow social invisibility to be observed.

Taking into account what was mentioned above, it can be said that security in the studied complexes is a collective fact that its inhabitants build from spontaneous experiences, generated by the feeling of the absence of risks or the confidence of being surrounded by security devices.

When asking some residents of the closed complexes about security in this type of residential development, they responded the following:

*The closed complex where I live, Alto de Ziruma, is very safe, they provide us with security as long as we stay in the complex, because we are surrounded by walls and bars that separate us from many poor neighborhoods where many thieves live, we, who live as a whole, we are calmer than others in the streets where there are robberies and other dangers... (Rojano, 2014).*

*The closed complexes provide tranquility, security and quality of life, thanks to the walls, bars and surveillance, those of us who live in the complex have the right to peacefully enjoy the green area, the pool, the parks, the children play sports, adults have parties, barbecues and we don't worry so much about the dangers that can happen in other neighborhoods that are outside... (Torres, 2010).*

*Lately insecurity has been increasing in this city, and one tries to take refuge in safe or somewhat safe places, because as an alternative I decided with my family to buy a house here in this complex, which has private security with guards, cameras, we are surrounded by walls and bars, which separate us from other neighborhoods like La Nevada and Bello Horizonte, we also have a benefit, we can enjoy tranquility, swimming pools, playgrounds for the children, I take care of my children so much that where they study there are cameras where I can monitor what my kids do with my cell phone, that is wonderful and gives me a little peace of mind (Castilla, 2017).*

The resident of the San José los Blocks residential complex, Mrs. Martha De Rincón, describes the complex in relation to security in the following way:

*It is a place where we live with the family with some comfort, it is lived separately from the other neighborhoods, there is always surveillance and guards here. For example, unauthorized or unknown people do not enter Los Blocks, thus preventing robberies and robberies in the complex. Here those of us who live can live peacefully almost without fear, however outside there is danger or there is fear of the darkness, loneliness, the robber, marijuana user and other things that are very scary, I can say that living here is having well-being... (De Rincón, 2015).*

The previous data, provided by interviewees who live in the four residential complexes, describe and demonstrate the importance of security as a common element and similarity of the closed residential complexes, around the urban social imaginaries of social relations. In this sense, security is a social imaginary built within urban spaces, collectively, establishing a link of symbolic order to live in a neighborhood with the feeling of being in the absence of risk.



## CONCLUSIONS

It is evident that social reality is impossible to understand, capture or measure in its entirety, but it is necessary to approach it. From this text an approach of subjective and inductive studies is proposed, where security is interpreted as an urban social imaginary, studied from the symbolic universes congruent by the social relations that are created in life in the suburb (in this case the closed residential complex).

The social imaginaries constitute a study, a referential scheme to interpret the socially legitimized reality constructed intersubjectively and historically determined, that is, the social imaginaries are a frame of reference or semantic field that serves as an interpretation scheme to understand and apprehend the socially given reality.

The accelerated construction of closed residential complexes in the City of Santos Reyes is a phenomenon that increases urban social segregation. This type of construction is transforming the physiognomy of the city; in the last 30 years, more than 200 complexes have been laid, producing changes not only in the urban area, but also in the symbolic fabric of the society that inhabits it, specifically in regards to social relations in this case the social imaginary of security.

Paraphrasing Roitman (2003) and Martinez (2012), it can be said that closed complexes are residential areas surrounded by barriers that have permanent surveillance during the day and night. Security mechanisms make free movement impossible for visitors. These new types of housing have been built with the purpose of providing security to its residents and preventing the entry of unknown people into them. The new urban residential phenomenon.


Security is a common and similar social imaginary, which allows neighbors to have a feeling of being away from danger and at the same time the coexistence regulations generate healthy environments, which help regulate the urban life of the residents within these residential spaces, and thus not affect the daily life of the neighbors.

Thanks to the interpretation of the urban social imaginaries in the city of Valledupar and especially in the closed residential complexes, it was possible to know how a traditionally conservative society accustomed to living in open spaces, with organic conceptions, a community which is self-defined as a lover of nature, that values freedom as a source of social cohesion; renounces many of the aforementioned privileges and decides to live segregated and cohesive in urban spaces delimited by bars and security devices, where private property is horizontal and collective, and its uses must be agreed upon, where coexistence is mediated by rules and manuals of behavior. The above is accepted with the promise of finding a stable emotional state away from the fear and danger caused by open, dark spaces, alone and visited by strangers.

The inhabitants of closed residential complexes justify their change of residence from open to closed, citing fear of violence, darkness, loneliness and crime, however, it can be seen that the fear does not end, because this is a distressing monster invented by humanity caused by the presence of a real or fictitious danger. Therefore, it is an inexhaustible sensation that will always be present in any social relationship.

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