

Progress and the Happiness Ideal: Materialization of a Utopia with the Fortified Enclave: The Case of Casa Forte

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Abstract

The advance of construction techniques and the increase in urban violence led to a process of transformation in Casa Forte, a traditional neighborhood in the Brazilian city of Recife. Single-family residences are being replaced by large vertical condominiums thanks to their leisurely appeal and security. They became the ideal of happiness for part of the residents of that vicinity, which greatly impacted the urban life of that neighborhood.

It turns out that living in one of these vertical condominiums, with characteristics of fortified enclaves, brings the resident happiness by living in an apartment that not only provides social prestige but it is also considered modern and safe and offers leisurely activities with peers from the same socioeconomic point of view. These skyscrapers have also brought a civilizational setback to the neighborhood. This contributes to the security problem, increasing the traffic and infrastructure problems within the vicinity and generating socio-spatial segregation, which leads to the denial of the city as an area of freedom. Public policies are needed in order to prevent these harmful effects from undermining the collective happiness of the neighborhood.

Keywords: progress, happiness ideal, fortified enclave, urban violence, Casa

Forte.

1. Introduction

~~The neighborhood of Casa Forte is one of the most traditional vicinities of the Brazilian city of Recife, which assumed its name from a sugar cane mill—Engenho Casa Forte. A green area, with relatively narrow streets and avenues, the neighborhood carries with it a symbology of tradition and status, which is reflected by the high cost of real estate.~~



Fig. 1: Typical house in the neighborhood of Casa Forte. Credit: Author, 2017.

~~Originally formed by single family horizontal residences (figure 1), the neighborhood witnessed, since the mid-90s, the growth of urban violence and a concomitant process of replacing houses by vertical condominiums of more than 30 floors (figure 2). The vertical condominiums' leisurely appeal and~~

security have become symbols of social status and the object of desire for many of its residents.

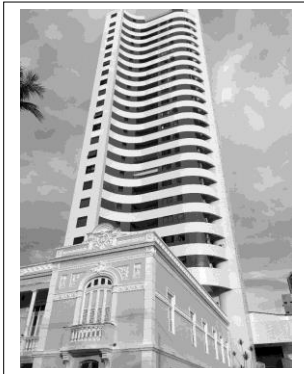


Fig. 2: Maria Clementina Viana Building—A skyscraper in the Casa Forte Square. Credit: Author, 2017.

The growth of these bubbles of safety raises questions not only about social inclusion and territorial justice but also about the impact on the urban life of the neighborhood and its quality of living.

2. The Urban Violence Growth, Progress and the Fortified Enclaves

The process of producing gated residential spaces is not a recent one or a privilege of Brazil, Recife or of the Casa Forte neighborhood. Sposito (2013) points out that these residential spaces are already found in the United States in the 19th century and that in the 1920s these condominiums appear in Venezuela and Argentina.

Gated communities have been defined in different ways but they normally include residential areas with restricted public access, through the use of gates, walls and fences. They often include security systems and services such as leisure facilities. (Atkinson and Blandy, 2005)

Although housing enclaves are seen as residential spaces characterized by the security and isolation of a specific group within society, there are different international contexts and drivers. Atkinson and Blandy (2005) found the desire for status, privacy and the investment potential of gated dwellings as others motivations to live in gated communities. Eshuis et. al. (2014) studied the case of the Netherlands and found that Dutch housing enclaves are predominantly without gates and little segregation and that the main reason for its inhabitants to demand this type of a housing enclave is the search for a pleasant living environment and not for security.

In the Brazilian context, analyzing the growth of horizontal condominiums in the interior of the State of São Paulo in the 1990s, Sposito (2013, p. 65) found great empirical evidence relating the emergence of these condominiums due to the "significant increase in insecurity."

Supporting Sposito's research, Caldeira (2000, p. 260) finds that while the 1970s buildings used to be open to the streets, the new condominiums, in the 1990s, both vertical or horizontal, tend to ignore the urban network, with large areas, several equipment of collective use and great security devices, which led the author to denominate them as fortified enclaves.

In the case of Recife and the neighborhood of Casa Forte, the evidence is that, just as in São Paulo, violence is also the driving force behind these fortified enclaves. In an interview in a local newspaper, José Simón, the vice president of the Union of Civil Construction Industry in the State of Pernambuco, explained that the builders build what the population wants or asks for and, for the same reason that the walls have risen in size and buildings became gigantic, with the leisure areas being built inside the buildings. "It's the lack of safety in the streets", the entrepreneur concludes. (Alves, 2105, n.p.)

On the other hand, in the case of the neighborhood of Casa Forte, in the

absence of large areas available for horizontal condominiums and given the advances in architecture and construction technologies, the option was to demolish houses, rematch lots and replace them with large high-rises far from the street, which include the characteristics of fortified enclaves reported by Caldeira.

On Figure 3, one can see the swim pool, part of the playground, the games building and the children's recreational area of the 40-floor fortified enclave Alameda Casa Forte, which also includes a party room, fitness center, jogging path and tennis court.



Fig. 3: A view of the Alameda Casa Forte Building recreational area. Credit: Author, 2017

It should be noted that in Casa Forte, a very traditional neighborhood, apartments were initially rejected and seen as tenements, a point of view that was changed when small buildings with one apartment per floor were developed and then when high skyscrapers with large apartments came about, which have become object of desire and a symbol of social status.

Although in a completely different historical context, the towers of Casa Forte, some with 40 floors, like the one in figure 4, bring us back in symbolic terms to the medieval towers that existed in several Italian cities, such as Bologna and San Gimignano. As well as in Casa Forte, in the medieval Italian context, the towers were not only restricted and well-defended buildings but also symbols of power, so that the family that owned the highest tower was the richest and most powerful in the city.

At this point, it is important to note that the process of fortification observed in Casa Forte and elsewhere in Recife and Brazil is sometimes compared to a process of feudalization. Even though the walls try to isolate the inhabitants from the threats of barbarians or thieves in both the medieval and current contexts, there is a crucial difference. While in the medieval city, there was a socially heterogeneous coexistence, the new walls of the condominiums seek to isolate the community from the socially unequal.

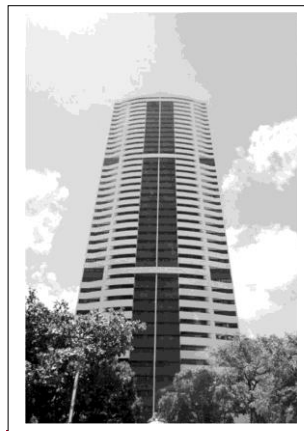


Fig. 4: Freguesia de Casa Forte Building. Skyscraper of 40 floors located at Praça de Casa Forte Square. Source: Author, 2017

At the end of the 1990s, with the intensification of the process of verticalization, the neighborhood was experiencing a worsening in traffic conditions, sewage and water supply problems. As a result of that, the City of Recife proposed and approved the Law 46.479/2004, which limited the height of buildings in some neighborhoods to a maximum of 6 to 20 floors and reduced the construction parameters in these areas.

Despite the law, and due to high demand for this type of housing, the market

continues to offer, although to a lesser extent, these types of apartments. In Casa Forte, the appearance of these fortified enclaves, including in the Casa Forte Square, a plaza that was designed by the renowned Brazilian landscaper Roberto Burle Marx and a symbol of the neighborhood, has not yet caused the disappearance of single-family houses, which still predominate in the neighborhood, but has generated new social relations and impacts that we analyze below.

3. A New Paradigm of Happiness and the Denial of the City

Starting with the micro-point of view, for the individual who chooses to live in a fortified enclave, living in this type of housing brings him happiness as it bestows a social prestige, is considered modern and safe, and offers leisurely activities to enjoy with peers from the same socio-economic point of view.

When we analyze these fortified enclaves from a macro point of view, considering the neighborhood and the city as a whole, as these fortified enclaves spread there is a civilizational setback due to the problems generated in the neighborhood.

Although the high walls of these condominiums protect their residents, they end up increasing the insecurity in the neighborhood as these buildings are unrelated to the street, which have less people watching the movement of the public area. The attempts of the City of Recife to harmonize these enclaves with the public space requiring condominiums to use metal fences or walls that allow part of the interior of the building to be seen by the outside and exterior gardens between the wall and the sidewalk were insufficient. Note that this process generates a circular cumulative causation movement where insecurity generates enclaves that result in increased insecurity, which increases the demand for fortified enclaves and so on. In an unplanned neighborhood, such as Casa Forte, where the infrastructure was

designed and built for single-family housing, the replacement of these homes with large buildings is aggravating the traffic conditions and overtaxing the water supply and sewage collection infrastructure. In addition to these infrastructure issues, there is research (Gregolato and Reis, 2012) that correlate high skyscrapers to changes in the local microclimate and to negative changes in the landscape of the city.



Fig. 5: Fortified enclave close to a typical house of the Casa Forte Neighborhood. Credit: Author, 2017

In figure 5, the change in the landscape from the construction of a fortified enclave can be noticed. Note the traffic in the area and the contrast between the building and the house.

These fortified enclaves moved away from the unsafe street and began to offer alternatives to the public space. Thus, within the walls, the square was replaced by the playground and the swimming pool, the street by the soccer field of the condominium, the gym of the neighborhood by the fitness center of the building. All of these alternatives to public facilities increase the socio-spatial segregation, generating a new paradigm and the denial of the city itself, understood as an area of freedom.

These new vertical condominiums are also generating a standardization of the architecture, leading to a loss of identity and personality within the neighborhood making its appearance more similar to the other districts of the city.

By generating costs and loss of quality of life for other city dwellers, these mega-

projects generate negative externalities to the city, which justifies, from an economic point of view, the intervention of the government through the adoption of public policies to mitigate or compensate for these impacts. (Weimer and Vining, 1998)

The growth in the demand for housing in fortified enclaves, where each resident in choosing this type of housing seeks the best for himself but brings the worst for the community, can be seen as a non-cooperative game, which reinforces the need for government intervention. In this case, the free market is generating social costs.

Given the increase in violence and insecurity that Brazil is witnessing in recent years, which is also happening in Casa Forte, there is little hope that the demand for this type of enterprise will diminish, reinforcing the need to revise the policy of land use rights in the city.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

The insecurity of the streets and the technical progress of the architecture and construction techniques led to large fortified enclaves in the neighborhood of Casa Forte, which have become the ideal of happiness for several residents of the neighborhood who seek leisurely activities, security, modernity and social status that these new buildings offer.

It turns out that the progress represented by these high fortified enclaves was accompanied by a civilizational setback in the neighborhood represented by socio-spatial segregation, increased street insecurity, increased traffic and problems of water supply and sanitary sewage.

In other words, this new ideal of individual happiness provided by security, social status and leisurely activities with people of the same social-economic status within the walls of a self-contained condominium complex is leading to the denial of the city as a fruition place, an area of freedom and demanding public policies that prevent its harmful effects from generating collective unhappiness throughout the

neighborhood.

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