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## **RESIDENTIAL FENCING AND SECURITY ASPECT: THE CASE OF THE NEW CITY OF ALI MENDJELI IN CONSTANTINE (ALGERIA)**

**Abstract:** Our research article focuses on the security aspect in the living quarters of collective housing and aims to determine the main reasons for the residential fencing. Taking as a case study the new city of Ali Mendjeli, more specifically the 434 housing units in the neighbourhood unit No. 05, from a participatory social housing program. It is divided into two sections; the southern section, which consists of 242 housing units was the subject of our investigation. To fulfil the objectives of the research and get reliable results, we chose to work with a mixed-method research approach. Firstly, we used a quantitative method based on a questionnaire and then a qualitative method based on interviews and direct observation. The results of our survey revealed that the security aspect is a major concern for the inhabitants of the district, which led them to choose the residential fencing in an informal residentialisation process of the studied district, and by extrapolation of the surrounding districts. We also noted that the type of security sought as a top priority was for the dwellings, more than vehicles or persons, and the main obstacle to fencing work was financing. It seems to us that it would be right for the relevant authorities to take this aspect into consideration during urban upgrading processes but also in new housing programs so that this type of residential fencing integrates the upstream the study stage of this type of project.

**Key words:** collective housing, gated communities, gated housing, residential security, residentialisation

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## **Introduction**

The construction of large-scale high-rise housing estates during the 1960s in France and other industrial countries was initially perceived as a kind of fruition of modern urbanism (Hersemul, 2016). Inspired by the precepts of the Athens Charter, these constructions that were the symbol of human prosperity were quickly criticised (Hersemul, 2016). Indeed, the areal organisation of these new neighbourhoods consisting of tall apartment blocks was sometimes considered hostile (Brausch, 2014). Faced with this construction brutalism, the sociologist Henri Lefebvre proposed to favour the aspect of use and practise over function (Lefebvre, 2000) and introduced the concept of appropriation (Pinson, 1993). This space appropriation, which is a kind of an expression of the user in his habitat (Lazime, 2015), as a response from the inhabitants of these stigmatized neighbourhoods, who lived some sort of an enclave (Debrie, 2001) and aspiring for a better integration (Boquet, 2008). To remedy this situation, urban regeneration projects were launched to move from quantitative to qualitative (Tabet, 1999).

In the context of a housing crisis that has persisted since Algeria's independence in 1962 to the present day, manifested in the gap between housing supply and demand, the relevant authorities have tried to respond to an increased need through housing programs that have been studied and carried out as a pressing issue. Despite changes in Algerian society and the way in which inhabited space both inside and outside, housing continues to be produced in the same way.

Confronted with this discrepancy, some inhabitants have taken the initiative, randomly but collectively, to transform the intermediate spaces of collective housing in order to adapt them to their needs, including security, in the face of the upsurge in urban violence and delinquency. According to Moley, these intermediate spaces, which represent transitional spaces between housing and the street or public space, must provide a sense of privacy without isolation (Moley, 2006).

Some of these transformations are leading to fencing of outdoor residential areas. This leads us to ask the following question: what are the main reasons for residential fencing?

In order to answer this question, we put forward the hypothesis that residential fencing is mainly related to the security aspect. Hoping that this theory is well founded.

This phenomenon is not unique to Algeria. It is the case of other countries such as France, which saw the birth of the concept of residentialisation at the beginning of the 1990s with the urban renewal operations which affected particularly the large-scale high-rise housing estates inherited from the 1960s.

## **Literature overview**

According to Lelévrier and Guigou, residentialisation is a way of clarifying the status of the exterior space by using a fence to delimit the private area of residence from the public area (Lelévrier & Guigou, 2015). The objective of residentialisation is to revalue the inhabited space, by creating intermediate areas which meet the needs of use and practice of the inhabitants (L'Union Social pour l'Habitat, 2012). It is a matter of organising one or more, as well as their outlines, into a residential unit with well-marked and identifiable boundaries (Vuailat, 2010).

However, residentialisation operations should not be confused with “Gated Communities” (Le Goix, 2003) in which a public place is privatized and walls and fences prohibit access to streets, sidewalks, and playgrounds to non-residents (Blakely & Snyder, 1997).

Residential fencing is often associated with gated communities. This phenomenon is most prevalent in North America and more specifically in the United States. This explains the multitude of research on the subject in this region of the world. The works of Blakely and Snyder are a reference on the subject. They have determined the typologies of these gated communities as well as their distribution in the United States (Blakely & Snyder, 1997). Not forgetting the research of Renaud Le Goix on the same subject (Le Goix & Veselinov, 2015). Manuela Porcu developed an inventory of these gated communities in an interesting article (Porcu, 2013). South America has also experienced this phenomenon, but with different designations, in Colombia, Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, and other South American countries, this is a growing phenomenon according to Marie-France Prévôt Schapira (Schapira, 1999).

In Europe, Africa and Asia, the residential closure is less important than in the Americas, according to François Madoré, who has published an article that provides an overview of residential self-enclosure in the world (Madoré, 2004). We can cite the work of Atkinson and Blandy on the expansion of the practise in England (Atkinson & Flint, 2004) and the related security reasons (Blandy, 2009). In France, the country that saw the birth of the concept of residentialisation, research is being carried out on two fronts; the first is on American-style gated communities (Golovtchenko & Souchet, 2015). Second, several research projects are being carried out on the phenomenon of residentialisation, notably the work of Jade Tabet on the city of Paris (Tabet, 1999) and the report by Guy Tapis on the residentialisation of social housing (Tapie, 2007). Central Europe is not left out, as some interesting research has been published, such as that of Zoltán Kovács and Gábor Hegedűs on Gated Communities in Budapest (Kovács & Hegedűs, 2014), and Christian Smigiel on the city of Sofia (Smigiel, 2014).

In the Arab world, some research work has been done, such as that of Georg Glasze and Abdallah Alkhayyal on Lebanon and Saudi Arabia (Glasze & Alkhayyal, 2002). Or that of Rana Tawfiq Almatarneh in Cairo in Egypt (Almatarneh, 2013).

In Algeria, although the phenomenon of residential closure has existed for decades, few studies have been undertaken on the subject. We can cite the work of Atika Benazzouz-Belhai and Nadia Djelal on closed residences in Algiers (Benazzouz-Belhai & Djelal, 2018), as well as the work of Karima Bendib on residential self-enclosure in Batna (Bendib, 2020).

## **Methodology**

### ***Materials and methods***

The approach adopted to achieve the objectives of this research is the survey approach. It is based on the quantitative method, which aims to measure the phenomenon, and the qualitative method, which aims to understand the phenomenon (Angers, 2009).

The quantitative method was based on the interview questionnaire. A test questionnaire was first carried out in order to check the relevance of the questions. Then we started the survey with 45 families residing in the neighbourhood that formed our probabilistic

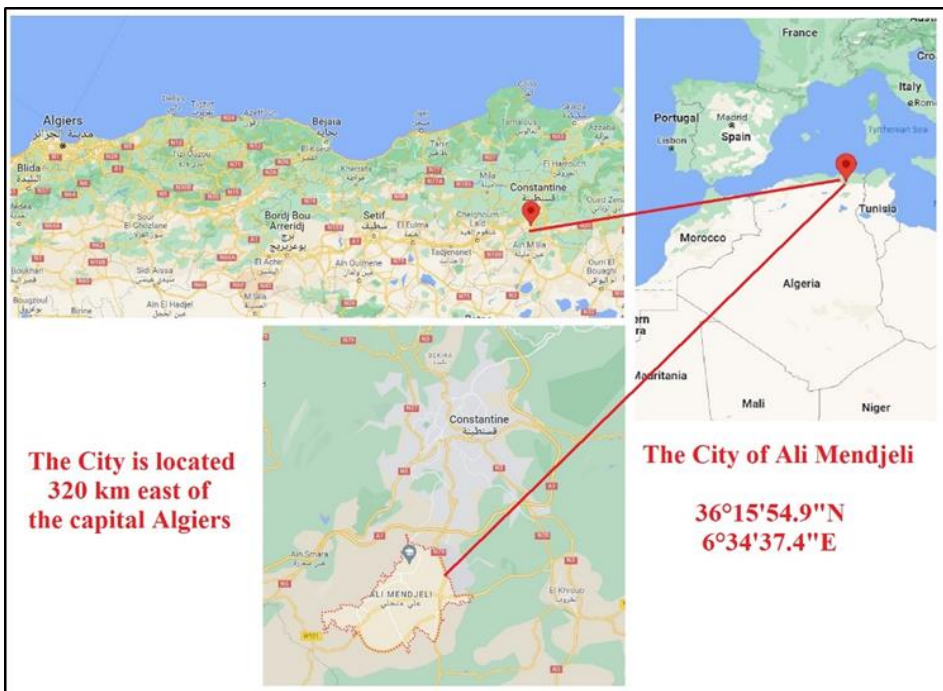
sampling (Benhassine-Touam & Labii, 2011). This represents 20% of the total number of residents. The collected data were analysed and the results were discussed.

To complete our survey, we used a qualitative method based on simplified direct observation (Benhassine-Touam & Labii, 2011) as well as a semi directive interview conducted with residents of the neighbourhood. The information collected was cross-referenced with the data collected from the questionnaire to ascertain the research hypothesis (Dépelteau, 2000).

### **Presentation of the case study**

#### *Presentation of the new city of Ali Mendjeli*

The new city of Ali Mendjeli is located approximately 20 km from the city of Constantine and was established on the plateau of Ain el Bey. It is still called a new city by its inhabitants and even by some public administrations because of its relatively recent creation compared to other cities in the Wilaya of Constantine. The early construction works started in 1992, but it wasn't until the year of 1998 that a decree had confirmed the official status of this city. With an initial capacity of 50,000 housing units, it is expected to accommodate a population of 300,000 inhabitants on an area of 1500 hectares. The new city was renamed "Ali Mendjeli" by a presidential decree in 2000 (Foura & Foura, 2005). Its objective was to bring relief to the urban crisis in the city of Constantine and to respond to a high demand for housing (Cherrad, 2008).



*Fig. 1. Location of the new city of Ali Mendjeli (Source: Google Maps, 2022, edited by the authors)*

The city of Ali Mendjeli is composed of several neighbourhood units. The district studied is located in the neighbourhood unit No. 05 (Figure 2), which is one of the oldest neighbourhood units built (Lakehal, 2020).

This neighbourhood unit was chosen for two reasons, first because it was one of the first units built in the city, which gives enough time to do a post-occupancy study, and second because the knowledge of the area and some of its inhabitants allows us to collaborate better with the residents.

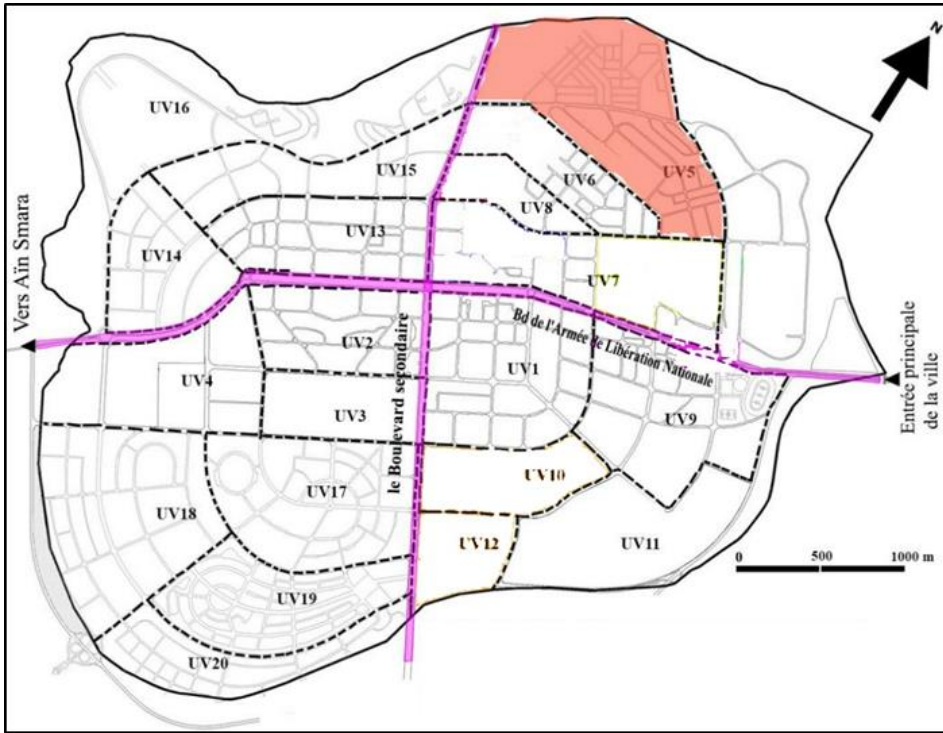


Fig. 2. Neighbourhood units of the new city of Ali Mendjeli (Source: Lakehal, 2014, edited by the authors, 2022)

#### Sampling (434 housing units)

The 434 housing units located in the neighbourhood unit No. 05 in the new city of Ali Mendjeli were one of the first housing programmes undertaken in this city. First, under the formula of a building cooperative. This program then integrated the participatory social housing programs formula in 2003 and was only delivered at the end of 2017.

A secondary road crosses this neighbourhood and divides it into two sections. The section chosen as the subject for our investigation is the southern section, made up of 242 dwellings (Figure 4).



Fig. 3. 434 housing units (Source: Authors, 2022)

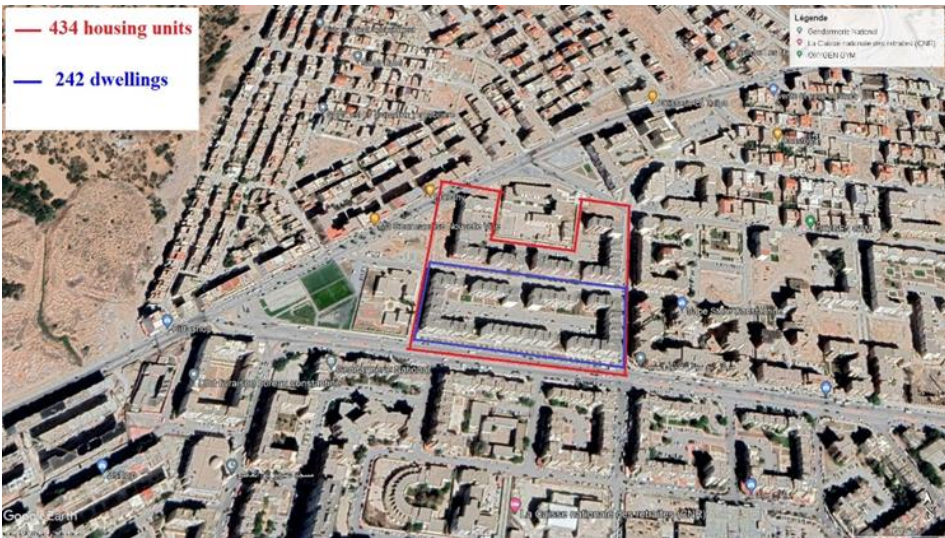


Fig. 4. 434 housing units with a subgroup of 242 dwellings (Source: Google Maps 2022, edited by the authors)

## Identification of the population

During our field visit, we noticed that the majority of the inhabitants we interviewed were in the age category of (36-59 years old) with children and youngsters who are mostly under the age of 15 (36% of the population), which is slightly above the national average of 30.6% (O.N.S, 2021). This more vulnerable segment of population requires greater attention in terms of personal safety (Table 1).

Tab. 1. Age category

Age category	Statistical Figures
0 to 15 years	36%
16 to 35 years	27%
36 to 59 years	32%
60 years and above	5%

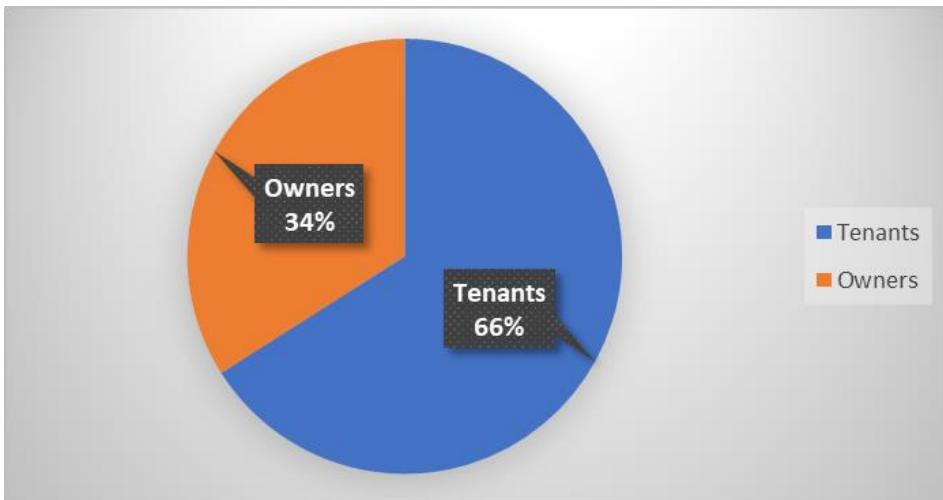
Source: Authors, 2022

Regarding the division of the population by gender group, we have a slight majority of women with 58% and 42% of men. We also found that the majority of households living in the neighbourhood were made up of 4 people.

## Results and Discussion

### *The importance of residential fencing*

Due to the long delay in this housing program (more than 25 years between the beginning of works and the delivery of the dwellings). The majority of the inhabitants of the living quarter are tenants (66%) (Figure 5). Because a large number of initial subscribers to this programme had to find another way to be housed due to this delayed delivery. The majority of the owners of the rented apartments are the initial subscribers of the programme (86%), and the other owners are private individuals who bought these apartments from some subscribers who preferred to part with their property (14%).



*Fig. 5. Tenant- Owner proportion (Source: Authors, 2022)*

However, the large majority of the residents questioned were in favour of block fencing despite their status as tenants (79% were in favour of closure) (Figure 6). They even consider residential fencing to be essential (63%) (Figure 7).



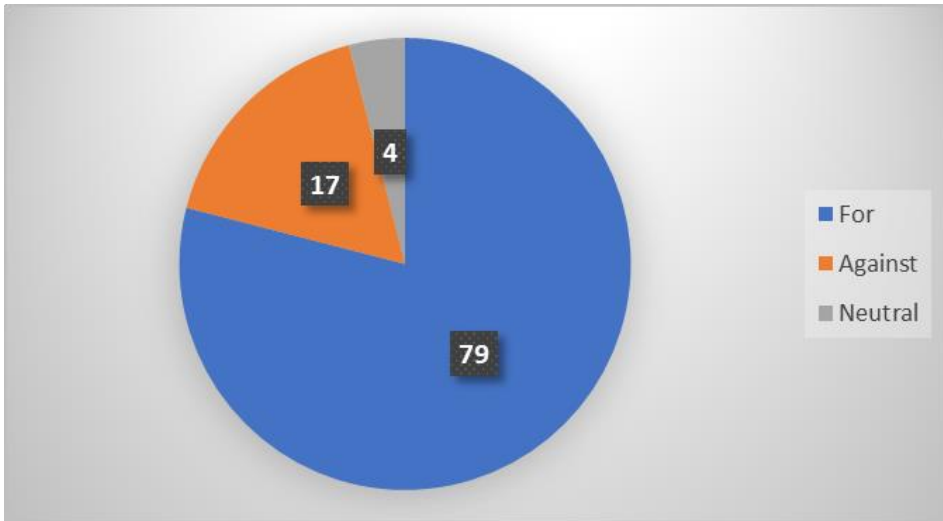


Fig. 6. Opinion towards closure, in % (Source: Authors, 2022)

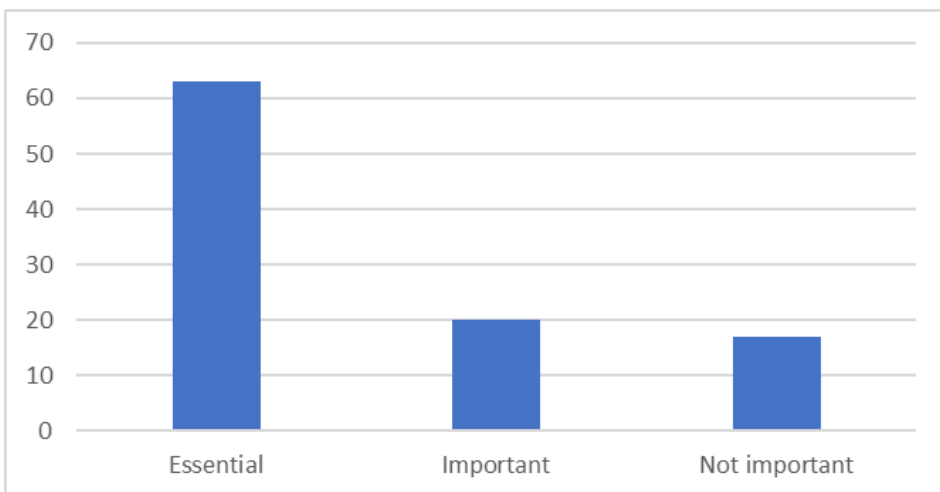


Fig. 7. The importance of residential fencing (Source: Authors, 2022)

### **Reasons for residential fencing**

The field survey revealed that the main reason for the residential fencing given by the questioned residents was the security (92%). This shows that the security aspect is a priority for these residents. Then comes the aspect of privacy with 54% and finally the organizational aspect of the neighbourhood which represents a minor concern with only (8%) (Figure 8).



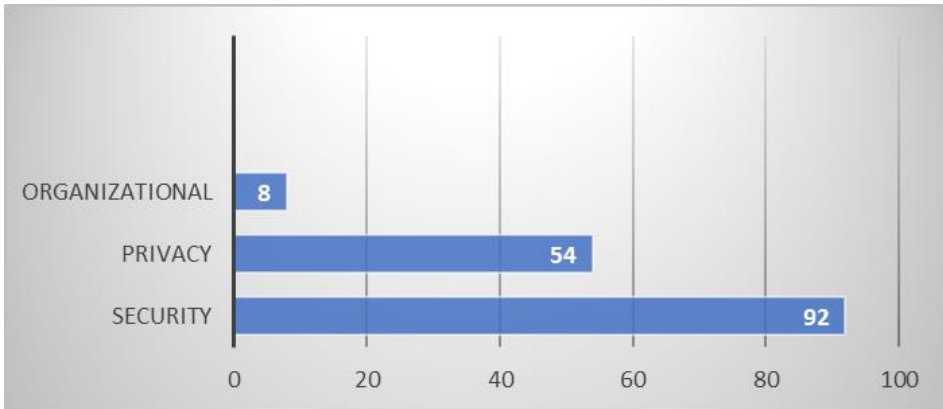


Fig. 8. Reasons for residential fencing (Source: Authors, 2022)

Concerning the type of security sought by the questioned residents, it is the security of the dwellings that is found to be the most important (96%). Then comes the security of vehicles (54%), and finally the security of persons which represents only 34%. This means that the security sought is mainly from the theft of property and not from possible aggression against people (Figure 9).

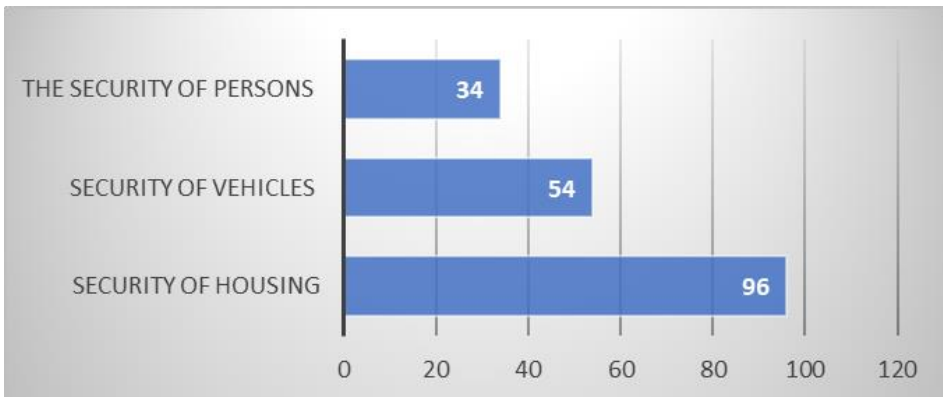
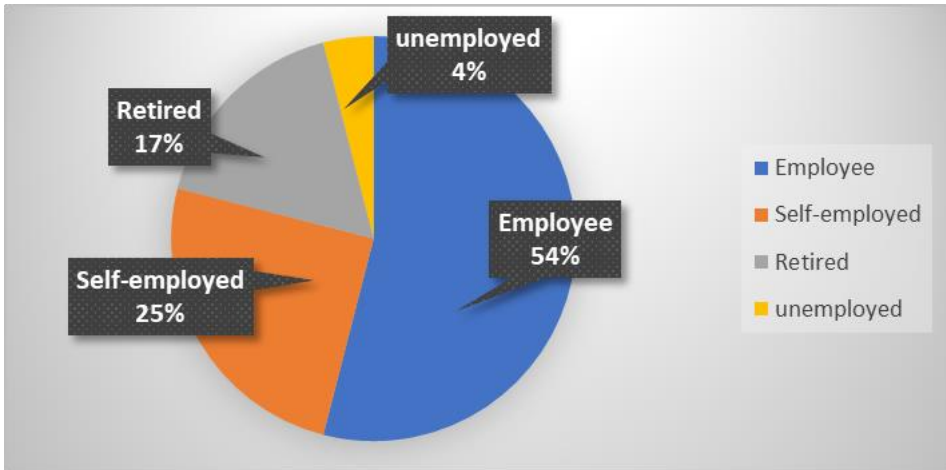


Fig. 9. Type of security sought (Source: Authors, 2022)

According to interviews with local residents, one of the reasons for fencing off the neighbourhood was to restrict passing through blocks on strangers, especially on students of a nearby middle school. This was, according to them, a big source of annoyance.

**Obstacles encountered during the gating process**

71% of the questioned residents admitted to facing obstacles during the gating process, mainly in financing. Although most residents are in favour of enclosing the neighbourhood, only 54% of the people questioned admitted to participating in the financing of the process. This is probably not due to the lack of financial resources of the residents, as most of them have a regular source of income (Figure 10). But rather to their status as tenants, which restricts their investment in the works in this neighbourhood.



*Fig. 10. profession of the residents questioned (Source: Authors, 2022)*

Another obstacle spotted during the survey was the placement of the access. In fact, while vehicular access is not a source of divergence, it is not the case for pedestrian access. For practical reasons, each inhabitant wants to have an access close to his building. Finally, the problem of access and financing was partially solved by creating a neighbourhood association. However, the dissolution of this association resulted in the suspension of construction work; the main reason is the lack of funding, as shown by the unfinished work on the vehicular access gate (Figure 11).



*Fig. 11. The vehicular access gate has not yet been achieved (Source: Authors, 2022)*

### **Changes following residential enclosure**

Most of the residents questioned (79%) mentioned a notable change in the use of exterior spaces. Especially for pedestrian access, which makes it more manageable, that means less visits by strangers to the neighbourhood. This gave them a feeling of security and belonging to the neighbourhood.

Another notable change is the use of outdoor spaces as a children's playground, especially in the space for which it was designed (Figure 12).



*Fig. 12. Improved use of children's play spaces after residential fencing (Source: Authors,2022)*

## **Conclusions**

Residentialisation is a fairly new concept in Algeria, but this doesn't prevent certain practices related to the appropriation of the exterior space of collective housing from being undertaken for years, in which security constraint is increasingly sought after following the resurgence of delinquency and insecurity in recent years.

In the past, residential fencing was only observed in residential neighbourhoods whose inhabitants were part of a higher socioeconomic class. But this trend is spreading to other socioeconomic class in search of security for their property and even for their folks. And secondly, the search for a sense of privacy and belonging to the neighbourhood.

However, the involvement of apartment owners is more important than that of tenants, either on the financial or organisational side. This often creates failures in the implementation of residential fencing in neighbourhoods where tenants are majority.

Therefore, we suggest that the local authorities take this aspect into consideration upstream, in the new housing programs but also in the urban upgrading processes in order to ensure that this gated housing becomes subject to an adequate study rather than a random and chaotic process.

In the case of new housing programmes, the study and realisation of this residential closure would be undertaken by the public or private estate developer. And in the case where the housing is already occupied, this task will be carried out by the neighbourhood associations in collaboration with the inhabitants and the local authorities.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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