

Urban Segregation: Theoretical Perspectives and Political Views

Segregación urbana: Perspectivas teóricas y puntos de vista políticos

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Abstract: In this 'position paper' theoretical perspectives and political views on urban segregation will be scrutinized. Theoretical perspectives include 1) the institutional context; 2) structural conditions; and 3) individual preferences and constraints. These perspectives help to understand segregation, and how it is framed by politicians and policy makers. The discussion also entails the question when and why segregation should be regarded a problem. When is segregation causing extra effects, on top of the sum of individual effects related to the population composition of the segregated area? Are the effects justifying interventions? Is there an awareness that not all interventions serve the residents? The discussion triggers critical reflection on theory, politics and policy practices and brings us new challenges.

Keywords: segregation, effects, theory, reflection, framing, policies, challenges

Resumen: En este '*position paper*' se examinarán las perspectivas teóricas y los puntos de vista políticos sobre la segregación urbana. Las perspectivas teóricas incluyen 1) el contexto institucional; 2) las condiciones estructurales; y 3) las preferencias y limitaciones individuales. Estas perspectivas ayudan a comprender la segregación y cómo la enmarcan los políticos y los responsables políticos. El debate también conlleva la cuestión de cuándo y por qué la segregación debe considerarse un problema. ¿Cuándo la segregación causa efectos adicionales, además de la suma de los efectos individuales relacionados con la composición de la población de la zona segregada? ¿Los efectos justifican las intervenciones? ¿Se es consciente de que no todas las intervenciones sirven a los residentes? El debate suscita una reflexión crítica sobre la teoría, la política y las prácticas políticas y nos plantea nuevos retos.

Palabras clave: segregación, efectos, teoría, reflexión, encuadre, políticas, retos

1. INTRODUCTION ¹

Segregation is frequently regarded to be problematic. Academics and politicians have argued that segregation might impede integration of population categories, reduce participation in society and hinder social mobility (e.g., Van Ham et al., 2012; Sampson, 2012; Musterd et al., 2019). Therefore, policies against segregation have been developed (Dahlmann & Vilkkama, 2009; Lawless et al., 2010; Arthurson, 2012; Bolt & Van Kempen, 2013; Belotti, 2017; Musterd, 2022; Alves, 2022). Yet, there is also ambiguity. On the one hand researchers point at the fact that many individuals and households are showing housing behaviour with an orientation on neighbourhoods where they find a significant share of ‘people-like-themselves’. This suggests a preference for some homogeneity and segregation (McPherson et al., 2001; Clark & Fossett, 2008; Van Gent et al., 2019). On the other hand, ‘preference’ for segregation is also questioned; some point at the lack of choice, at impacts of actors at the supply-side of housing, and they also mention the impacts of institutions and structural forces (e.g. Musterd & Ostendorf, 1998; Maloutas & Fujita, 2012; Bridge et al., 2012; Hochstenbach, 2017; Kirk, 2024).

In fact, a review of the literature on segregation reveals that three major theoretical perspectives and several political views on segregation have to be discussed: 1) the institutional context – in particular the welfare regimes – here limited to contrasting liberal conservative and social democratic regimes (Esping-Andersen, 1990); 2) structural conditions; and 3) perspectives that address preferences and constraints and related behaviour. I argue that these perspectives all play a role in understanding segregation. The discussion also addresses the question when and why segregation might become a problem. Are there extra negative contextual effects of certain population compositions, or are neighbourhood problems just compositional: the sum of individual problems in the segregated area? Is there a justification for fierce intervention? Who benefits from the interventions? Local residents? Developers using rent gaps²? Middle class people only?

The essay starts with an indication of levels of segregation in different sets of cities. A presentation of theoretical perspectives on segregation, and a section on potential effects of segregation will follow. This connects to varying policy framings and political responses. The discussions also trigger critical reflection on theory, politics and policy practices, which brings us to the formulation of challenges for further research.

¹ This paper draws on the recently published ‘Advanced Introduction to Urban Segregation’ (Musterd, 2023).

² The rent-gap reflects “the disparity between the potential ground rent level and the actual ground rent capitalized under the present land use” (Smith, 1979, p. 545).

2. LEVELS OF URBAN SEGREGATION

Over the past decades cities have been compared on the basis of their level of segregation. Some studies focused on the *development* of the levels. These studies are important to get a feel for where the discussion is about. For practical reasons I follow the dominant selectivity of dimensions and domains in the literature: the ethnic (or country of origin) and socioeconomic dimensions of segregation, and the fact that these dimensions have been predominantly discussed with regard to the residential domain (Musterd, 2020a).

Levels of segregation differ between and within continents, countries, urban regions and cities, and between population categories. In US cities, for example, segregation levels for Asians and Hispanics are relatively high, but clearly lower than for Black people. In general, segregation levels of Black people versus ‘White’ people are highest in North American cities (Massey & Denton, 1987; 1993; Logan, 2013; Jargowsky, 2020); but also in cities in South American countries (Marques & França, 2020), and in South Africa (Christoffer, 2001; Crankshaw, 2022). Socioeconomic or class segregation levels are also high in these contexts.

In Continental European and Asian cities, segregation levels are generally lower (Musterd 2005; 2020a; Arapoglou, 2006; Li & Wu, 2008; Pan Ké Shon & Verdugo, 2015; Nijman, 2015; Tammaru, et al., 2016; Arbaci, 2019). This regards segregation of migrants from former colonies; of so-called guestworker migrants, and of Black people. Most countries have also experienced extensive rural-to-urban migration during industrialisation from the 18th century onwards. Large waves of such migration can be found in today’s China (Li & Gou, 2020). These migration processes produced segregation. In a wide range of European cities as well as in Chinese and several other Asian cities, segregation remained relatively moderate, until recently. In these contexts, so far, levels of socioeconomic segregation tend to be lower than levels of ‘ethnic’ segregation. Within Europe we see relatively high levels of segregation in UK cities, where migrants from the Indian sub-continent, for example, appear highly segregated. Those with a Black Caribbean background are showing moderate levels.

Regarding the *development* of segregation, ‘ethnic’ or ‘migrant’ segregation levels generally seem to be decreasing somewhat. This applies particularly those who have settled decades ago and have had time to familiarize with the new society. In the European realm the urban region of Amsterdam may serve as an example. Unevenness levels of residents with a Moroccan, Turkish and Surinamese background – currently between 40 and 50 at a scale from 0 to 100 – dropped between 2006 and 2016 with 6%, 4%, and 7% respectively (Boterman et al., 2021). Another example is Stockholm, where the segregation level between ‘non-western and ‘natives’ dropped with 8% for the lowest income quintile and

with 26% for the highest income quintile between 1990 and 2010 (Andersson & Kährik, 2016). Elsewhere in Europe similar processes have been shown (Andersson, 2012; Vidal & Windzio, 2012).

Decreasing ‘ethnic’ segregation levels are, however, contrasting with rising socioeconomic segregation levels. This holds for almost all European capital cities (Tamaru et al. 2016). Detailed evidence for Stockholm shows that segregation between the lowest and highest income quintile households increased between 1990 and 2010 with 59% for residents with a non-western background and with 32% for those with a ‘native’ background.

In American cities, Glaeser & Vigdor (2012) presented a provoking interpretation of the dynamic of segregation. They observed a moderate decrease of the level of ‘ethnic’ segregation, also for Blacks versus non-Blacks, between 1990 and 2010. They labelled this: the ‘end of the segregation century’. Christoffer (2001) noticed similar dynamics in South African cities, which, from 1990 onwards in the post-apartheid era, showed a decline in segregation levels as well. However, he immediately added that this happened after a lengthy period of increasing segregation of Blacks versus Whites during colonialism and apartheid. Moreover, he pointed at the fact that the median segregation index value of Africans in South African cities only declined to 86.9 in 1996 compared with 90.9 in 1991.

The development of segregation in Chinese and several other Asian cities shows an increase over the past decades, both among migrants and in the socioeconomic sphere. In several countries, urbanization processes have run analogously with massive rural to urban migration in connection to recent industrialization in well-located urban regions. These dynamics also produced a rapid increase of social inequality, mirroring experiences in European and US cities during industrialization in the 18th and 19th century.

3. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON SEGREGATION

As argued in the Introduction, there are three explanations for the variation in the levels and development of segregation in different contexts: the institutional setting; structural factors; and individual preferences.

The relevance of *the institutional context* can be illustrated by comparing two opposite types of welfare regimes. Inequality and segregation levels are relatively low in extensive or universal social democratic welfare states, and relatively high in residual types of liberal or neoliberal welfare states. In the latter type, the regime is actively stimulating individual choice and facilitating market processes (e.g., Musterd & Ostendorf, 1998; Hemerijck, 2013; Bischoff & Reardon, 2014; Quillian & Lagrange, 2016; Arbaci, 2019; Musterd, 2022). Social democratic regimes aim at reducing inequality in various domains: in the income

domain by levying progressive income taxes and guaranteeing a minimum income; in the housing domain by de-commodifying housing markets and by the promotion of social housing and ample access to affordable housing. They also guarantee access to good services in the domains of education, healthcare, and social security.

Persistently high levels of segregation of Black people in the USA and South Africa can also be ascribed to their welfare regimes that institutionalized different positions and treatments of Black people and White people. Blacks in the USA were systematically separated from other population categories through Jim Crow laws – segregation laws – from the Civil War (1861-1865) onwards until the Civil Rights Act was signed in 1964. In South Africa authors relate systematic segregation of Black people to the start of colonialism from the 2nd half of the 17th century onwards, but the strongest sign of institutionalization of difference, the first apartheid law, passed government only in 1950 (Van Rooyen & Lemanski, 2020). This had led to almost total racial segregation, lasting until the democratic election of the ANC government, in 1994, when Nelson Mandela became president of South Africa. The post-apartheid era promised and brought change. Segregation decrease was, however, limited. According to Van Rooyen & Lemanski (2020) this relates to the legacy of apartheid, but also to the fact that the post-apartheid era coincided with the further rise of a neo-liberal era in combination with ongoing racial inequality. This “resulted in the perpetuation and entrenchment of socio-economic, racial and spatialized forms of urban inequality and segregation in the post-apartheid urban landscape” (p.31). Jargowsky (2020) arrived at a similar conclusion when he too observed that segregation levels of Black people in the USA decreased somewhat, but that simultaneously the socioeconomic condition of segregated Blacks worsened. Also Massey (2020) supported this view. He argued that a slightly lower level of race-based segregation became offset by increasing income-based segregation. The just mentioned studies convincingly show that the ‘end of the segregation century’ (Glaeser and Vigdor’s view), is not yet in sight.

As shown, decreasing ‘ethnic’ segregation also occurs in Europe, but there many welfare regimes fundamentally differ from the very liberal types in the US and South Africa. This may explain why declining European levels of ethnic segregation correlate with successful integration of migrants in (higher) education and in the labour market (Boterman et al., 2021), while that is not the case in the US and Africa. A recent comparative study (OECD, 2018) supports this interpretation.

Socioeconomic spatial segregation follows social inequality, with a time-lag (Bischoff & Reardon 2014; Musterd et al., 2017). Social inequality, on its turn, relates to the city’s level of embeddedness in global networks (Sassen, 1991), but

is also dependent on the type of welfare regime. Higher levels of globalization result in stronger international financial and economic relations and often coincide with a louder call for neoliberal policies (Mishra, 1999). Neo-liberal regimes tend to actively support undisturbed functioning of markets, assisted by institutions such as the OECD, IMF, and World Bank (Musterd 2020b).

The most ardent neoliberal states provide only limited support for those who have difficulty to fully participate in society, such as the unemployed, elderly, and the poor. This further stimulates inequality and segregation (Fainstein et al, 1992). In contrast, social-democratic regimes tend to make more efforts to reduce socioeconomic inequality and thus segregation.

Socioeconomic inequality is usually expressed through the Gini-coefficient, but also other indicators, such as the ratio between the top 10 per cent / bottom 10 per cent incomes tell a story about inequality.

North, and South American states like the USA, Mexico, Chile, and Brazil, plus South Africa, India and China have high Gini values and a most unbalanced division of income over the top and bottom 10 per cent categories. In Europe the UK and Baltic countries are showing relatively high levels of inequality. Scandinavian and West-European countries like The Netherlands, France, and Germany have relatively low Gini values and also lower ratio values. Currently, the index is somewhat rising in Germany, Denmark, The Netherlands, and Sweden, reflecting recent institutional changes. Higher inequalities will eventually result in higher levels of segregation.

Structural factors with impact on the level of segregation include the just mentioned position in global economic networks, and characteristics of the historically grown economic structure of cities and urban regions (Burgers & Musterd 2002). Some cities fulfil all conditions to become an important spider in a global economic net. These cities have developed a well-connected and diversified economy, which employs a high-skilled population, many of them employed in high-tech and/or advanced business services. At the same time, a pool of low-skilled or unskilled labour is needed for consumer services, such as restaurants, cafés, hotels, and other services. Together this generates unequal, polarised, and segregated cities (Musterd 2020b). Cities or urban regions which are less well embedded in global networks, with manufacturing or port-related economic histories and limited economic diversity, may eventually experience demand-supply mismatches in the urban economic structure. This will generate structural unemployment and gaps between the socially included employed and the socially excluded unemployed (cf. Wilson, 1987). Such cities tend to be poorer, but less polarized, and less segregated than firmly globally connected cities.

State	Gini	Top 10%/Bottom 10%	Year
South Africa	0.62	22.3	2017
China	0.55	23.0	2011
Chile	0.50	9.9	2020
India	0.50	9.4	2011
Brazil	0.48	9.7	2016
Mexico	0.42	6.6	2020
US	0.38	5.4	2021
Lithuania	0.37	5.1	2021
UK	0.35	4.5	2021
Latvia	0.34	5.2	2021
Italy	0.33	4.6	2021
Australia	0.32	4.3	2020
Spain	0.32	4.6	2021
Estonia	0.31	5.0	2021
France	0.30	3.5	2021
Germany	0.30	3.9	2020
Netherlands	0.30	3.4	2021
Canada	0.29	3.3	2021
Sweden	0.29	3.3	2021
Finland	0.27	3.1	2021
Denmark	0.26	3.0	2019

Table 1: Gini coefficients (of disposable income after tax and transfers) and Top10% / Bottom 10% ratios for selected countries, most recent year / Source: OECD.Stat <https://stats.oecd.org/>

Individual preferences and actual behaviour in the housing market also play a role in segregation theory. This is what Schelling (1971) suggests. A key argument in his theory is that even weak preferences for co-residence with members of one's own group ('people like themselves') will trigger residential mobility, resulting in segregation. However, here too, individual behaviour is not independent of the type of welfare regime and of structural forces shaping the economy, housing market etc.. Schelling's theory was developed in the USA and supported in that context (e.g., Clark & Fossett, 2008), but would it also be supported in very different regime contexts? To test this idea, we developed two large-scale empirical research projects based on individual level longitudinal data for the entire population in The Netherlands (Musterd et al 2016, Van Gent et al. 2019). Two colleagues, on their turn, independently tested the first of our two studies in the Norwegian context (Galster & Magnussen-Turner, 2017). The Dutch and Norwegian welfare regimes are known to be highly regulated,

generous, social, inclusive, (partly) de-commodified, and redistributive and thus very different from the US type. To our surprise, we both found support for Schelling's theory. Individuals and households appear to aim for a certain matching between their own socioeconomic, demographic, and cultural profile and the attributes of the places they live in. In Figure 1, referring to the 2019 Dutch study, we show that when the matching between individuals and their environment is strong, few people will move to another place. When the matching declines, the likelihood to move increases. The Norwegian study showed that this holds for low as well as for high status households. The relationship presented in Figure 1 persists after controlling for other impacts on residential moves, such as the wish to adjust the price and quality of the dwelling to one's household income change. These findings reveal that individuals and households prefer small social and cultural distances between themselves and their neighbours. They seem to prefer relatively homogeneous residential environments and thus contribute to segregation, even in strong welfare regime contexts.

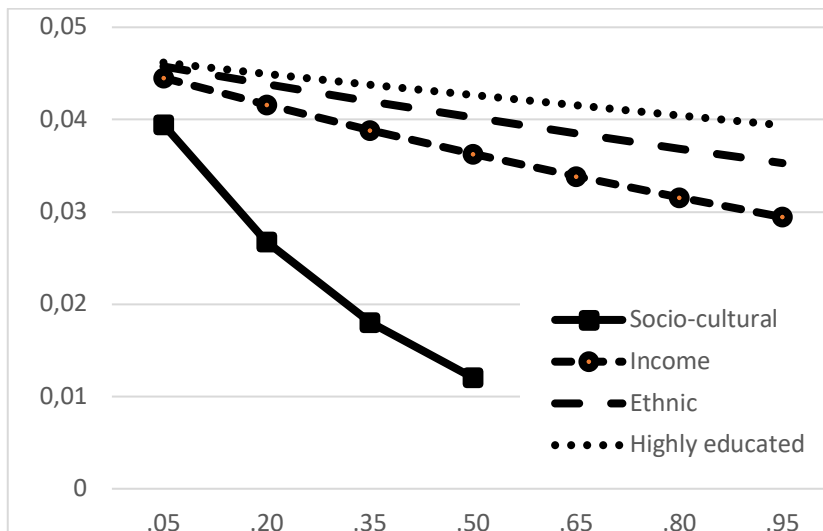


Figure 1: Estimated probability to move from the neighbourhood (only for $p < 0.001$) (vertical axis) by the share of own group living in the individual's neighbourhood (horizontal axis), by socioeconomic class, ethnic group, high level of education, and intra-household between-partner distribution of income (balanced or modern, and non-balanced or traditional); for couples only, 2008 / Source: Van Gent et al., 2019; data source: System of Social Statistical Datasets (SSD), Statistics Netherlands; re-processed by the author.

These findings do not imply that the institutional and structural contexts do not matter. On the contrary; they still – partly – condition individual behaviour. Dutch and Norwegian institutional and structural contexts differ from those of

the US, but also have some elements in common. For example, de-commodification is far from absolute in the two countries; both have some liberal traits as well. Yet, the *levels* of homogeneity and ‘matching’, and the *levels* of segregation are still much lower in European contexts than in American contexts.

Matching attributes of individuals to other (groups of) individuals with similar attributes or aspiration levels also appears to play a role in the integration of newcomer-migrants, although matching on a single attribute may not offer a satisfying explanation. Large-scale quantitative (Andersson et al., 2019; Kadarik et al., 2021), and in-depth qualitative (Pinkster, 2009) research have shown that migrants who arrived in a community where they matched well with co-nationals or co-ethnics, did not always become better integrated; a similar conclusion was drawn regarding migrants who landed in communities where many people were employed. What really appeared to help in terms of integration opportunities, was the presence of already settled migrant communities with *co-ethnics or co-nationals-who-were-employed*. Precisely the combination of these two factors at individual level plays an important role in facilitating labour market participation and subsequent integration of newcomers.

4. EFFECTS OF SEGREGATION

Governments with knowledge of what drives segregation will see that there are individual forces pushing segregation, which are conditioned by structural and institutional contexts. Individuals who have choice will try to find a place to live amidst other ‘similar’ households. This effectuates homogeneity and segregation. Here we have argued that classic (neo) liberal welfare regimes, globalized cities, unequal states and cities, and regimes that developed institutionalized racial inequality will stimulate segregation. In contrast, social democratic welfare states, cities that are less connected globally, with more social equality, and places where they fight against racism will create conditions aimed at reducing segregation.

A critical question remains: can segregation reach a level that triggers extra negative effects, on top of the sum of individual effects generated in an area? A certain level of homogeneity in one’s neighbourhood may help to establish social networks with like-minded people and may facilitate collective socialization. Such homogeneity is not expected to create negative effects. This applies to various sociocultural categories; and to the poor *and* the affluent³.

Nevertheless, politicians frequently only expect negative outcomes of segregation of the poor, also without knowing whether the total negative outcomes exceed aggregated individual negative outcomes. (Sections of) the poor are represented as ‘marginal’ and associated with problems such as

³ However, self-chosen segregation of the affluent may result in not self-chosen segregation of the poor who are left behind.

unemployment, criminality, low levels of education, high levels of school drop-out rates, drug trade and alcohol and drug abuse. Wacquant (2008, pp. 257-260) ascribed marginalization of the poor to ‘polarization from below’ and ‘polarization from above’. The first process (from below) is driven by withdrawal, entrenchment, and segregation of the middle and higher classes, away from lower classes. This results in poor areas becoming homogeneously poorer and more marginal. The second process (from above) is driven by influential cultural, governmental, and business elites, and institutions which promote deregulation, re-commodification, and a reduction of state intervention that supports the poor. Cutting the welfare state down to the bone further marginalises poor neighbourhoods. Their inhabitants are frequently positioned as the cause of urban trouble. This will eventually stimulate the rise of gated communities, and the rise of marginal and stigmatized poverty areas. The stigmatization may *produce* extra negative neighbourhood effects.

When poverty levels pass certain thresholds – and when the areas where the poor are living are extensive – social networks and social role models may predominantly exist of poor and marginalised individuals. Because of the size of the poverty concentration, residents run the risk to become isolated from ‘the other’. Social networks and negative role models may consequently become unhelpful for individuals who are residing there. This may create extra negative effects as well.

But what is a critical thresholds connected to the segregation of poverty? A large-scale research in Swedish neighbourhoods may provide a beginning of an answer. I would like to stress, however, that the answer to the question *at what level* the share of poverty in a neighbourhood might be seen as problematic is *not* the same as saying that the neighbourhood composition is the *cause* of the problems. In the Swedish neighbourhoods, poverty was measured as the share of people in the lowest 30 per cent income category. The effect was measured as the impact of the poverty concentration on individual earnings, while controlling for other factors affecting individual earnings. Poverty levels below 40 per cent were associated with only limited negative earning effects, but above that threshold negative effects became significant (Hedman & Galster, 2013; Galster et al., 2015). While such levels may be frequently reached in highly segregated cities in American contexts these are – so far – exceptional in most European contexts. This relates to more moderate levels of inequality in Europe. In several countries safety nets and benefits are still in place and help to reduce effects (individual rent subsidies, old age pensions, unemployment benefits, disability benefits, income allowances in case of long-term illness, and so on). Those who lose their job do not immediately lose all their income; or their dwelling; they also remain entitled to receive health and other services.

5. FRAMING

Theories on segregation might assist government leaders and other urban managers to frame segregation issues, and to develop policies. Starting with theory is, however, not a common practice. ‘Neighbourhood segregation’, or poverty and/or migrant concentrations, tend to be mainly seen as ‘undesirable’ (Uitermark 2003; DeFilippis 2013). Poor people and migrants are seldom addressed as ordinary citizens, who fill vacancies in tight labour markets, equally participating in society. Especially migrants are frequently seen as a ‘burden’ to society and if society cannot ‘get rid of them’, governments often decide that the ‘burden’ should be spatially dispersed across the country (cf. ‘Spreading the “Burden”?’’, Robinson et al., 2003).

These negative attitudes are reflected in the framing of areas to be targeted. Segregated areas with a relatively high share of poor people, or ‘migrants’ are often framed as ‘areas with arrears’ (the softest form), as ‘disadvantaged’ or ‘problematic areas’ (a stronger stigmatizing form), or even as ‘ghettos’ (the extreme form). All of these frames are negative, which produce instead of mitigate discrimination practices, stigmatization, and bad reputations (Walks, 2020; Musterd, 2023).

The wide variety of expressions of segregation in different institutional and structural contexts asks for reservation when it comes to framing neighbourhood ‘issues’. When designating a neighbourhood as a place that requires extra attention, the frames applied should be conceptually tailored to the contexts, without aggravating the social position and reputation of the neighbourhood. While differences between continents, countries, and cities exist (cf. Musterd, 2022), in many contexts most of the neighbourhoods with high shares of relatively poor and/or migrant residents are functioning well. Good quality and affordable dwellings match their households’ needs. Also when quite some poor households and many new migrants are living in these neighbourhoods, social networks may be strong and communities lively. When problems occur, they may not apply to the entire area or entire population. Problems should thus be formulated clearly and targeted precisely.

Stigmatizing and discriminating frames reflect a lack of trust in and respect for newcomers and relatively poor households, where urban leaders state that the neighbourhoods these categories settle in must receive attention to ‘restore the social balance’. They then try to make them ‘average’ or ‘socially mixed’ with middle class residents and non-migrants. Such frames assume that mixing will increase social capital and stimulate social mobility, and integration (e.g., Lawless et al., 2010; Arthurson, 2012; Belotti, 2017; Alves, 2022). Middle-class households and non-migrants are presented as the norm (Bacqué et al., 2011). Such framing practices may have truly negative effects, especially when neighbourhoods are labelled as disadvantaged or problematic on the basis of ‘the

share of residents with a non-western migrant background'; or 'the share of low-income residents'; or 'the share of social rental housing'.

The most stigmatizing frame is that of the 'ghetto'. That concept refers to areas which are the almost exclusive domain of the poor, or of one ethnic population category, many of whom are supposed to be in trouble; and where almost the entire population of that category is living (Peach, 1996). There is a common understanding among scholars that such segregated areas may be found in the US, in South Africa, and a few other South American places, but hardly elsewhere. In Europe, ghettos are virtually non-existent (cf. Wacquant, 2008; Arbaci, 2019; Walks, 2020). Nevertheless, ghetto rhetoric has recently been applied in cities in the UK, Denmark, Greece, and the Netherlands (Peach, 1996; Kandyliis & Kavoulakos, 2012; Walks, 2020; Van Gent et al., 2018). I recall that in the Black ghetto of Chicago around 75 per cent of the population is black, while also around 75 per cent of the entire black population is living there. This differs hugely from practices in Athens, Copenhagen, and Amsterdam. In Amsterdam, in 2022, almost 10 per cent of the population had a Surinamese background, many of them (but not all) of Black African origin. Yet, only three tiny neighbourhoods could be found where a meagre 50% of the population had a Surinamese background. The key point is that in these neighbourhoods, with only a couple of hundred residents, only one (!) per cent of all Surinamese were living. The Amsterdam government wisely did *not* apply the explosive ghetto concept; but in Copenhagen, with similar levels of segregation, they did.

6. POLICY INTERVENTIONS

Several types of dominant frames can be distinguished. I refer to three dominant types: a (neo) liberal type, a social democratic type, and a populist type. The first two correspond to policy regimes, the third cannot be labelled a 'regime'.

The first regime has become widespread across the globe (Mishra, 1999; Ranci & Cucca, 2017). This type facilitates individual preferences while governments actively support market processes. It favours the middle-class, while the poor and homeless are held responsible for their own situation. Significant inequality and segregation relate to this type (Bischoff & Reardon 2014; Musterd et al., 2017).

The second regime has a social democratic character. Redistributive tax-systems, regulation, and socio-spatial engineering through social (and ethnic) mixing of neighbourhoods are instruments applied here. This regime aims to improve access of low-income households to affordable and good-quality housing and to reduce levels of socioeconomic inequality and segregation (Kadi et al., 2022; Musterd, 2022). Still, increasing segregation must be expected because of this type of intervention. This is because many households will avoid mixing. Moreover, mixing policies may stimulate gentrification and new

homogeneity and segregation at a later stage (Bridge et al., 2012). The ‘restoring the balance’ frame is usually translated in mixing policies whereby neighbourhoods with many poor or poor migrants are targeted to become ‘upgraded’, while affordable social housing may be demolished. This is detrimental to the poor.

Policies aimed at ‘spreading the burden’ and policies aimed at ‘lifting disadvantaged areas’ to a mixed, average, level have been especially applied in contexts with ample social democratic intervention experience (Andersson, et al., 2010; Lawless et al., 2010; Bacqué et al., 2011; Alves, 2022). Social democrats see their interventions as anti-segregation policies, producing more social capital, and stimulating integration and social mobility. Yet, such interventions may be counter productive. There is a risk to disqualify the poor and migrant populations. When mixing is followed by a reduction of social housing, by support for gentrification, and possibly by displacement of the poor, their policies might even be seen as an instrument of neoliberal politics (Davidson, 2008; Lees, 2008; Bridge et al., 2012; Arthurson et al., 2012; 2015).

The third type is characterised by populism. Their interventions have no coherent logic. The focus is on ‘scapegoating’, blaming, and social exclusion. They disqualify entire population categories for causing trouble, such as asylum seekers and other migrants. They blame the economic and cultural elite for continuously making the ‘wrong’ decisions. They do not focus on individuals who might cause problems, but target and exclude all migrants with a certain background, such as *all* Moroccan migrants, or *all* migrants who have a Muslim background. They also stigmatize entire neighbourhoods, and all their residents, sometimes by labelling the neighbourhood as a ‘ghetto’ (cf. former section). Overall, populists stimulate increasing social exclusion, segregation, estrangement, fear, and conflict, as well as discriminating and racist ideas.

7. REFLECTIONS

The observations give reason for rethinking segregation. I will briefly refer to five issues that require reflection and introspection. The first issue regards the difference between the levels of segregation in varying regime contexts. Ample empirical evidence has shown that social-democratic welfare regimes, while not ideal, associate with relatively low levels of segregation, in contrast with (neo) liberal welfare regimes that associate with higher levels of segregation. Populist types of intervention appear to produce additional social problems. This generates more instead of less segregation.

The second issue addresses the common practice of framing segregation as a negative phenomenon. This relates to seeing the poor and migrant population as problem categories, and non-migrants and middle class or affluent households as good role models and as ‘the norm’ when it comes to socialization. This clearly is a discriminatory attitude. We should not forget that behaviour of the relatively

better-off also contributes to the condition of the less well-off. Middle-class residents segregate themselves from the poor and thus contribute to segregation of the poor; White people or non-migrants segregate themselves from non-White people and migrants; they thus contribute to the marginalization and segregation of non-Whites and migrants.

The third issue relates to the observation that most households prefer some homogeneity in their direct environment (at micro-level), instead of enforced social mix. Although more knowledge about this phenomenon is welcome, the homogeneity tendency seems especially strong in the sphere of socio-cultural orientations (similar lifestyles; level of education) and socio-economic positions (professional and socio-economic class). When households maintain non-discriminatory attitudes and when inequality and segregation do not reach very high levels – as is the case in most contexts – some micro-level homogeneity may be beneficial to people, not only for the middle-class but also for the lower classes. Social networks may become tighter, common interests bring people together, and communication will be easier when social and cultural distances are relatively small. This is not a call for a *laissez faire* strategy, because there *are* certain levels of segregation that should not be accepted, especially when large isolated segregated areas of the poor threaten to develop and particularly when these areas are spatially extensive. To avoid large homogeneous areas from developing, heterogeneity must be reached, or even planned, at least at a meso-spatial level, to make sure that no disaffiliation or ‘estrangement’ processes will develop. Low levels of inequality and segregation people will be confronted with will make it easier for people to connect to others with different orientations and positions.

A fourth issue to reflect upon regards the theory on segregation. In my view, institutional contexts, structural conditions, and individual preferences all drive segregation. Empirical research is providing support for applying a somewhat eclectic theoretical framework, in which all three theoretical strands are considered simultaneously. This is a plea for reflection on integrated theory.

A fifth issue regards the conceptualization of segregation. Debates on segregation and segregation effects must apply well-defined non-stigmatizing and non-discriminating concepts, which are understood in the same way by different actors. This implies that all populist frames related to segregation should end in the rubbish bin. Framing neighbourhoods as ‘ghettoes’ should only be allowed when its own well-defined meaning applies. Policy makers should be more aware of the negative connotation and effects of such concepts. Wrong use of concepts will produce parallel societies instead of *helping to fight against* parallel societies. Linking the ghetto-concept to non-western migrants is an act of extreme discrimination, stigmatization, and marginalization. It produces anxiety among non-western migrants, and fear for them, and for the neighbourhoods they live in. Households will flee from or avoid such neighbourhoods and their residents; it will feed a negative spiral resulting in first and second rank citizens.

8. CHALLENGES

There are many challenges for researchers, policy makers and politicians when it comes to getting grip on urban segregation. Some challenges are obvious and seemingly simple, such as the need to apply appropriate concepts when dealing with segregation, but there are also other challenges to deal with.

One of these challenges is: detecting the segregation condition that requires intervention. When are concentrations of disadvantage passing crucial thresholds? When are areas with concentrated poverty of a size that they bring estrangement, parallel societies, isolation, and social exclusion? It is important, and a challenge, to expand the theory and to continue testing which interventions will work. It is also relevant to further investigate the role played by the welfare regime, by other contextual conditions, and by individual actors themselves. Does the development of integrated theory help? Or will interventions only have potential when there is a willingness and a tradition to intervene in social inequality and in spatial planning and housing policies? Can segregation levels only be reduced in social-democratic contexts, or are other contexts also offering opportunities?

It is still a challenge to figure out what the most effective type of intervention is, when intervention seems needed. Approaches aimed at changing the social composition of certain areas in cities offers one option for intervention; reducing social inequality more fundamentally at the level of the state is another; fighting stigmatization and discrimination is a third one. Of course, all strategies can be applied simultaneously, but is there sufficient public support for that?

Over the past decades segregation research has made enormous progress in methodological terms. This partly relates to large-scale individual level longitudinal data and detailed geographical information that have become available simultaneously for the entire population in several contexts. This allows for cutting-edge dynamic micro-level analysis without having to deal with fixed-boundary units of analysis and cross-sectional data. Methods based on individual exposure to environments, using bespoke neighbourhoods – equally defined environments for each individual – can now overcome problems related to using data of arbitrarily defined statistical units. Segregation can be studied over time and in a much finer detail, controlling for more variables. This generates clearer views on various segregation situations and transformations (e.g. Deurloo et al., 2022). This research area requires further expansion.

The largest challenge, however, seems to be to fully acknowledge and consider the situation that the sheer existence of social, cultural, and demographic inequality between people, combined with a certain freedom to act, will result in segregation. The general reflex of urban managers and politicians is that this always generates negative outcomes that should be tackled by social engineering: social mix of the population. Two comments must be made here. The first is that if the level of social inequality is the generator of unacceptable segregation, one

should – in the first place – consider the option to change the level of social inequality. The second comment is that if there is no drive to target the real cause: social inequality, a more realistic approach may be to consider the acceptance of a certain level of homogeneity or segregation at microlevel, but not above that level and not after a certain segregation threshold has been passed. This would result in an urban social geography with relatively homogeneous small neighbourhoods in heterogeneous larger districts, while large-scale spatial concentrations of single population categories with similar attributes will have to be avoided. Several studies provide support for such a strategy, but more analysis is required. We especially need to expand the knowledge of the willingness of different population categories to accept or even embrace heterogeneity, the cohabitation with those who are socio-culturally and socio-economically at some distance. Also the scale question needs more attention. Not all residents are searching for homogeneity in all dimensions (such as lifestyle, ethnicity, socioeconomic position, demography, etcetera) or in all domains (residential, work, leisure, etcetera). The challenge is to obtain more knowledge of the conditions at work bringing together different classes within one social and cultural system. Preliminary research findings suggest that the most well-off just prefer homogeneous neighbourhoods in homogeneous districts in all dimensions and domains. They are the most segregated almost everywhere. However, in some relatively egalitarian contexts, lower- and middle-class households seem to be open for homogeneous micro neighbourhoods in heterogeneous districts. Implicitly, this shows the relevance of limiting social inequality. Very unequal societies will likely not be able to manage and control segregation.

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