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Urban Segregation

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Confronting Urban Segregation: Physical-Social Intersectionality

With more than half of the world's population now residing in urban areas,[1] urban studies are increasingly concerned with the issue of how to maintain harmony among these "unruly" populations in "disorderly" cities.[2] Among the contemporary issues relating to that dilemma is the prominence of urban segregation. Manifested in both the physical and social form of a city, urban segregation is visible in these two areas of urban studies: residential neighborhoods and urban planning. This essay will explore urban social structure and planning issues to investigate the demonstrations of urban segregation practices within those two domains and the causes behind such presentations.

Residential Segregation

The first form of urban segregation—residential segregation—bears a close link to social stratification[3] when it comes to neighborhood zones and residential patterns. Given that residents are categorized into neighborhoods based on their socioeconomic status and identity, cities' residential distribution can reflect the typology of the inhabitants in each neighborhood. There are four main causes of residential segregation: de jure segregation, de facto segregation, gentrification, and congregation.

Regarding de jure segregation, though various judicial rulings and legislation have been passed to prohibit government-mandated segregation, the imprints of such practices are still visible in modern cities. Aligning with racial discrimination and colonialism, de jure segregation takes the form of designated areas exclusively for white populations, as demonstrated by European imperial powers' establishment of separate districts for Europeans and "natives" in Africa, South Asia, Australia, and America.[4] Following the colonial era, these areas remained restricted to the wealthy due to infrastructure benefits and higher housing costs. A case study of this phenomenon is the Old Quarter district of Hanoi. As the epitome of the infusion of French-Vietnamese architecture and arts, it stays expensive and exclusive to the upper class.

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[1] Cox, Wendell. "Demographia World Urban Areas: 2022 Released." Demographia

[2] Hall, Tim, and Heather Barrett. *Urban Geography*, p. 123.

[3] Social stratification is the categorization of people based on socioeconomic factors.

Exclusionary zoning ordinances, which remain lawful notwithstanding the prohibition of explicit racial zoning, are another example of de jure segregation. Portland, Oregon, the whitest major city in the U.S.,[5] used to divide people based on class and race by establishing a series of single-dwelling zones.[6] However, its recent abolition of that zoning and measures to develop more affordable housing[7] have demonstrated its commitment to urban reform and led to a 0.45 decrease in the index of White-Black dissimilarity[8] since 1970.[9] Despite this, the issue of de facto segregation may persist as a deterrent to the city's full economic and ethnic integration.

De facto segregation is visible in the institutional discrimination of the housing market and social segregation in settlement preference. Within private property markets, segregation can result from lenders or real estate agents refusing to work with those from marginalized groups or misrepresenting the market information provided to these clients. Examples include the now-illegal practice of redlining, in which banks refuse to lend to or insure someone who lives in an undesirable location, and steering, in which real estate brokers advertise specific housing prospects or drive individuals to specific areas.[10] The discrimination may be more insidious: marginalized individuals are more likely to be tracked into a subprime mortgage[11] than white applicants with similar credit histories, and housing prices in white areas are often inflated to deter disadvantaged residents.

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[4] Gershon, Livia. "How Global Colonialism Shaped Segregation."
[5] de Leon, Kristine, and Mark Friesen. "Is Portland Still the Whitest Big City in America?"
[6] "History of Racist Planning in Portland."
[7] Britschgi, Christian. "Portland Legalized 'Missing Middle' Housing. Now It's Trying to Make It Easy to Build."
[8] The index of dissimilarity is the percentage of a group's population that would have to change residence for each neighborhood to have the same percentage of that group as the metropolitan area overall. The index ranges from 0.0 (complete integration) to 1.0 (complete segregation) (US Census Bureau).
[9] Cortright, Joe. "America's Least (and Most) Segregated Metro Areas: 2020."

Considering social segregation, this can occur when groups of affluent residents use their economic power to transform urban neighborhoods according to their interests. A prime example of this is white flight, or the relocation of white residents away from metropolitan centers to surrounding suburban areas, typically due to an influx of people of color into the city. This occurrence can be seen in Hartford, Connecticut. Hartford's highly segregated demographics are the product of the white flight that started in the 1950s and 1960s as immigrants began to arrive in the city. Today, black people make up the majority in the North End, while white people dominate the nearby affluent suburbs of West Hartford and Avon.[12]

Gentrification is another form of residential segregation that leads to the evictions of locals. Despite being a key strategy in urban regeneration for cities,[13] gentrification results in the displacement of lower-income groups that formerly inhabited the now-gentrified areas. Gentrification often begins with the arrival of groups of pioneer gentrifiers,[14] followed by corporate gentrification[15] as gentrifiers' financial prominence grows, driving up property prices even further. Jaffa, Tel Aviv, has seen drastic gentrification-driven urban neighborhoods. Once a historical Palestinian city, Jaffa is now an affluent Israeli neighborhood in Tel Aviv. Gentrification began with the emergence of Israeli artists in the neighborhood and was later institutionalized by Tel Aviv municipal authorities in order to promote real estate and tourism.[16] This caused the displacement of Palestinians (those that still live in Israel under the Israel-recognized identity of Arab Israelis), who could not afford the house prices, as well as the erasure of Palestinian cultural heritage in the neighborhood, highlighting the problem of systemic discrimination. Though the case of Jaffa is unique due to its involvement with territorial conflicts among two national identities, it nonetheless exemplifies the impacts of gentrification and residential segregation on lower-income populations. Once evicted, these people must relocate to new neighborhoods, where they often congregate based on their shared identities.

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[10] Hall, p. 264.

[11] Subprime mortgage is a loan offered to individuals with poor credit scores.

[12] Lis, Suzanne. “White Flight in Hartford County, CT: 1950—2010.”

[13] Hall, p. 256.

[14] Pioneer gentrifiers refer to “cultural innovators,”, such as artists, architects, or academics, that introduce new social and cultural waves to the area they move into, potentially generating local conflict and eventually leading to socioeconomic change of the area (Ibid., p. 267-268).

[15] Corporate gentrification refers to the process of gentrification caused by the growing financial services and prospects of an area (Ibid., p. 268).

Congregation, also known as voluntary segregation, happens when people with shared identities such as ethnicity, language, or religion gather to establish new residential communities or reside in preexisting ones. However, because these ethnic enclaves are frequently formed by immigrants or minority groups, they are subject to the majority's alienation and ostracization. Guangzhou's Xiaobei and Guangyuanxi regions, popularly known as "Little Africa," are one example. Dominated by African traders, the former with Muslim Africans and the latter with Nigerians,[17] these neighborhoods are isolated from the high-end globalization immigrant neighborhood of Zhujiang and the rest of Cantonese-populated Guangzhou. This reality is the result of Cantonese racial stigma and discrimination against colored populations, which is insinuated by the image of the monoethnic and monocultural Guangzhou to which they are exposed and familiar.

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[16] Ashly, Jaclynn. “Gentrification in Haifa Soars as Palestinian Homes Are Converted into Luxury Real Estate.”

[17] Mathews et al. *The World in Guangzhou: Africans and Other Foreigners in South China's Global Marketplace*. p. 10.

What lies at the core of residential segregation seems to be the intersectionality between race, ethnicity, and income. This makes categorizing the impacts of different forms of social discrimination on urban morphology incredibly challenging. Murdie (1995) attempted to create an idealized model of the urban ecological structure, drawing the differences between how socioeconomic, family, and ethnic status shape different levels of population dispersion in a city. According to him, socioeconomic status displays a sectoral structure, while family status shows a zonal gradient, and ethnicity exhibits a clustered pattern.[18] However, his model was later heavily criticized owing to reality's divergence from it, in which different statuses interact and various forms of segregation overlap.

These four drivers of residential segregation, although they differ in forms, resemble each other in their aggravation of patterns of poverty and racial segregation in cities. Because of market supply and demand, richer neighborhoods demand greater urban mobility and have more capacities to facilitate it, while the poorer neighborhoods are more isolated from amenities such as public services or entrance to the labor market. Furthermore, social segregation between groups in society, particularly de facto segregation and congregation, creates a sense of lock-in settlement toward marginalized populations. This means that individuals in these communities are discouraged from moving to more prosperous neighborhoods, even if they are financially capable. This exacerbates the urban poverty trap, in which people are trapped in poor neighborhoods with low average incomes, informal jobs, and inadequate public services.

Residential segregation can be difficult to tackle with top-down urban planning strategies because it is dependent on social stratification, housing market flow, and personal desire. As a result, the dilemma for city planners attempting to reduce urban segregation shifts to the prospect of integration in public areas.

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[18] Hall, p. 254.

Urban planning

Taking a more top-down approach, urban planning focuses on how the built environment, spatial layouts, and urban landscapes may encourage social connections among diverse society groups and accommodate the underprivileged. This section of the essay will examine how various urban planning strategies might promote or discourage cross-cultural interaction in public areas, as well as how equitable public service delivery can reduce economic and social isolation.

Regarding urban layouts, certain layouts might increase segregation because they place spatial limits on certain neighborhoods, despite the good intentions of planning visionaries. The “garden city” model by Ebenezer Howard is an example. These “garden cities” were planned to be social cities with a decentralized network of garden towns and a central city, that had plenty of open space, boulevards, and a range of social services. However, the concept went awry, as these cities turned out to be middle-class commuter enclaves, rather than mixed communities as intended. In contrast to Howard's vision of urban planning as a vehicle for attaining social justice, his model not only failed to address the issues of segregation within communities but aggravated them, giving rise to the “new town blues”[19] sentiment. Some groups even used these “garden cities” as buffer areas to distance themselves from the poor and overcrowded inner city areas. Thus, the potential for intercultural interaction between inner-city and suburban residents is rare, leaving little room for economic and social integration between these two groups.

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[19] This term refers to the exclusion, isolation and a lack of community town residents may experience (Ibid., p. 131).

An ardent opponent of this layout and a critic of the patronizing utopian urban vision is Jane Jacobs. She advocates for cultural heterogeneity and vibrant urban life in cities through four principles: varied uses, mixed blocks of buildings, traditional streets with several corners, and a dense concentration of people.[20] Her idea is to view streets as the center of the city and design them to encourage "sidewalk ballet," which refers to the natural social interactions among pedestrians on sidewalks. She also advocates for urban planning that incorporates buildings with varying rent prices and shorter building blocks to facilitate more informal meetings between neighbors.

Howard and Jacobs' opposing urban layouts highlight the importance of appropriate layouts in influencing segregation. A city can, therefore, nurture multiculturalism by constructing public spaces that engender encounters between residents from different backgrounds. These spaces considered "micro-publics," are contexts for "prosaic negotiations"[21] where status differences can be overcome by the recognition of mutual interests or aims. These micro-publics can connect people from segregated neighborhoods, which is especially crucial in mongrel cities[22] where cultural diversity and heterogeneity prevail.

The presence of public or open areas, however, does not guarantee such social interactions. The "Gym Crow" case of Columbia University's gymnasium in Morningside Park is an example of this reality. Despite being open to both Columbia students and neighboring residents, the building had separate entrances for the primarily white students on top of the hill and the black Harlem population below, as well as limited hours of community access for the locals.[23] Furthermore, the issue of dilapidated or deserted public spaces can also contribute to the absence of interaction among residents. This can occur due to mishandling of funds for these places or inconsiderate development plans that discourage visitors. Absence of interaction also arises following Edward Relph's idea of "flatscape," which argues that urbanization contributes towards the erosion of emotional attachments to the city.[24] Even though humanistic geographers criticize his proposal, it adds a dimension to the debate over public spaces. Municipal administrators are therefore accountable not just for the provision of public and open spaces but also for the supervision over these places to ensure equitable access and frequent use.

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[20] Ibid., p. 136.

[21] This is a concept developed by Leonie Sandercock to refer to dialogues and negotiations around mundane matters, rather than serious or controversial topics (Ibid., p. 166).

[22] This is a concept, also developed by Sandercock, to refer to cities with high otherness, multiplicity, heterogeneity, diversity and plurality (Ibid., p. 174).

Another component of urban physical form that city administration must pay particular attention to is public services. According to the World Resources Report assessment, one in three are not adequately supplied by municipal services.[25] The inequality in access to services between those who have and do not have access demonstrates the disparity in opportunities generated by residential, social, and economic segregation.

This discrepancy is obvious in the public transportation system. Public transportation is often regarded as "inferior goods" in an economic context, meaning that with an increase in income, people's demand for public transportation would decrease. Hence, the service is more widely used among the impoverished population. However, in an urban context, a paradox emerges when public transport nodes are often located far from the less wealthy neighborhoods due to less robust movements, despite the higher need. This reality represents a vicious cycle in

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[23] Baldwin, *In the Shadow of the Ivory Tower: How Universities Are Plundering Our Cities*. p. 42.
[24] Ibid., p. 499.
[25] "World Resources Report: Towards a More Equal City."

which the absence of public transportation in those neighborhoods causes their residents' mental maps to lack transport nodes, leading to the belief that adding nodes there is unnecessary. This cycle is observable in the case of “splintering urbanism,” or the segmentation of infrastructure in cities. When viewing a city as a system of “habitable channels of communication and circulation,”[26] the areas lacking these “channels” are prone to being cut off from the network of connectivity. This can lead to further segregation between areas with better infrastructure and those without. The London subway system serves as a good example of this "splintering urbanism" structure. The West End, Central, and North West areas are well-served by multiple subway lines, while the South East has fewer stations and transit lines. Unsurprisingly, East London is populated by people of color rather than white British, with the Northeast dominated by Asian/Asian British and the Southeast by black dwellers. [27]

With equitable access to public spaces and public services as two pillars for overcoming the problem of discrimination in cities, city governments should focus on implementing development plans and urban layouts. The emphasis on infrastructure's impact on urban segregation once again highlights the inseparability between the physical and social forms of the city. While neighborhood segregation suggests a causal direction from the social form to the physical one, where social segregation leads to neighborhood zoning and population patterns, this top-down approach shows how the physical city, expressed through urban layout, landscape, and architecture, can influence social segregation.

Conclusion

In summary, urban segregation poses a significant societal concern, especially with the rapid urbanization of cities worldwide. The problem is most noticeable in the distribution of residential areas and the connectivity networks of public services and places. Addressing this issue is challenging due to the intersectionality of residents' social statuses and the bidirectional interaction between a city's physical and social forms. Therefore, both top-down and bottom-up approaches are necessary, with the former focusing on improving the physical city and the latter reducing cross-identity prejudice in the social city.

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[26] Hall, p. 277.
[27] Coates, Sarah. “Population Estimates by Ethnic Group and Religion, England and Wales: 2019.”

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