

URBAN SOCIETY

SPATIAL SEGREGATION

Did you know that 29 percent of cities in the developing world have areas considered inaccessible or too dangerous to the police?



The spatial concentration of population groups is not a new phenomenon. Societies have segregated inhabitants for thousands of years, usually on socio-economic, religious or ethnic grounds. Segregation has both negative and positive impacts in cities, ranging from the social exclusion that makes life harder for the poor, to the strengthened social and cultural group identities which contribute to urban diversity and vitality. Lifestyle differences between social groupings and cost differences make it inevitable that central cities differ demographically from suburbs. In itself, this fact does not raise serious questions of equity. When life style, economic class, ethnicity or some other group identifier is seen as a reason to limit the opportunities and services available to those groups, however, territorial segregation becomes problematic. Segregation can easily reinforce disadvantage and exclusion by restricting the geographic and social mobility of whole classes of people, all of whom may be denied the full benefits of city life.

Voluntary and involuntary segregation

The forces that contribute to urban spatial segregation are many and vary from place to place. This complexity stems from a combination of coercive, opportunistic and voluntary forms of segregation.

For example, segregation can be caused by legal frameworks - with the extreme example of the former apartheid regime of South Africa - or it can be stimulated by increased land and housing prices in certain urban neighbourhoods, resulting in lower-income groups being driven out.

In other cases, social groups may actually seek segregation to strengthen social identity, as is often the case with immigrant groups. At the other end of the scale, fear of violence is often used to justify the creation of fortified upper and middle-income residential and commercial enclaves from which the poor and marginalized are excluded, and where private security companies fill the gap in security and governance. It is undeniable that, worldwide, cities have become more segregated in recent years, as the legal market for affordable, accessible and habitable housing in many countries has proven incapable of meeting the needs of the poor.

Impacts

Thus, many of the world's cities have ended up with internally differentiated, dispersed and potentially unstable residential patterns. The carving out of ethnic-cultural enclaves along socio-economic lines in cities threatens the very foundations of urban culture. Urban spatial segregation no longer simply expresses socio-economic differences, but has become the spatial embodiment of societal fragmentation and "irreconcilable" inequality. Connections between land and housing markets and between revenues and local services cause spatial variations in access to transportation, education and health care - as well as air quality and neighborhood infrastructure. Thus, poorer enclaves may, for instance, only offer sub-standard schools, which in turn further limit the life chances of already poor children.

Regional differences

Patterns of segregation vary both within and between metropolises worldwide. In developing countries, the spatial segregation of the poor often occurs within informal settlements, dividing the city into zones of inclusion and exclusion, the latter characterized by deprivation and non-realization of housing rights. Informal settlements often result from inequities in access to land and housing markets, and overall income poverty. Regarded thus, informal or clandestine means of accessing and occupying urban land are the sole way that the market provides housing for poor people. Nevertheless, these arrange-



Not only the wealthy

Atlanta may well be the first major metropolitan area in the U.S.A. to convert public housing projects into 'gated communities' as a matter of policy. A 1996 study found that public housing residents were three to four times more likely than other city residents to become a victim of violent crime. The Atlanta Housing Authority now plans to fence in three of its crime-ridden communities, and controlled access systems will require residents to show their identity card or swipe an access card through an automated entry system. The Authority is also screening prospective tenants more closely, evicting 'troublesome' tenants more frequently, and running regular credit checks. The official line is that gated entrances will "improve the status and safety of public housing" by keeping the "unwanted element out while maintaining a record of visitors," thereby making it easier to attract middle-income residents.

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Investment Plan in the Districts of Villaverde and Usera, Madrid, Spain

De-industrialization in Spain, including the Villaverde and Usera districts of Madrid, often occurred without measures alleviating the negative effects of job losses. As a result, drug abuse in such areas increased drastically. Following protests from local people, the Madrid Regional Government allocated 3 billion pesetas annually (US\$ 71 million), and with the help of partners has managed to refurbish most derelict districts. Problems of unemployment and lack of education were addressed and infrastructure was improved. Working committees were set up to respond to local needs for a decent place to live and improved quality of life. The result was that the neighbourhoods became spatially reintegrated into the city.

Recent urban research suggests that national and local political conditions can influence the scale of inequality in any given city. Cities with a tradition of popular action and extensive networks of CBOs are better able to deal with segregation than polarized cities dependent on private investment and conservative policies. Through participation in community organizations, minority groups can partake in local political discussion as an intercultural arena for the formal negotiation of difference. Civic life requires settings in which people meet as equals, without regard to race, class, or national origins.

ments are not always chosen for their low price or relative conveniences, but because there are few other choices available to the poor.

In a number of industrialized countries, spatial segregation frequently takes on racial and cultural dimensions in addition to socio-economic forms, equating life chances, poverty and spatial discrimination with ethnicity.

Combating segregation

Segregation poses questions as to whether people from different cultures, ethnicity and socio-economic groups can mix or not. In other words: Is the city a mosaic of small, separate worlds, or is it an arena for cultural interaction and exchange? There is much more to understand regarding the effects of regulatory systems (notably land and housing markets) on spatial segregation and the life chances of urban residents. In policy terms it might be more effective to eliminate quality of life differences between neighbourhoods rather than aiming to achieve social mix by changing the regulatory framework. Combating social problems in segregated areas requires a multi-disciplinary rather than *ad hoc* approach. For example, there is no single guaranteed public policy route for improving the life-chances of poor minority children when it seems that the socio-economic status of the family is consistently more influential on educational performance than the school itself. Even in countries where multiculturalism is declared national policy, indifference and outright racism is still experienced.

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