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### 31. **Growing socio-spatial segregation in European capitals: Different government, less mitigation**

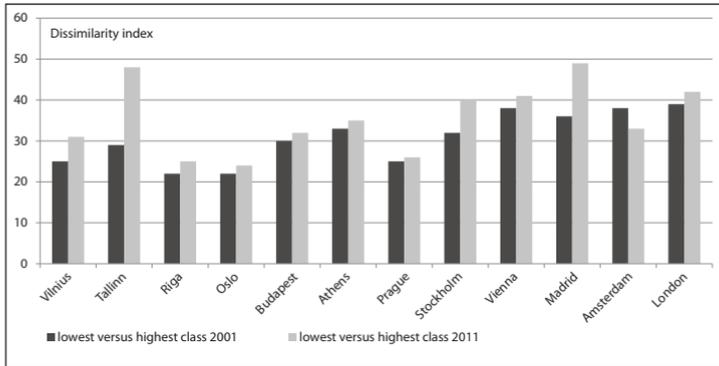
*Sako Musterd*

Social contrasts between residential environments in the capitals of European countries are increasing everywhere, albeit to different degrees. This is one of the most important conclusions of a large-scale comparative study recently completed by a trans-national team of urban geographers. The study was conducted by local teams of urban specialists, acting simultaneously and according to the same methods, in Amsterdam, Athens, Budapest, London, Madrid, Milan, Oslo, Prague, Riga, Stockholm, Tallinn, Vienna and Vilnius. Together these cities represent Northern, Southern, Eastern and Western Europe.

This comparison of the development of socio-spatial inequality, as it is known, covers the period 2001-2011. The researchers applied as much as possible the same measuring instruments in all cities to establish inequality between the neighbourhoods and districts of the capitals. They focused on differences in income and profession. The accompanying graph, representing one of the results and using an established measure for this purpose, sets out the unequal distribution over the city between the lowest and highest classes of social groups.

The levels of segregation are still modest if we compare them with cities in North and South America, for instance, or in Africa. The segregation levels in Eastern Europe are generally a little lower than in the rest of Europe. However, the Eastern European cities are now quickly 'catching up' with the rest of the continent. In fact one can see an increase everywhere. In the supplied example, Amsterdam would seem to be an exception to the rule. However, a closer analysis of the dynamism in this city before

**Closer analysis of the levels and development of socio-spatial segregation of the lowest and highest socio-economic categories in European capitals, in 2001 and 2011 (the scale of the dissimilarity index runs from 0 to 100; 100 is equal to maximum segregation).**



Source: Marcinczak, Szymon, Sako Musterd, Maarten van Ham & Tiit Tammaru. 2016. 'Inequality and rising levels of socio-economic segregation: lessons from a pan-European comparative study', in Tammaru, Tiit, Szymon Marcinczak, Maarten van Ham & Sako Musterd (Eds.), *East Meets West: New Perspectives on Socio-economic Segregation in European Capital Cities*, 358-382. London/New York: Routledge.

and after the outbreak of the financial and housing market crisis shows that this involves a temporary effect. The crisis put a brake on the buyers' market and many middle-class households postponed a planned move. As a result they unintentionally promoted the social mixing in the areas where they continued to live. This led to lower segregation. The dynamism before the crisis shows that the segregation will once again increase when the housing market picks up again.

### Negative effects of segregation

The described development of increasing segregation – the increasingly separated residential distribution of poorer and richer parts of the population in important European capitals

– demands a response. After all, both residents and local and national governments, and even the European Commission itself, regularly express their rejection of the threat of increasing segregation. This is because negative effects are expected. There is a danger that the differences between rich and poor will become increasingly evident in the daily urban environment. In the case of very large differences this can lead to problems, especially if the inequality takes the form of a sharp division of the residential areas. We can see this, for instance, in the shape of gated communities: more or less closed-off residential environment cocoons comprising relatively prosperous households who wish to separate themselves from the rest of the population. In contrast, neighbourhoods with concentrations of the least prosperous can arise, where many other social groups no longer dare show themselves. A development like this would result in alienation and discontent. The alienation can lead to false images of others and discontent is the basis for social unrest and ultimately brings conflicts or riots. This situation ultimately also damages the economy. Naturally, no democracy wishes for such consequences.

Segregation also has unhappy associations for many other reasons and is thus seen as something negative. It is expected to cause adverse effects in many areas. It is assumed, for instance, that growing up in a relatively poor neighbourhood has an inhibiting effect on the individual development of young people: because there are few or no socially successful residents living close to them, but many who are less successful, young people mostly receive the ‘wrong’ role models. It is also thought that people have less chance of upward social mobility because the educational ambitions in poor neighbourhoods are said to be lower. Furthermore, it is expected that people in such areas will not be able to find the right networks, for instance to help them get a job. Although no conclusive evidence has yet been found for these supposed effects, they do generally cause worry among various levels of government and prompt them to intervene to turn the tide of segregation.

## Factors causing segregation

In order to turn around the growth of segregation, it is essential to understand the factors responsible for the growth. This brings us to the theory behind the segregation. How does segregation actually come about? If we have the answer to this question, then it leads us to starting points for targeted intervention, which can help to combat the negative effects. Simply working against segregation as a symptom is of course also an option, but that costs a lot of money and – if the causes are not well understood – the effects of such symptom-countering can quickly evaporate. So in order to interpret the differences in the development of segregation between different cities, one must first examine the theory relating to segregation.

The previously referenced European study examined several dimensions of explanation. Firstly, the influence of the changes in the welfare state and, above all, the changes in the housing market. Secondly, the relationship with the degree to which the cities are connected to the networks of the global economy and the extent to which they have achieved a successful economic restructuring. Thirdly, the association with the level of social inequality in the countries in which the cities are located. Fourthly, the historical development of the cities. For the last of these four factors, the specific local historically developed context of the cities was examined in broad terms. It seems increasingly likely that this context can in itself have an important impact on the development of segregation.

All the aforementioned factors play a role and are in fact inter-related. In cities that are well-connected to global economic networks, for instance, we see a development in which many activities take place that require many highly educated and specialised workers. This results in a stratum of the population with a relatively high income and a prestigious profession. Simultaneously in these cities we see an upturn in the consumer-oriented services sector, which often employs less highly educated people. The social inequality manifesting itself here tends

to translate into socio-spatial inequality: segregation. Another influential factor is the neoliberal wave that has been washing over Europe for a while now. This shows itself in a changing role for governments, which are devoting less attention to 'broad-based policy and redistribution'; they are actively removing broad-based subsidies. The housing market has less and less space for social rented homes. As a result, this sector becomes increasingly the exclusive domain of low-income households, thus increasing the chance of stigmatisation. On the other hand, the government is devoting ever more attention and money to 'stimulating economic activity and market forces'. This shift of regime has probably contributed to the increase in social and spatial inequality.

### **The paradox of the post-socialist transition**

It is hard to gain a solid understanding of segregation because some time often lies between the possible causes and the development of the segregation. This is best illustrated using experiences in Eastern Europe. After the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989 and the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991, globalisation, neoliberalisation and large-scale privatisation – together with the restitution of former property to the owners from the time before the Second World War – were given a relatively free hand in the countries seeking accession to the European Union. The results first became visible in and around the capitals. Following the change of regime, which took place almost immediately after 1990, the social inequality quickly increased, most strongly in the more liberal Baltic states (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania) and less so in the post-socialist and corporatist Visegrad countries (including the Czech Republic and Hungary). But socio-spatial segregation did not occur immediately. This was because first the old and decayed, but potentially valuable central city districts were refurbished and because middle-class households seized the opportunity to acquire a home in the suburbs. This had still

been impossible under socialism. This dynamism did not initially lead to an increase in segregation; in some locations an initial drop was even recorded, for instance because more households with higher incomes moved to the previously poor inner cities, temporarily leading to a greater social mix. This can be called a 'paradox of the post-socialist transition': a strong increase in social inequality, but initially without a corresponding strong increase in segregation. It was only in the new millennium that the inequalities slowly became visible through increasing socio-spatial segregation. The modelling of the housing market on the liberal section of Western Europe clearly began to have its effects. In the longer term this will also lead to a weaker position of the large-scale residential districts with standardised housing blocks, which in the socialist era still enjoyed high status and offered high living standards.

### **The mitigating effect of government intervention**

The experiences in Eastern Europe show in a compact form how economic reforms and the transition to another model of the welfare state can have effects in terms of social inequality and socio-spatial segregation. On the basis of these experiences we should consider that most European cities still have relatively strong welfare state systems. Despite all the changes and the differences between European states with a more liberal, social democratic or corporatist nature, many cities have reasonable levels of social security, devote considerable attention to ensuring access to and affordability of housing for wide sections of the population, and have a broadly inclusive policy in areas such as education and health. Such government interventions serve to mitigate the negative effects of globalisation and economic restructuring. This seems to be the most important reason why the levels of segregation in European cities are still lower than those in, for instance, North America.

Historically developed, context-specific differences also play a role, of course, as well as those relating to the welfare state model and the evolved economic structure. It seems that social networks and family links can take over many tasks of the government, and can also contribute to mutual solidarity and a more balanced distribution of social and economic capital. This can be seen in Southern Europe and was reality in Europe at the start of the 20th century, when Europe was still strongly rural. But if such safety nets come under pressure, or if we consider the fact that in many places these structures have been transferred to the state in times of prosperity, then it becomes clear that a further withdrawal by the government in the aforementioned areas will bring considerable risks. The consequences will probably become visible in increasing social inequality and will lead, albeit with some delay, to sharper socio-spatial segregation.

## The author

**Sako Musterd** is Professor of Urban Geography at the University of Amsterdam. His expertise is in comparative analysis of spatial segregation, neighbourhood effects and inter-urban competition.

## Further reading

Tammaru, Tiit, Simon Marcinczak, Maarten van Ham & Sako Musterd (Eds.). 2016. *East Meets West: New Perspectives on Socio-economic Segregation in European Capital Cities*. London/New York: Routledge. Chapters 1 and 15 of the book are open access:

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