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Perspectives on Urban Segregation

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In May 2010 the University College London (UCL) 'Cities and Migration' working group convened a gathering of thirty academics, policy-makers and NGOs, who came together to hear presentations on the subject of urban segregation. The workshop, titled 'Beyond the Ghetto', was structured around papers presented by UCL scholars working in the fields of architectural research (Laura Vaughan), planning (Sonia Arbaci), geography (Pablo Mateos), geographical information science (Muki Haklay) and public health (Ilaria Geddes). These were followed by responses from three invited experts: Pnina Werbner (Professor of Social Anthropology, Keele), Ceri Peach (Professor of Social Geography, Oxford) and Ludi Simpson (Professor of Population Studies, Manchester).

In recent years, the issue of urban segregation has gathered an intense level of attention from the general public, the media, policy-makers and academics across the world as cities and societies have become more ethnically diverse. Underlying the preoccupation with the geographic concentration of minority groups is a deeply rooted assumption that sees spatial separation as a clear symptom of a lack of social integration. The challenges encountered when debating urban segregation are numerous. The social scientist Alan Carling has stated that:

the air of unreality that pervades a good deal of the academic debate about these [segregation] issues among urban geographers derives from the fact that key concepts are often *measured* by statistical distributions, and yet *interpreted* for the quality of intra-communal relationships that they allegedly imply, apparently without further appeal to evidence that actually bears on the latter issue. (Carling, 2008, note 8)

Ceri Peach also suggests that segregation is more complex than previously thought, necessitating the measurement of 'cross-cutting variables' in relation to race and ethnicity (Peach, 2006), while the anthropologist Pnina Werbner has pointed out that segregation is a concept that 'simply refuse[s] to go away', suggesting that 'rather than denying the existence of "community", one should theorise its heterogeneity: its ideological, political, cultural and social divisions, on the one hand, and its situationally changing boundaries, on the other' (Werbner, 2005, p. 748).

The workshop 'Beyond the Ghetto' discussed these challenges, which were shown to stem from a variety of causes, including the tendency for academics to remain within the comfort of their disciplinary silos, as well as the inherent complexity underlying an apparently simple topic. The most obvious challenge identified by participants was the small amount of research on segregation which takes account of the built environment as a measurable contributory factor in the process of migration, in the formation of ethnic minority settlement patterns and in fostering social integration. This special issue of *Built Environment* aims to fill this gap, collecting a range of empirically founded perspectives from a multitude of disciplines on how residential segregation patterns are realized in space and how, in turn, the spatial environment influences these patterns.

This issue opens with an overview of the challenges of studying segregation, describing the complexity of the subject and the differing disciplinary approaches. Laura Vaughan and Sonia Arbaci – from two sister schools at the Bartlett Faculty of the Built Environment, University College London, dealing with architectural research and planning, respectively –

argue that research into segregation needs to address its inherent complexity as well as the fact that it is fundamentally a spatial phenomenon. Amanda Wise, from the Centre for Research on Social Inclusion, Macquarie University, Australia, sets the scene for the remainder of the issue by providing an ethnographic account of a multicultural suburban landscape, where diversity is negotiated in public space through subtle application of cultural signifiers in the streetscape. Public space is also at the heart of the paper by Ann Legeby and Lars Marcus, from the School of Architecture and the Built Environment, Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm, Sweden. Here the authors demonstrate that analysis of the potential for public space to enable urban life can take the understanding of residential segregation beyond a pure description of difference, towards a nuanced picture of how urban design can inhibit or enable the sharing of public space.

Nadia Charalambous and Christos Hadjichristos, from the Department of Architecture, University of Cyprus, continues this theme further in a study of the use of public space in Nicosia by both immigrants and locals. Here, in one of the 'classic' divided cities, the use of a variety of research instruments, including direct observations of space use, questionnaires and studies of movement flows, allows for a multi-faceted analysis of the way in which public space in the old city brings some groups together and allows others to remain separate in the same physical context. The paper by Margarita Greene of the School of Architecture, Pontifical Catholic University of Chile with Rodrigo Mora of Technical University Federico and Emilio Berrios of the Providence Municipality, follows in a similar vein, although here migrants are of the internal variety – people who have made preferential moves within the city of Santiago, Chile. The paper uses neighbourhood boundary analysis along with various social research methods to reveal the impact of urban renewal policies on place attachment, socio-economic strata and population stability in this volatile context.

Geography and scale shift slightly in the paper by Itzhak Omer, from the Department of Geography and Human Environment, Tel Aviv University, who uses space syntax along with an historical analysis of residential settlement patterns as well as the spatial distribution of ethno-religious land uses in the Arab-Jewish city of Jaffa, Israel to analyse the changing patterns of settlement through time. This paper sheds new light on a long-debated topic: the impact of small-scale individual decisions on residential moves on large-scale changes in the overall population mix. The opportunity for a nuanced debate on this topic in the Middle Eastern context is particularly welcome.

Brendan Murtagh, from the School of Planning, Architecture and Civil Engineering, Queens University Belfast, brings the geographical context back to the UK, albeit to the arguably special case of Belfast. The theoretically rich analysis of ethno-religious segregation in post-conflict Belfast demonstrates that residential mixing and desegregation have as much to do with urban structure and public policy as with the historical conflict in the area. He also makes the essential point that residential mixing does not necessarily signify social integration and his paper makes an urgent plea for a better set of competencies in understanding conflict and resolving disputes.

Pablo Mateos, from the Department of Geography, University College London, provides the final paper of this special issue. This closes the circle, by demonstrating the uncertainty inherent in ethnicity classifications underpinning traditional studies of segregation. His paper serves to illustrate the need to have greater transparency in measurements of population diversity and, more importantly, a more critical approach to the reading of segregation indices in the public realm.

There are several themes that have emerged from the papers. First, it is evident that taking analysis beyond a reading of a pattern on the ground is essential to understanding how spatial

segregation relates to social/economic outcomes. Second, it is clear that the different facets of segregation, namely ethnicity, society, economy, health, identity, education and religion need to be considered in relation to their specific urban and geographical context. Third, this selection of papers shows that the physical context within which social relations are played out needs to be considered as part of a complex set of spatial relations; patterns as well as processes of residential settlement have to be understood in relation to constraints or spatial potentials at the neighbourhood and city-scale alike, if the full picture of minority integration is to be understood.

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