

Special Issue Distances

FUORI LUOGO

Journal of Sociology of Territory,
Tourism, Technology

Guest Editors

Anna Maria Zaccaria

Maria Camilla Fraudatario



Editor in chief: Fabio Corbisiero
Editorial manager: Carmine Urciuoli

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This issue is dedicated to the memory of Prof. Gabriele Qualizza, Università Ca' Foscari di Venezia

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Residential Segregation: Concepts, Mechanisms and Effects of Spatial Inequalities²

1. Introduction

The study of the distribution and spatial division of social groups within the urban space gained increasing attention in the last years (Musterd, 2020; Tammaru *et al.*, 2016a), stimulated by growing social inequalities and levels of segregation in European countries and cities (Cassiers, Kesteloot, 2012; Moulaert *et al.*, 2003; van Ham *et al.*, 2021).

In Europe, segregation studies focused mainly on the separation of socio-economic groups. At the same time, the urban distribution of the foreign population became a research topic only when migrations assumed considerable dimensions in many large cities. In contrast, American researchers dealt with spatial inequalities related to the discrimination of ethnic groups and the concentration of disadvantaged families in neighbourhoods (Maloutas, 2012).

Although not problematic in an absolute sense, scholars have underscored that residential segregation can pose a significant threat to the social inclusion of disadvantaged groups (Hedman *et al.*, 2015; van Ham, Manley, 2010). It is assumed that the physical and social characteristics of the areas of residence, together with an unequal spatial distribution of services and resources, contribute to defining the opportunity/constraint structure of people, cultivating the reproduction and intergenerational transmission of social inequalities (Morlicchio, 2018; Nieuwenhuis *et al.*, 2020; van Ham *et al.*, 2018). It has also been argued that segregation can brew up vicious circles so that a condition of separateness experienced in the housing sphere tends to be reproduced and reinforced in other life spheres, such as school, workplace, and leisure time activities (Tammaru *et al.*, 2021).

Over the years, several authors dealt with this phenomenon focusing on aspects related to its causal processes – systematic and contextual factors that determine the degree and the intensity of residential segregation and its spatial configuration (Maloutas, 2012; Tammaru *et al.*, 2016a). On the other hand, many efforts have been made to give a good depiction of the phenomenon through the use of theoretical frameworks, statistical measures and cartographic tools (Reardon and O’Sullivan, 2004; Wong, 2016). As residential segregation can have profound effects on individual life courses, shaping inequalities in many spheres of life, endangering social cohesion, and raising questions of social justice (Cassiers and Kesteloot, 2012; Pratschke and Morlicchio, 2023), a public intervention through policies is required to address its main adverse effects. These programs include place-based policies aiming to diversify social mixing in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, by adopting specific housing policies to favor the replacement of buildings and household/individual-based policies, that act by reducing factors of social exclusion, such as education and employment, by creating opportunities for people, implying that the access to different networks could lead to the disruption of vicious circles that foster segregation. Finally, connectivity-based policies seek to support the physical connection between disadvantaged neighbourhoods with other urban places within a regional area (van Ham *et al.*, 2018). Despite the trust placed in such programs by policy makers, the real impact and usefulness of these strategies in addressing spatial inequalities in European countries have been questioned (Arbaci, 2019).

The work is organised as follows. Section 2 introduces the concept of residential segregation, its different declinations, and the spatial configurations through which it manifests in urban space. Section 3 illustrates the main theoretical frameworks that attempt to explain the mechanisms underlying the phenomenon’s production in contemporary cities, showing its complexity, and

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intertwining with economic, social, and institutional factors. Section 4 addresses issues related to the effects of residential segregation in terms of social inequalities and its potential impact on the life courses of individuals and families. Section 5 describes the impact of economic factors on the socio-spatial layout of European cities, with a particular focus on the city of Liverpool – one of the most important European industrial centers of the past. It provides an illustrative case to get insights about how much the changes induced by the transition from a Fordist to a post-Fordist socio-economic structure have shaped spatial segregation in European cities. The impact of these transformations on the current socio-spatial configuration of the city, resulting in residential segregation and spatial divisions among specific social groups, is explored. The analysis results are interpreted and linked back to the theoretical frameworks illustrated in Section 3. Finally, Section 6 summarises the evidence from the article and presents some concluding remarks.

2. Definition of the Concept of Residential Segregation and its Dimensions

Residential segregation is a concept used in the social sciences to refer to the physical separation between two or more groups based on specific social characteristics that lead to their unequal distribution in urban space (Barbagli and Pisati, 2012; Massey and Denton, 1988). The systematic study of socio-spatial divisions within population groups began with the Chicago school and the development of the Human Ecology Approach, which aimed to study and describe the structure and organisation of American cities. According to Park (1926), the spatial distance between social groups can be considered a good approximation of the social stratification system, where differences in status or occupation are fixed in space:

«It is because geography, occupation, and all the other factors which determine the distribution of population determine so irresistibly and fatally the place, the group, and the associates with whom each one of us is bound to live that spatial relations come to have, for the study of society and human nature, the importance which they do. It is because social relations are so frequently and so inevitably correlated with spatial relations; because physical distances so frequently are, or seem to be, the indexes of social distances, that statistics have any significance whatever for sociology. And this is true, finally, because it is only as social and psychical facts can be reduced to, or correlated with, spatial facts that they can be measured at all» (Park, 1926, p. 14).

Over time, the study of residential segregation has grown, particularly in the United States, where suburbanization and discriminatory housing practices have led to the creation of socially homogenous areas (Maloutas, 2012). American researchers have primarily focused on factors such as race, ethnicity, and socio-economic status as contributing dimensions to the formation of ghettos and disadvantaged areas (Massey, Denton, 1993). In contrast, studies on residential segregation in Europe have mainly concentrated on the socio-professional dimension and the distribution of foreigners within cities (Bergamaschi, Maggio, 2020; Oberti, Prêteceille, 2017). Historically, the study of segregation became an important research topic for urban sociologists, human geographers, and demographers starting from the 1950s onward. According to Hamnett (2001), the American urban riots of the 1960s, along with the changes in social compositions that American inner cities experienced in the post-war, stimulated a wave of research on residential segregation. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, these investigations were primarily centered around racial and ethnic dimensions. Additionally, the availability of census data and the use of quantitative analysis made it possible to analyse and compare the distributions of social groups by large urban areas. Nevertheless, the trajectory of research on residential segregation underwent a transformation with David Harvey's contributions (among them *Social Justice and the City*, 1973). This shift moved the focus from the study of residential patterns to a

deeper exploration of the foundational economic and social processes that, along with ethnic and social class factors, shaped urban divisions. Renewed interest in the topic came later with Wilson's seminal work *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass and Public Policy* (1987) which delved into American ghettos and the debate on the underclass. Subsequently, there was a further shift in focus toward topics like polarisation and duality, involving cities and their socio-spatial structure (Mollenkopf, Castells, 1991; Sassen, 1991).

On the other hand, while many researchers focused on methodological issues related to the quantitative measurement of the phenomenon and the criteria for classifying urban areas as segregated or not (Duncan, Duncan, 1955), fewer efforts were devoted to developing a theoretical framework on what segregation was and how to define it. In 1988, Massey and Denton published a seminal work that conceptualised residential segregation as a multidimensional phenomenon. They introduced a set of indices designed to capture each dimension, providing essential concepts and tools for scholars studying this phenomenon.

According to the authors, the classical definition of segregation, which is «the degree to which two or more groups live separately from one another, in different parts of the urban environment» (p. 282), may conceal a certain complexity related to the manifestation of the phenomenon in a variety of ways.

As stated by them, segregation is described through five conceptually distinct dimensions:

- 1) *evenness* (equal/unequal distribution of two or more groups across the areas of the urban space. The more unevenly a group is distributed within the urban area, the more segregated it is);
- 2) *exposure* (degree of potential contact/isolation between different groups within defined areas. The greater the interaction between members of the same group (isolation), the greater the segregation within that group);
- 3) *concentration* (share of physical space occupied by a group in the urban environment. The higher the concentration, the smaller the area occupied by a group);
- 4) *centralisation* (spatial distance/proximity of a group from the urban centre of the city. According to this dimension – which was designed for the declining central areas of American cities – a group that is more concentrated in the city centre is considered more segregated);
- 5) *clustering* (over-representation of a group between contiguous parts of the city. The more a group is clustered in contiguous areas of the city, the more segregated it is).

It is worth noting that according to the definition of Massey and Denton, evenness and exposure are aspatial dimensions as they are based solely on social group composition within urban zones. On the other hand, concentration, centralization, and clustering explicitly require spatial information such as the distribution of the population in urban space (Reardon, O'Sullivan, 2004).

Although Massey and Denton (1988) suggested paying attention to the multiple dimensions that characterise segregation, studies have mainly focused on evenness as the most critical dimension of segregation (Tammaru *et al.*, 2016a; van Ham *et al.* 2021). Over the years, the multidimensional definition proposed by Massey and Denton has been challenged by scholars who have suggested rethinking segregation and its dimensions through the adoption of different theoretical frameworks (Johnston *et al.*, 2007; Reardon, O'Sullivan, 2004; Wong, 2016).

According to Reardon and O'Sullivan (2004), segregation can be defined as «the extent to which individuals of different groups occupy or experience different social environments» (p. 122). This definition emphasises the spatial characterisation of the phenomenon, and its measurement – from a methodological point of view – must take this component into account, considering segregation as a complete spatial process. In light of this, the authors suggested that the five dimensions illustrated by Massey and Denton can be condensed into two primary ones: *spatial exposure/isolation* and *spatial evenness/clustering*.

The former refers to the extent to which members of one social group encounter members of another social group (or of the same social group, if we consider spatial isolation) in their local

environments; while the latter describes the extent to which social groups are similarly distributed across urban areas. When adopting this scheme, evenness and clustering dimensions are merged, while exposure is conceptualised as explicitly spatial.

The spatial dimension assumes a central role within the domain of social sciences in understanding social phenomena (Nuvolati, 2018). A recognition that stems from the awareness that human interactions and actions take place within a physical-spatial framework (Mela, 2006; Bottini, 2020). By adopting a spatial perspective, it becomes evident that, since all events occur within specific locations, comprehending the spatial arrangement of elements, especially in relation to each other, is relevant to shed light on social phenomena (Logan, 2012). This holds particularly true in urban segregation studies, where spatial concepts such as distance, proximity, and exposure encompass a relational component that can be used as tools for evaluating the extent of interactivity among social groups or their shared exposure. However, places are also a combination of cultural, social, and economic processes, thereby molding the constraint-opportunity structure of individuals and influencing their beliefs and behaviors as well (De Falco *et al.*, 2022). Consequently, the domain of spatial sociology has underscored the paramount importance of regarding space neither as an empty form nor merely as an endogenous variable, but as a potent shaping agent of human actions (Fuller, Löw, 2017). In connection to this aspect, which will be further explored later in this text within the context of urban segregation, it has been pointed out that places can also fuel social differences and hierarchies through intricate mechanisms that exclude and segregate categories of people. On the other hand, such hierarchies are reproduced and reinforced through places of residence that reflect and reinforce urban hierarchy and inequalities among social groups (Gieryn, 2000; Massey, Denton, 1993).

Nevertheless, it is worth noting that despite efforts to establish a shared theoretical and methodological framework for studying residential segregation in urban contexts, one that also adequately incorporates and conceptualizes the spatial component of the phenomenon, a consensus regarding its definition and primary dimensions remains yet to be reached. Consequently, research on segregation should not only focus on the development of measures but also on a shared understanding of the phenomenon itself (Wong, 2016).

Nevertheless, scholars generally agree that residential segregation is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that can take on various spatial configurations stemming from diverse economic, cultural, and social factors. According to Barbagli and Pisati (2012), three main ideal types of spatial segregation can be identified, namely: *ghetto*, *enclave*, and *citadel* (Marcuse, 1997; Wacquant, 2004).

The *ghetto* is defined as a place inhabited only by a social group affected by social stigma and negative connotations. This specific type of residential segregation implies that the excluded group lives in a condition of subordination to the other social groups; in this case, isolation and marginalisation from the rest of society can be imposed either *de facto* or *de jure*.

An *enclave* is a form of segregation different from the ghetto, as it is not the result of institutional racism or any other form of social discrimination. In this case, the spatial concentration of groups with similar characteristics, such as ethnicity and cultural identity, is in a sense voluntarily chosen in order to maintain and sustain social cohesion, mutual aid networks, and to achieve social, economic, and political improvements. Historically, this type of segregation is linked to immigration and is explained through the concept of homophily, which refers to the tendency of people to seek out other people similar to them.

The last type, the *citadel*, is considered a voluntary concentration in the urban space of people according to their position of privilege in terms of wealth, power, and status. Spatial separation, in this case, can also be understood as marking a physical distinction and protecting oneself from other social groups. An example is provided by the gated communities with access restricted to wealthy residents and their guests.

3. Mechanisms of Residential Segregation

Regardless of the different forms by which the spatial separation of social groups is shaped, a growing debate on the causes and effects of residential segregation has developed since the 1980s. Starting from the role of economic processes and institutional factors such as the state, the welfare regime, and the housing system, two main explanations of the phenomenon in contemporary cities can be distinguished in the literature. According to some American scholars (Mollenkopf, Castells, 1991; Sassen, 1991), the process of deindustrialization that began in the 1970s, followed by the globalisation and tertiarisation of economic activities, has led to a growing polarisation in the labour market between high-skilled and low-skilled workers; the changes that have taken place in the social structure of post-Fordist cities – with the contraction of the middle class and the expansion of higher and lower occupations – have manifested mainly in the urban space through a reorganisation of social geography that takes the form of a socio-spatial duality involving the two emerging occupational groups.

Despite the extensive use of the social polarisation thesis in segregation studies to describe new forms of urban inequalities in metropolitan cities, researchers have questioned its foundations (Hamnett, 1994; van Kempen, 1994) since the 1990s, emphasising that spatial divisions cannot be understood as a unidirectional and homogeneous process. Moreover, the relationship between social polarisation and spatial patterns has proven to be more complex and articulated than mainstream theories suggest (Arbaci, 2019, Pratschke, Morlicchio, 2012). It has also been argued that the adoption of the polarisation framework – developed mainly to account for changes in large American cities – can be problematic and less effective when translated into different urban contexts, where economic, social and cultural spheres can lead to different outcomes (Musterd, Ostendorf, 1998).

In particular, European researchers have specifically focused on the various types of residential segregation that result from a combination of economic and institutional factors, shifting the interest to the role of the state and redistributive policies. This approach has brought attention to the importance of contextual factors and variations between different urban areas, making it a central theme in international debates. Therefore, while global forces may help to explain inequality and segregation processes, monocausal explanations, such as the polarisation thesis, are insufficient to account for the diverse configurations of segregation observed in cities around the world. Instead, other contextual factors must be considered in order to understand the mechanisms and effects of residential segregation. As stated by Maloutas: «Urban segregation is context-dependent in the sense that its patterns and social impact are determined by the combined effect of mechanisms and institutions involving the market, the state, civil society and the specific and durable shape of local socio-spatial realities» (Maloutas, 2012, p. 3).

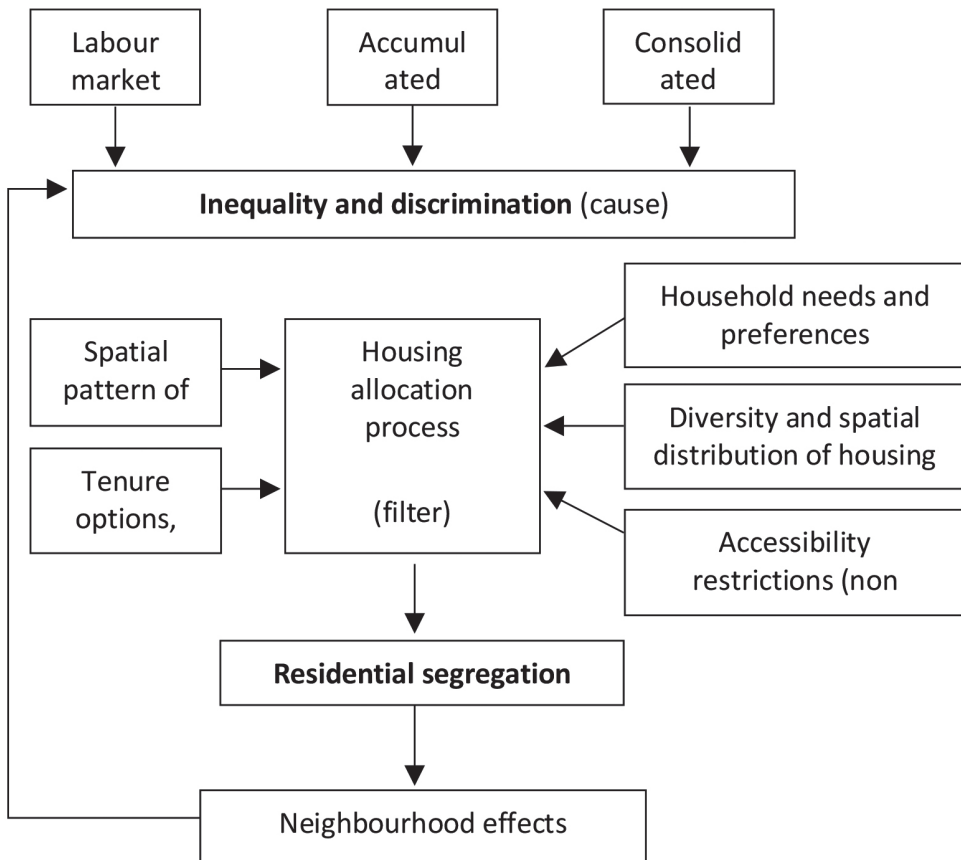
Hence, the spatial divisions can be understood as the result of various causal mechanisms – such as targeted national and local policies, welfare states, market forces, and private housing systems – which, combined with the local historical pathway, can lead to different outcomes. Maloutas (*op. cit.*) developed an explanatory scheme (Fig. 1) that defines the processes leading to residential segregation as a set of causal relationships mediated by local urban contexts.

The first part of the scheme considers the labour market, unequally accumulated wealth, and ethno-racial diversity as causes of social inequalities and discrimination. Here, different types of social regulation may act on the functioning of the labour market and accumulated wealth in other ways, producing different outcomes in terms of income inequality (considered the most critical contextual characteristic) and ethno-racial discrimination. Afterwards, these factors turn into segregation through several drivers that influence the housing allocation process: the role of the housing market and institutional intervention – ranging from minimal interference in market dynamics to the provision of social housing – greatly influence segregation patterns; the characteristics of housing stock, such as diversity, spatial distribution and quality; social networks and the presence of family ties can influence, along with property rights, neighbourhoods and

housing choices by producing low levels of residential mobility. Finally, as residential segregation may fuel inequalities and social exclusion through the action of neighbourhood effects, institutional intervention could promote mixed social policies and improve the distribution of services to address these adverse outcomes.

Regarding the last mechanism introduced in Maloutas’s model (the neighbourhood effects), other authors have underscored the pivotal role played by the place – and therefore by the spatial dimension – in conjunction with macrostructural factors, in generating inequalities and segregation. Wilson (1987) employed the expression “*concentration effects*” to explain how the concentration of disadvantaged social groups within highly impoverished areas can produce a range of different social outcomes that perpetuate inequalities.

Figure 1 Diagram of the causal mechanisms in the reproduction process of residential segregation (Maloutas, 2012, p. 12).



According to Sampson (2012), neighbourhoods play a crucial role in understanding spatial differentiation within urban areas. They act as intermediaries between macro-level factors (political, institutional, and economic spheres) and micro-level processes (such as individual preferences) contributing to shaping spatial inequality and segregation. The active role of places in producing spatial divisions is also highlighted by Oberti and Prêteceille (2017). Residential space constitutes a fundamental framework for comprehending social life, as social relationships and practices are deeply intertwined within local places. Moreover, according to the authors, the city goes beyond being a mere spatial reflection of social inequalities arising from economic

relationships. On the contrary, places actively generate distinct urban inequalities. Indeed, the city consists of a diverse range of resources that are unequally distributed in urban space. The convergence of urban segregation with urban inequalities gives rise to specific social disparities. These inequalities not only contribute to segregation, but conversely, segregation also gives rise to additional urban inequalities that mutually reinforce one another.

Musterd *et al.* (2017) proposed an analytical framework that seeks to account for the primary structural factors that shape socio-economic segregation. These factors include socio-economic inequalities, welfare and housing regimes, degrees of globalization, and changes in economic structures. Based on their analyses of European cities, the results reveal that while a relationship exists between segregation levels and these factors, they do not fully explain the phenomenon. This led the authors to argue that the unique combination of economic, social and physical factors, together with the local institutional contexts that characterise cities, play a crucial role in understanding socio-economic segregation.

The prominent role of national and local institutions in shaping segregation processes is also highlighted by Arbaci (2019), who defines residential segregation as a multi-scalar process embodied in the broader organisation of societies. It is driven by a variety of systemic mechanisms and contextual factors in which macro-structures such as welfare regimes and housing systems play a significant role in the social division of space, and the state-market(-family) nexus is a critical factor in the production and understanding of urban inequalities. According to this perspective, segregation cannot be conceptualised as the result of global forces or individual choices. Rather, it is linked to the functioning of society in terms of organisation, production and distribution of resources. This shift entails a radical change in how the issue of segregation is usually approached, as it places the phenomenon within the more complex debate on the production of urban inequalities.

The main differences in the conceptualisation of segregation, and its causes between North American and Western European schools, have historical and ideological reasons (Arbaci, 2019; Maloutas, 2012). These can be traced back to the different socio-spatial configurations of urban spaces and the distinct ways of defining and addressing segregation as a political and social problem. Regarding the first aspect, the process of suburbanisation in European cities has been less intense and widespread than in American cities. Additionally, the upper classes have not moved out of urban centres, while welfare policies have mitigated the effect of social and spatial inequalities. This has not been the case in American cities. Secondly, in the American context, dominated by the ideology of liberalism, segregation is perceived as a limitation to individual achievement – a situation that can be overcome through upward spatial mobility, as demonstrated by government programs that encourage residents to leave problematic areas instead of improving them – and as the product of individual choice. On the other hand, in Western European countries – traditionally characterised by principles of social equity – segregation is conceived as a social and structural problem.

Recognition of these differences has led European scholars to address segregation in a systematic and redistributive way, acting on the mechanisms that produce inequality in the housing and labour market. State regulation and the role of welfare policies may explain why Western European cities show a lower level of segregation than American cities, while the existence of different welfare regimes and housing systems in European countries helps to understand the variety of outcomes in terms of urban inequality between cities (Tammaru *et al.*, 2016b).

4. The Effects of Residential Segregation

Whatever the role and degree to which economic restructuring, institutional intervention, and the housing system shape the spatial division between social groups and the complex relation-

ship between social distance and spatial segregation, residential segregation as an outcome can produce negative effects in terms of social exclusion and transmission of social inequalities, undermining equal opportunities between individuals and families of different social groups. In the literature, many studies have focused on the relationship between place of residence and social mobility (Musterd *et al.*, 2003), employment, and educational attainment (van Ham *et al.*, 2012) underlining the undesirable consequences of the isolation and concentration of disadvantaged groups (by income, status, etc.) in terms of life opportunities. However, residential segregation is not negative per se and may also have positive effects on communities. Some studies suggest that the proximity of individuals who share the same socio-economic background or ethnicity can foster strong social ties and mutual support, allowing people to more easily access forms of instrumental and relational support (Peach, 1996, Piekut *et al.*, 2019). This can positively impact social cohesion and cultural values, especially among ethnic groups. The social composition of residential areas, therefore, does not necessarily lead to a cycle of inequality and social exclusion. In certain contexts, the concentration of social groups in urban spaces can produce positive effects in terms of access to resources (Daconto, 2014). However, it is widely recognised that segregation can also have a negative impact on individual life opportunities (Johnston *et al.*, 2014; Nieuwenhuis *et al.*, 2020; van Ham *et al.*, 2018).

The place where individuals and their families live is considered a key location for everyday activities such as school, the workplace, and leisure activities. Residential segregation can be therefore considered as a form of inequality interrelated with other life domains, leading some authors to define a conceptual framework of “the vicious circles of segregation” to explain how segregation and spatial inequalities systematically occur and reproduce in different spheres of life (Tammaru *et al.*, 2021). According to this perspective, segregation experienced in one sphere of life such as residential, school, or work, tends to reproduce itself in other spheres. Moreover, the disadvantage is often transferred from parents to children due to the close ties between family members. Thus, residential location and housing play a crucial role in shaping social and spatial inequalities in cities.

The urban areas in which people live influence their access to school, occupation, and leisure activities. The issue of school segregation provides a good example of how these spheres are interconnected. School choice is often influenced by the proximity of schools to the family residence; as consequence, schools reflect the social composition of the neighbourhood. This phenomenon is further compounded by differences in the quality and reputation of schools, leading to higher housing prices in areas with better schools, and the exclusion of low-income families. The spatial separation between rich and poor households in urban space implies that higher-income households may choose to live in neighbourhoods with high availability of services. This situation leads to the so-called Tiebout sorting effect, triggering competition between local areas to attract households by offering high-quality services, resulting in an uneven distribution of resources (van Ham *et al.*, 2018). The concentration of families according to their socio-economic characteristics and their exposure to poverty and social exclusion can influence the life opportunities of individuals through the action of negative contextual effects (Hedman *et al.*, 2015; Sampson *et al.*, 2002; van Ham, Manley, 2010) that act over time by fostering the intergenerational transmission of inequalities which, in turn, contribute to reinforcing the spatial separation of social groups in different places.

How segregation is perceived, whether it is considered problematic or not, can influence how institutions respond and their strategies for addressing the issue. According to Cassiers and Kesteloot (2012), it is possible to distinguish three levels of interventions: 1) strategies aiming to mitigate the negative outcome of segregation mainly through the adoption of programs in the disadvantaged areas; 2) strategies promoting the social mix between higher income households and lower-income households; 3) strategies targeting specific deprived areas seeking to upgrade and reconnecting them in the wider context of the city. These intervention approaches fall into the category of place-based policies and connectivity-based policies and are based on the

assumption that de-concentrating and mixing socio-economic or ethnic groups, or upgrading buildings and infrastructure may solve social problems related to segregation and inequalities. However, their effectiveness has been challenged and this is because they are mainly developed on the idea that it is places, and not disadvantaged groups, that need to be socially integrated (Kesteloot *et al.*, 2006). Other types of intervention target individuals and aim to improve their socio-economic conditions by creating educational and employment opportunities which in turn may facilitate mobility to better neighbourhoods. The validity of these policies is not easy to test as their effects may be visible in the long term. Additionally, families affected by upward socio-spatial mobility may be replaced by other low-income families, not changing the socio-spatial patterns in the urban area (van Ham *et al.*, 2018).

5. The Socio-spatial Structure in Post-industrial Cities: the Case of Liverpool

Historically, European cities have exhibited a range of socio-spatial configurations, in which economic and institutional factors have played a crucial role in shaping residential environments. Undoubtedly, the changes induced by the Industrial Revolution significantly impacted the social structure of cities, determining the expansion and the concentration of the working class in the inner areas – due to the presence of industrial plants – and the shift of the upper class in better and healthier residential areas placed in suburban zones. The shift from a traditional to a Fordist industrial society brought about changes in the social geography of urban areas. Production activities became more decentralized, and the expansion of the public tertiary sector led to the growth of the middle class. As a result, previously working-class neighbourhoods in central urban areas were gradually occupied by middle and upper-class families, while working-class families were displaced in peripheral areas or in smaller municipalities that surrounded the city core (Morlicchio, 2020). Starting from the 1970s, industrial cities in Western countries experienced a considerable decrease in manufacturing sector activities as the Fordist industry declined. As a result, there was a transition towards economic restructuring, leading to a substantial expansion of the tertiary sector and a corresponding reduction in industry sector employment, with a significant increase in service sector jobs (Kesteloot *et al.*, 2006). This shift towards a post-industrial economy created a growing polarisation between high-skilled and low-skilled occupations and a contraction of the middle class. As a consequence, there has been a notable increase in social and spatial inequalities within European cities, affecting their socio-spatial structure.

Given the significant changes that occurred during the transition from industrial to post-industrial economies, the city of Liverpool can offer an informative case study to examine how these processes affected the socio-spatial structure of urban areas. Once one of the world's major industrial centres and a strategic hub for international trade, Liverpool's socio-economic structure was characterised by high levels of employment in the industrial sector and the prevalence of manufacturing in the organization of economic activities. By the 1950s, its decline as a global economic centre began, accelerating dramatically in the 1980s, with the collapse of the Fordist industry and the subsequent deindustrialization of the city. This transformation, which occurred in many other European industrial cities, considerably altered Liverpool's social structure and urban morphology, leading to the decline of areas once cores of wealth production and increasing the spread of unemployment and urban poverty (Sykes *et al.*, 2013). According to Haase *et al.* (2021), the transition toward a new economic phase that reversed the economic decline of the city can be attributed to a few key factors. Among these, the national economic growth starting from the mid-1990s, driven by urban economies and the expansion of the tertiary sector; the end of the period of rapid industrial restructuring in the 1990s; and the long-term urban and economic regeneration strategies and programmes funded by the European Union and central government.

Like other English cities, Liverpool has undergone urban renewal, housing renewal projects, and regeneration programmes aimed primarily at central areas, with the goal of reversing the deterioration of industrial sectors and creating opportunities for a new economic development based on tertiary and tourism-related activities. In this new context, the city's identity has been deeply transformed by the growth of the advanced tertiary sector, as well as by the expansion of hotels, restaurants, and the entertainment industry, which mostly affected the city center. This transition has resulted in the city's shift from being a "centre of producers" to a "centre of consumers" (Belchem, 2006). However, these transformations have only affected specific areas of the city and certain social groups. Outside of the historic centre, which is mostly inhabited by the upper and middle classes, the trend of decline remains unchanged. Other areas continue to be affected by a weak economy and high unemployment rates. Given these processes, it is interesting to examine how the population is currently distributed within Liverpool and gain insights about the existence and extent of socio-spatial divisions. An operation also made possible by the recent release of the latest UK census data.

5.1 Methodology and Results

The analysis is based on data gathered from UK census data provided by the Office for National Statistics³ for the year 2021. Since the aim of this section is to get insights into the geographical distribution of socio-economic groups within the city of Liverpool, population groups are defined according to the National Statistics Socio-economic Classification (NS-SEC)⁴. Socio-economic schemas have been extensively used by scholars to study social inequalities. These typologies commonly stem from data regarding individuals' occupations to explain differences in wealth and life chances. This is because work significantly influences socio-economic differences in market-driven economies (Ballarino and Cobalti, 2003). The NS-SEC classes are aggregated into four categories: 1) Higher managerial, administrative, and professional occupations (NS-SEC 1); 2) Intermediate occupations (NS-SEC 2); 3) Small employers and own account workers (NS-SEC 3); 4) Routine and manual occupations (NS-SEC 4).

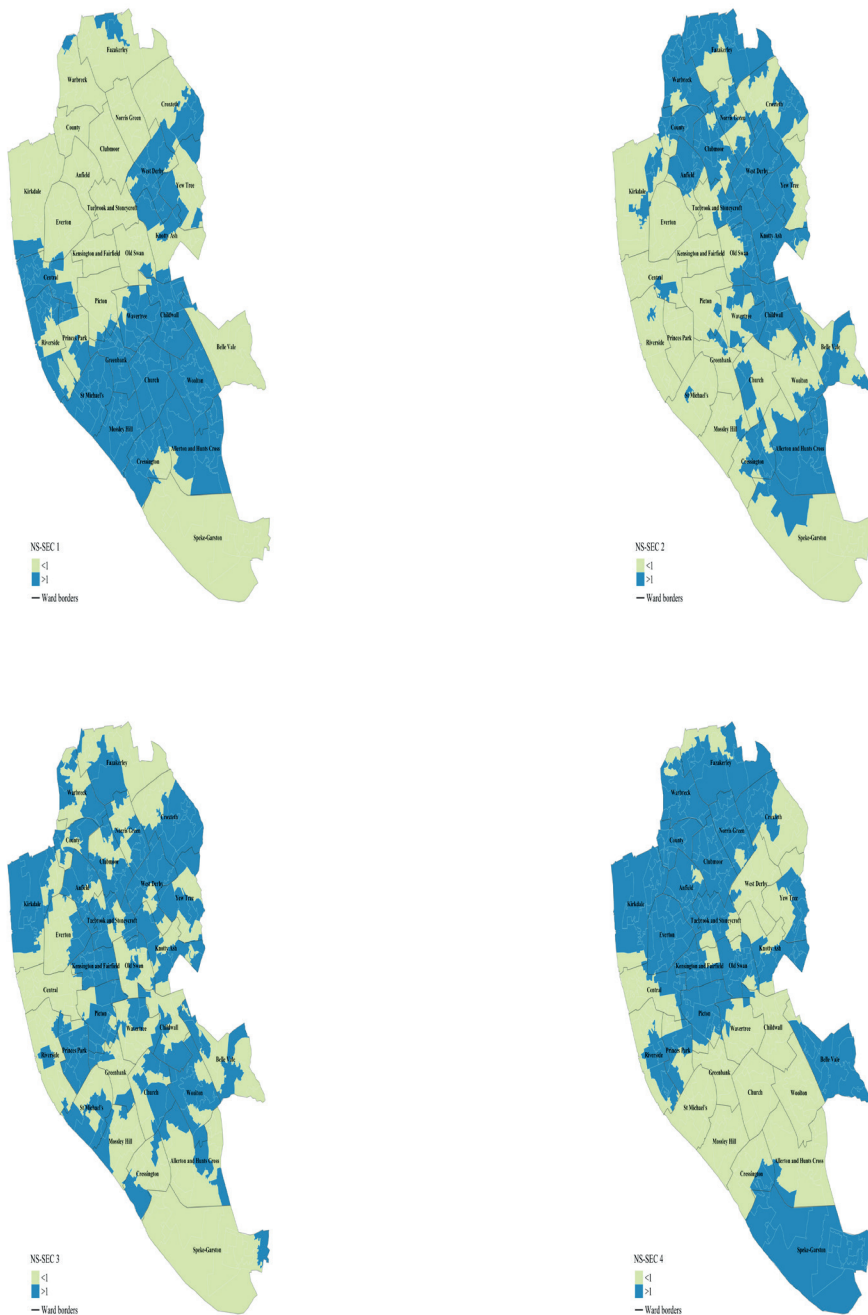
To unveil the geographical distribution of NS-SEC classes in the study area, the Location Quotient (LQ) (Brown, Chung, 2006), which is a common measure in residential segregation studies, was used. The LQ is a relative indicator of residential segregation, offering insights into the concentration of social groups in specific city areas. Furthermore, the results from the index can be visualised through mapping, providing a more accurate depiction of social group distribution across urban areas and thus enhancing the understanding of Liverpool's social geography.

Specifically, the LQ works by comparing the proportion of a specific group within a given area to the proportion of the same group at the municipality level, providing insights into the relative concentration or underrepresentation of socio-economic groups within particular city areas. Values greater or lower than 1 denote situations of concentration or underrepresentation respectively, while values equal to 1 indicate that there is no difference in the proportion of a socio-economic group in local areas compared to its proportion at the city level. Finally, Lower Layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs) were used as ecological units for the analysis. These areas encompass between 400 and 1,200 households and have a resident population ranging from 1,000 to 3,000 individuals. Their size makes them suitable for approximating a neighborhood scale, facilitating detailed local-level analysis. The results of the LQ for each socio-economic group were mapped and reported in Figure 2.

³ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/census>.

⁴ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/methodology/classificationsandstandards/otherclassifications/thenationalstatisticssocio-economicclassificationnssecrebasedonsoc2010>.

Figure 2 Location quotient maps of NS-SEC groups in Liverpool city at Lower Layer Super Output Area (LSOA) level – Contains National Statistics data © Crown copyright and database right [2023].



By looking at the cartograms, it is clear that the NS-SEC 1 class is mainly overrepresented in the central areas of the city, while middle occupational groups (NS-SEC 2 and NS-SEC 3) show a more scattered distribution across the urban area. Conversely, the NS-SEC 4 class is primarily concentrated in the peripheral zones of the city. It is interesting to note that areas of NS-SEC 1

concentration almost completely overlap with areas where NS-SEC 4 is underrepresented, and vice versa.

What emerges is that Liverpool exhibits a cleavage between socio-economic groups along the centre-periphery axis. The centre, defined not only in geographical terms but also by the concentration of commercial, cultural, and financial activities, is predominantly inhabited by the upper class (NS-SEC 1). On the opposite, the working class (NS-SEC 4) is concentrated in peripheral areas. Interestingly, the LQ map for the NS-SEC 1 class seems to show pockets of overrepresentation that could indicate a possible phenomenon of polycentrism taking place. It should be also highlighted that historically, the occupation of the city centers by the upper-middle classes is more distinctive in European continental cities than in Anglo-American ones, where elites favored suburban residences due to the rise of manufacturing and concentration of working-class populations in industrial city centers (Maloutas, 2012). It is remarkable but not surprising that these residential patterns coincide to a good extent with the geography of deprivation of the city. According to the index of household deprivation calculated by the Office for National Statistics for 2021, and based on employment, education, health and disability, and housing dimensions, the highest levels of deprivation can be found in the working-class areas, while at the opposite end of the spectrum, the central, predominantly upper-class areas experience the best socio-economic conditions. In conclusion, changes in recent decades that have altered the socio-occupational structure of the city of Liverpool seem to have produced a markedly polarised social geography. In my doctoral thesis (De Falco, 2023), I also conducted an extensive diachronic analysis of Liverpool at a metropolitan scale employing UK census data for the years 2001, 2011, and 2021. The results, as the ones outlined in this study, strongly supported the hypothesis of polarisation between NS-SEC 1 and NS-SEC 4 classes, demonstrating the persistence of this phenomenon over time and highlighting a distinct center-periphery demarcation as well.

6. Conclusions

Residential segregation refers to the spatial separation of population groups in urban areas. This definition incorporates both a socio-relational dimension – segregation involves at least two groups defined on the basis of some socially relevant characteristic (such as ethnicity or socio-economic class) – and a spatial dimension – segregation materialises in physical space through a condition of isolation (in most extreme cases) – or over-representation of homogeneous social groups in specific urban areas.

What makes the study of residential segregation interesting for scholars from different disciplines is not the spatial location of groups per se, but the underlying economic, institutional and social mechanisms that shape specific socio-spatial structures in cities and, above all, the social consequences in terms of life opportunities and inequalities it has on individuals and families. The mechanisms through which segregation shapes individual life courses are complex, intertwined and not always visible. As pointed out in the text, it is also crucial not to overlook the fundamental role that places play in generating urban inequalities and segregation. Operating as active agents, places exert their influence on behaviors, social interactions, and opportunities for individuals and families, through processes that emerge at the intersection of micro and macro factors.

When addressing the negative effects of segregation, it is mainly the disadvantaged and less affluent social groups that receive academic and institutional attention. The concentration of people with a low socio-economic profile in specific urban areas reduces their chances of upward social mobility and impacts the opportunities for intergroup interaction, raising issues in terms of social cohesion (see, for example, the riots in the suburbs of some major European cities such as London in 2011, Stockholm in 2013 and the recurring tensions that broke out in 2005 in the

banlieues of Paris). It can also define the extent and variety of social networks, which are essential in determining access to employment and educational opportunities, as well as in the capacity for social mobilisation and influencing political decisions.

Although not negative per se, residential segregation can have a negative impact on the inclusion of disadvantaged groups and can worsen social inequalities. This is because the social composition of the areas of residence, together with the unequal spatial distribution of services and resources, contribute to defining the spatial structure of constraints and opportunities of individuals.

This work aimed to present the concept of residential segregation by attempting to reconstruct the phases that led to its consolidation as an object of study in the social sciences from the early 1900s to the present. As illustrated, residential segregation is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon that can be broken down into two main fields of research. As a process, segregation is conceived as the product of an intertwining of economic, social, cultural and institutional factors acting at the individual and contextual level, producing different socio-spatial configurations. In this case, the focus of scholars is, therefore, on the mechanisms underlying segregation. As a result, the interest of scholars is directed towards the effects of residential segregation on disadvantaged and less affluent social groups in terms of unequal life opportunities.

The in-depth study of the city of Liverpool showed how changes in the city's socio-economic structure with deindustrialization and tertiarisation of the economy have resulted in social and spatial polarisation. The findings indicate the existence of spatial divisions between the upper and working class, and the contrast of a regenerated city centre that is surrounded by disadvantaged and deprived residential areas.

As discussed, since the consequences of segregation raise social issues, public institutions have promoted policies to mitigate them over the years. Although a mix of strategies can effectively reduce segregation levels, it has been argued that addressing urban inequality is not just a matter of policy response through urban interventions. Still, it implies the need for a systemic rethinking of the key factors to be addressed – the production of urban inequality – and what principles and policies can lead to a less unequal society.

It is important to emphasise that this work was focused exclusively on the Western context. However, for a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon, it could be valuable to broaden the lens to encompass non-Western urban contexts. In doing so, a global perspective that embraces contextual diversity and different theoretical approaches can be adopted. Regarding the examination of the Liverpool case, the use of the Local Quotient to depict the geographical distribution of socio-economic classes could benefit from the integration of qualitative elements. This integration would offer a more profound comprehension of the residential patterns in the city. Additionally, a further enhancement might involve considering other cities from different European countries as case studies. Through comparative analyses, it may become possible to investigate variations in social geography among urban areas, thereby further testing the polarisation thesis.

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