

Urban Spatial Segregation: Forces, Consequences, and Policy Responses

Rosalind Greenstein, Francisco Sabatini and Martim Smolka

Spatial segregation is a feature of metropolises from San Diego to Boston, from Santiago to Cape Town, from Belfast to Bangalore. In some places the segregation is associated primarily with racial groups, in other places, ethnicity or religion, while in still other places, income status. In our experiences with the Americas, we find that international comparative research allows researchers and policy analysts to see both unique and shared characteristics in sharp relief. For example, in Latin America, the public debate around urban spatial segregation typically focuses on socioeconomic issues, whereas in the U.S. and many developed countries the debate centers more on racial or ethnic disparities.

Residential segregation also has different meanings and consequences depending on the specific form and structure of the metropolis, as well as the cultural and historical context. In North America, social and ethnic minorities tend to be segregated in less desirable inner-city locales while the upper- and middle-class majority disperses into small, socially homogeneous urban neighborhoods or suburbs across the metropolis. By contrast, in Latin American cities it is the elite minority that tends to concentrate in one area of the city.

The Forces

The forces that contribute to spatial segregation are many and varied. The apartheid laws of South Africa were one extreme case of large-scale, government-sanctioned spatial segregation. Other cases have garnered less international attention, such as the Brazilian government's destruction of *favelas* in the 1960s, when the poor inhabitants were removed to other segregated locations. On a smaller scale, in Santiago, Chile, between 1979 and 1985 during the Pinochet regime, more than 2,000 low-income families were evicted from high- and middle-income residential areas with the stated objective of creating neighborhoods that were uniform by socioeconomic group.

While government evictions and legal

frameworks are explicit mechanisms for creating urban spatial segregation, more subtle mechanisms also have been used to create or enforce spatial segregation. In Colombia, the *contribución de valorización* (a kind of betterment charge) was imposed on inhabitants of an informal settlement in Bogotá located on the edge of a new circumferential highway. Officials knew the charge was higher than most inhabitants could afford to pay and would likely lead them to "choose" relocation. In setting land use standards that the poor could not meet, the government virtually forced them toward the informal, peripheral areas. The U.S. is no stranger to such mechanisms to create segregated housing markets. For example, some real estate agents shun racial and ethnic minorities or persons from lower social classes who do not fit their target markets, and many small landlords rely on informal networks to find the kinds of tenants they prefer.

CALL FOR PAPERS ON SEGREGATION

In July 2001, the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy will convene a three-day international seminar on urban spatial segregation. Researchers and policy analysts from around the world will seek to gain a deeper understanding of the forces that contribute to spatial segregation, the consequences of segregation patterns, and possible policy responses.

Scholars are invited to submit an abstract for consideration as part of this seminar. We are looking for original papers that comment on urban segregation, or that offer alternative viewpoints on how to frame the issue. An abstract of up to 500 words must be received at the Lincoln Institute by December 31, 2000. Complete information and guidelines for this Call for Papers is available on the Institute's website (www.lincolninst.edu).



Voluntary segregation has become a new force, with the proliferation of gated communities in both northern and southern hemispheres. This trend seems to have several motivations, including both supply and demand factors. On the demand side, residents might be attracted to the perception of security or a new lifestyle. On the supply side, builders and developers find tremendous profitability with the large-scale internalization of externalities in these highly controlled developments.

The complexity that stems from the combination of coercive and voluntary segregation leads us to a deeper question: What is the relationship between social differences and spatial segregation? It is commonly assumed that the former are "reflected" in the latter. Social groups sometimes resort to segregation in order to fortify their weak or blurred identity, as in the case of emerging middle-income groups or immigrant communities in search of social recognition. To a great extent, the post-war suburbanization process in U.S. cities can be interpreted as a means of homogeneous sorting to strengthen social identity.

The Consequences

In the U.S., spatial segregation is a serious policy issue because of the complex interactions between land and housing markets on the one hand, and their connection to local revenues and the distribution and quality of local services on the other hand. Disparities in school quality may be one of the more dramatic examples of the variations in public services between places.

The combination of residential segregation by class and by racial or ethnic groups and the systematically uneven spatial distribution of quality schools results in poor inner-city enclaves where children attend substandard schools, which in turn limits their life chances. Other services, such as access to transportation and health care, also vary spatially, as do such measurable factors as air quality and neighborhood infrastructure.

In other countries, spatial segregation of the poor often occurs within informal

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Voluntary and coercive segregation in Latin America are exemplified in these images of a new gated community and a favela.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY MARTIM SMOLKA

settlements. These areas once were viewed as aberrations, but scholars increasingly understand informality as a result of the normal functioning of land and housing markets, not as part of a duality of formal versus informal economies. In this view, illegal, irregular, informal, or clandestine activities to access and occupy urban land *are* the way that the market provides housing for poor people. Nevertheless, these arrangements are not always “chosen” for their low price or relative conveniences, but rather because they are one of an extremely limited set of choices available to the poor.

Traditional segregation patterns in Latin American cities are changing due to the proliferation of new gated communities for expanding high- and middle-income groups and the emergence of shopping centers and office complexes in more “modern” areas beyond the former urban enclaves. In São Paulo, Santiago, Buenos Aires and Mexico City, to name a few of the biggest and most dynamic cities, these developments are appearing even next to lower-income areas. Segregation of uses and access is becoming more intense, making the growing social inequalities of the last decades more apparent. Yet, at the same time, these changes in the patterns of segregation are reducing physical distances among socioeconomic groups, and are bringing “modern” commercial facilities and improved public spaces closer to the poor.

The consequences of segregation are probably changing due to this reduction in its geographical scale. Some of the negative effects of large-scale segregation of the poor (i.e., their agglomeration in the periphery of the cities) could be fading in this new, more diverse urban landscape. Recent empirical studies carried out in Santiago support this contention.

Policy Responses

Spatial segregation is both a reflection of the existing social structure and a mechanism to enforce that structure, thus raising the question of how and when segregation should be addressed. Is the problem in the U.S. context that poor minority children live among others of the same income and racial group, or is it that by living in poor, segregated areas the children’s life opportunities are limited because of their inaccessibility to good schools? Is the answer to improve the schools, to integrate the neighborhood, or to initiate a combination of these and other responses?

In the context of developing countries, is the problem of informal settlements that they are often dangerous (due to risky environmental conditions or street violence) or that the residents are isolated from good jobs, transit and other services? Is the answer to reduce or eliminate the danger, to improve transit, to bring jobs to the neighborhood, or to try all of these programs?

We need to improve our understand-

ing of the social problems in these segregated areas in order to adequately design and implement appropriate policy responses that are necessarily multidimensional. Should change come in the form of corrective programs (e.g., regularization or upgrading of informal settlements) or more fundamental policies that would involve the massive provision of serviced land at affordable prices? One “corrective” option contrasts the informalization of formal arrangements (e.g., deregulation) with the formalization of the informal (e.g., the redefinition of zoning codes or the regularization of alternative tenure systems).

A more fundamental solution would be either piecemeal implementation or mandatory designation of social housing developments in high-income areas. A different sort of tool is to open up decision making around the allocation of public investment, as in the successful *orçamento participativo* process used in the municipality of Porto Alegre, Brazil, where the budget is determined with extensive public participation. Other responses could address the radical upgrading of existing low-income peripheral settlements, more extensive use of linkage fees, or the elimination of land markets altogether, as was done in Cuba. However, we need more information regarding the efficacy of these varied programs and tools, and careful analysis of the necessary conditions to increase the chances of success.

Globalization has fostered the movement of labor and capital, bringing both the positive and negative experiences of developed and developing countries closer together. Immigrants to the U.S., particularly undocumented ones, tend to settle in urban enclaves, but their lack of legal status reverberates beyond those settlements. Access to jobs and credit is limited, which in turn restricts the immigrants' mobility and reinforces existing spatial segregation.

On the other hand, as U.S. financial and real estate corporations extend their operations overseas, they introduce U.S. protocols, conventions, expectations and ways of operating. The exportation of such U.S. norms to developing countries may lead to new patterns of geographic discrimination (e.g., redlining) by race and/or ethnic group, where such practices previously were less explicit.

We know from past research and experience that segregation can increase land revenues for developers and landowners. We also know that the profitability of housing development is dependent upon public investments in roads, facilities and services. At the same time, we acknowledge that segregation has both negative and positive impacts on city life, ranging from social exclusion that makes life harder for the poor to strengthened social and cultural identities that contribute to the city's diversity and vitality.

The face of segregation varies both within and between metropolises. However, comparative international work has demonstrated that there are important trends of convergence between U.S. and Latin American cities. We have much more to understand regarding the effects of interacting land and housing markets and the regulatory structure on spatial segregation and the life chances of urban residents. **I**

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Program Calendar

Contact: Lincoln Institute, 800/LAND-USE (800/526-3873) or help@lincolninst.edu, unless otherwise noted.

Can Land Value Increments be (Re-)Captured to Benefit the Community and Reduce Spatial Segregation?

NOVEMBER 3
Presentation at the Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning Annual Conference
Atlanta, Georgia
Contact: Pat Jackson Gleason, 850/907-0092 or pgleason@acsp.org

Chairman's Roundtable: Impacts of Advanced Information and Telecommunication Technology on Urban Development

NOVEMBER 9
Lincoln House
Cambridge, Massachusetts

Mediating Land Use Disputes

NOVEMBER 13-14
Lincoln House
Cambridge, Massachusetts

Measures to Mitigate Risks in Irregular Settlements

NOVEMBER 16-18
Cosponsored with State, Urban and Municipal Services (SUME)
Veracruz, Mexico
Contact: Jose Langarica, jlangarica@sume.com.mx

National Conference of State Legislatures Fiscal Chairs Seminar

NOVEMBER 29-DECEMBER 2
Boston, Massachusetts
Contact: lisa.houlihan@NCSL.org

The Price of Land Expropriation: Limits to Public Policies in São Paulo, Brazil

DECEMBER 1
São Paulo, Brazil
Contact: Erminia Maricato, erminia@usp.br

International Seminar on Urban Renewal Experiences

DECEMBER 4-5
Cosponsored with Mackenzie Presbyterian University and Economic Development Agency of the Greater ABC Region
Santo Andre, São Paulo, Brazil
Contact: Nadia Somekh, nadia@mackenzie.com.br

Reinventing the Strip

DECEMBER 6
Audio Conference Training Program cosponsored with the American Planning Association
Contact: Jerieshia Jones at APA, 312/431-9100 or jjones@planning.org

Land Regulation Network Meeting

DECEMBER 6
São Paulo, Brazil
Contact: alejandra@lincolninst.edu

Urban Land Management and Social Housing Development

DECEMBER 7-9
Cosponsored with Pólis Institute and Habitat Laboratory of the Catholic University of Campinas
Campinas, São Paulo, Brazil
Contact: Raquel Rolnik, polis@ax.apc.org

First Brazilian Congress on Urban Law

DECEMBER 13-15
Cosponsored with IRGLUS-International Research Group on Law and Urban Space
Belo Horizonte, Brazil
Contact: edesiofernandes@compuserve.com

Economic Development and Changing Communities

FEBRUARY 7
Audio Conference Training Program cosponsored with the American Planning Association
Contact: Jerieshia Jones at APA, 312/431-9100 or jjones@planning.org

Lincoln Lecture Series

Lincoln House, 113 Brattle Street, Cambridge, MA. The programs are free, but pre-registration is required.

Using Land as a Tax Base: Fiscal Reform of Property Tax in Baja California

NOVEMBER 6
Manuel Perló and Sergio Flores Peña, Urban Studies Program, Autonomous National University of Mexico (UNAM)

Sitcom Suburbs Meet e-Fringes: Familiar and Unfamiliar Forms of Suburban Space

DECEMBER 7
Dolores Hayden, Department of Architecture, Urbanism and American Studies, Yale University