The Perception of Socio-Spatial Segregation

The Interaction of Physical and Social Urban Space
Study case of Tehran Neighborhoods

Dissertation

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Abstract

General context: “How to understand the interaction between urban space and social processes” is a significant question in urban studies. To answer that, the city needs to be recognized as both a physical and a social entity and urban theory and practice need to connect these (Hillier 2007). The present research aims to re-examine the complex correlation between spatial and social inequality manifestations in the city of Tehran regarding the concept of segregation.

It observes the causes and consequences of segregation in Tehran and provides an insight into both concepts of socio-spatial segregation and neighborhood effects and creates a link between them. First, I argue when, where, and for whom spatial locations affect the chances of social networks in Tehran. Then, I discuss how neighborhood effects can emerge via social network mechanisms and thus affect the perceptions of residents in the neighborhoods.

Key Words: Socio-spatial Segregation, Urban Space, Neighborhood Effects, Social Networks

Problem statement: In the metropolitan area of Tehran, social, economic, and residential segregation is considered a major problem that often results in unequal living conditions. The spatial structure of Tehran has been segregated in different ways, evolving with certain social changes; from the self-contained inner part to the wealthiest neighborhoods in the north, and the isolated south, surrounded by the marginalized fringe.

In the Tehran context, segregation implies a lack of social relations between different sections of the population. Deficiencies that result in a distance between different groups manifested in their physical separation. As a result, some groups are excluded from important parts of everyday life, the isolation that makes it difficult, for example, to make qualified social networks.

Research questions and objectives: This research observes the causes and consequences of segregation by studying both implications of urban space and social life. The question is: how is the interaction of the physical and social space in the perception of segregation in Tehran neighborhoods?

I discuss the context in which patterns of spatial segregation emerged and influence socially excluded groups in different neighborhoods of Tehran and the social outcomes that have intensified the process. I explore how perceptions of residents can affect neighborhood attachment and stigmatization.

The scope of the research: Segregation in the urban context is about the separation of people as well as a separation of activities and functions. In this sense, social categories and social activities are not only social phenomena but also spatial phenomena (Franzén 2009). This way of understanding segregation is a crucial point of departure for this dissertation.

A simplified way of describing the city could be to see it as composed of different layers that are superimposed upon each other (Legeby 2010). This dissertation, however, is specifically concerned with the relations between the structural layer and the social layer. There is a shift in focus from spatial location to social relations. Starting with the research on residential segregation that describes geographical distributions in space, then I focus on the interplay segregation that refers to the distribution of space and can affect neighborhood effects.

Research structure: First, I examine the structural layer and observe the physical characteristics of segregation dimensions in Tehran neighborhoods. These relevant sub-questions are explored:
- Which neighborhoods from a configurational perspective are residually segregated as clusters of social exclusion? (Clustering vs evenness)
- Which of these neighborhoods are characterized as isolated by considering interplay segregation? (Isolation vs interaction)

I review the literature of segregation and social exclusion in recent decades according to time and theory and geographical contexts. By consulting with the domestic experts, I determine the indicators that are evident in the Tehran context today in making the deprived clusters of neighborhoods and I survey the situation of their residents regarding social exclusion. Then I observe the interplay segregation in Tehran neighborhoods by applying two key features of movement to the resourceful neighborhoods and co-presence of resourceful people in the deprived neighborhoods.

In the second step, I examine the social layer and test the presumed neighborhood effect mechanisms in two neighborhoods. My case studies, Shoush and Shadabad, both are residually segregated neighborhoods but Shoush has a higher rate of movement and co-presence of resourceful people.

I provide an overview of the potential causal mechanisms via which neighborhoods could affect their residents. One of the mechanisms through which neighborhood effects could transpire is via social interactions with the neighbors as well as residents from other neighborhoods (Galster 2012).

I study how socio-spatial segregation of the neighborhood reduces the chances of having social networks and increases the sense of being stigmatized. In the empirical studies, I test whether exposure to the resourceful people decreases or intensifies the negative effects of living in a deprived neighborhood in Tehran, for whom and how. The sub-questions explored in this step are:

- How does the neighborhood have limited or improved the chances of having social networks with local residents and residents from other neighborhoods?
- How do residents find it important to have different kinds of social networks in the neighborhood to improve life situations and satisfaction?

Methodology: The methods applied in this research include a theoretical component where segregation literature is re-conceptualized to respond to aspects that are relevant to the Tehran context. The theoretical part also explores in what way spatial theories and social theories can contribute with relevant knowledge to urban studies in the matters of neighborhood effects. I explore the relationship between the spatial and social aspects through a two-partitioned study:

- A spatial study focusing on the configuration analysis of residential segregation in Tehran and interplay segregation to identify clusters and isolations.
- A social study focusing upon analysis of neighborhood effect mechanisms in two targeted neighborhoods of Tehran to identify correspondences and relations.

In the first part (exploration-description), I apply deductive strategy using quantitative methods. It is a statistical evaluation and spatial analysis of clustering and social exclusion in Tehran. The main source for statistical analysis is statistical database of “Housing and Population Census in Tehran 2018” and I analyze the situation by overlapping raster maps. I am honored that Prof. Dr. Sarafi from the Department of Geography and Urban Studies at the University of Tehran helped me in regular sessions to survey this part.
In the following, I observe the features of interplay segregation in Tehran neighborhoods. First, the feasible movements of neighborhood residents to the resourceful areas that I observe the situation of the deprived neighborhoods by applying space syntax tools based on the existing studies on Tehran.

In the second part (understanding), I apply a version of abductive research using qualitative methods. I make self-observations on the co-presence of resourceful people in public spaces in deprived neighborhoods. In this step, I selected two neighborhoods of Shoush and Shadabad that are both among deprived residential clusters but Shoush has a higher rate of interplay segregation regarding movement and co-presence, and Shadabad is relatively isolated.

Then, I try to gain an insight into potential neighborhood effects that transpire via social interactions in these two neighborhoods. I assume that social satisfaction may be affected by neighborhood characteristics, mediated by the impact of social networks between local residents and people from other neighborhoods.

I test whether exposure to the resourceful people decreases or intensifies the negative effects of living in a deprived neighborhood in Tehran, for whom and how. An important source of information for this part is through qualitative research methods of in-depth interviews with academic experts, informants, and decision-makers as well as informal conversations with informant residents and self-observations, to survey the social satisfaction and perceptions of residents explicitly and implicitly.

Results and contribution: This dissertation explains how living in clustered neighborhoods in Tehran excludes life chances and integration of deprived people via social interactive mechanisms. I gained an insight into the spatial patterns of exclusion and the extent to which isolation of deprivation adds to the problems of experiencing social exclusion and developing effective policy responses in a comparison between deprived neighborhoods: an exposed (Shoush) and an isolated (Shadabad).

This provides a dynamic dialectic understanding of the nature of socio-spatial inequalities in Tehran as a contributing factor to enable interactions and empower residents in enhancing patterns of integration. I believe that the policies created to help concentrated excluded groups in Tehran would benefit from the combined study of networks and segregation. This combination declares the mechanisms by which exclusion is reproduced via networks and spaces. The issue is classifying the ties and their roles in bridging and bonding patterns of social capital.

Findings distinguished when higher exposure to the resourceful people in the neighborhood increases the satisfaction of deprived people. Their contacts are partly explained by their individual characteristics such as educational level and household type. People’s expectations of starting a job were not higher in the exposed neighborhood (Shoush) than in Shadabad, despite more interactions they have with the resourceful groups.

People in Shadabad prefer to live among a similar group because of the conveniences make concentrated neighborhoods of their income group attractive. Besides, population groups differ in Shoush and Shadabad in access to information on neighborhood attractiveness and housing opportunities, and in Shoush they feel a fear of discrimination that limits their opportunities on the housing market. Thus, I can assert that residential segregation in Shadabad is voluntary to some extent and social relations are also affecting spatial configurations in Tehran neighborhoods.
The findings show a direct relationship between the number of social interactions with neighbors and social satisfaction. Especially, housekeeper women in Shoush tend to have weaker social ties and run a greater risk to experience social isolation and weakening of local community life and thus have fewer reciprocity opportunities. In Shadabad, because of the religious atmosphere of the neighborhood, women are experiencing some interactions with other neighbors in religious events.

Findings indicate that the homogenous social structure of the neighborhood plays an important role in the social satisfaction of individuals. This reduces problems such as antisocial behavior, crime, and lack of trust and affects positively the perception of neighborhoods residents. It is recognized in Shadabad that common memories and feelings about the neighbors, length of residence, satisfaction with local social contacts, and support between local residents in the neighborhood increase the attachment to the neighborhood.

In Shoush, some residents are less satisfied with higher shares of other groups' interactions. Because they do not find these interactions in the direction of their opportunities and feel its negative effects on their perception about the neighborhood. The interactions in Shoush should be readjusted to be in direction with the scale of the local residents' expectations and not considered as a means of empowering the authority of the resourceful group in their residency area.

In my case study neighborhoods, it is difficult to decide if the share of poor families in the neighborhood has a negative effect on neighborhood satisfaction. I would say that their group preferences increase satisfaction when people experience strong ties with local residents. This is happening in Shadabad and in Shoush, the number of inhomogeneous interactions in the neighborhood seems relatively more subject to different kinds of conflicts and self-perpetuating.

Although in Shadabad, people seem to be satisfied with high shares of their group, according to the informants I interviewed, this does not fade the necessity and importance of creating possibilities for qualified interactions between diverse groups in the neighborhood, in a proper scale and functionally in the direction with the local needs to improve the standards and perception of residents.

**Further research:** I investigated how socioeconomic segregation on the scale of the residential neighborhood in Tehran affects deprived households to make social contacts and networks with resourceful residents. It is important to gain an understanding of the other potential mechanisms through which neighborhood effects emerge in Tehran.

Moreover, neighborhood effects research would benefit from more research trying to understand neighborhood selection. Besides, using a larger dataset and comparing the results of this study to other neighborhoods of Tehran, could give a better impression of patterns and routines of people’s activities in the neighborhoods.

A limitation of this research is the lack of information on personal and private life differences which affect residential preferences and restrictions. It would be interesting to analyze more detailed information on the characteristics of social interactions between local residents (e.g., frequency, type, purpose, and location). This research could be seen as a prototype for comprehensive neighborhood research in Tehran to merge spatial and social processes in a specific period.