

# Urban Europe Policy Brief

## Residential Segregation Levels across Europe: Innovative Methods show new Results

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### Introduction

One of the main concerns of contemporary urban policy is residential segregation and its effects on social inclusion. The ResSegr project, funded by JPI Urban Europe, has addressed residential segregation across five European countries, aiming to produce measures of segregation that are comparable across cities and countries, something which previous studies have been unable to generate.

The main shortcomings of previous studies were their lack of suitable data and problems related to the measurement of neighbourhoods, leading to difficulties in evaluating policy initiatives to combat segregation. Contrastingly, ResSegr uses unique geocoded administrative data covering the whole of Sweden, Norway, Denmark,

the Netherlands and Belgium. Our methods circumvent a range of methodological issues that have inhibited comparative research on segregation for decades.

A comparative European perspective is most appropriate, as only in this way, we can understand the different ways in which European societies face segregation, its consequences and its potential effective strategies to combat residential segregation. The five countries involved in ResSegr are relatively comparable in size and are all countries where geocoded register data is available to researchers, which is needed for a thorough and exact comparison.

### Key Message

- This new project is mapping segregation patterns in North-western Europe
- It uses geocoded register data and the nearest neighbours method
- There are surprisingly similar levels of ethnic segregation but different patterns of socioeconomic segregation across countries
- Lowest level of ethnic segregation found in Denmark
- Highest level of socioeconomic segregation found in Stockholm; and the lowest level is found in Amsterdam



## Innovative methods

Our innovation lies in the measurement of neighbourhoods; we do not use administrative areas but the method of nearest neighbours, where each resident has an own neighbourhood with a fixed number of people around him or her. For each neighbourhood, we calculate the share of people with a certain characteristic, such as being a migrant or having a low income. Varying the number of people in a neighbourhood is a way of examining context in a multiscalar way.

We have also been able to use the same definitions of ethnic segregation, poverty and affluence in all countries, which is a major breakthrough. Similar definitions, measures and methods assures true comparability across cities and countries.

## Findings

Our results show that it is very important to include several scales of investigation when measuring segregation. Segregation on a small-scale level, for instance by including the 200 nearest neighbours, might be very high, while large-scale segregation may be moderate. Both types are worth knowing, and lead to different policy outcomes.

Regarding ethnic segregation, we find that the share of non-European migrants in the most immigrant-dense areas in Denmark is much lower than similar areas in Sweden, Belgium and the Netherlands. As an example, in Denmark's most immigrant-dense areas, 22 % of the closest 12,800 neighbours are born in non-European countries, while the corresponding figure for the other countries is 40% or more. For large-scale, migrant-dense neighbourhoods, however, the share of non-European migrant neighbours is similar in Belgium, the Netherlands, and Sweden.

Based on these results, we conclude that ethnic segregation levels across these countries are similar and therefore, they face similar policy challenges. In both migrant-dense and native-dense areas, Swedish neighbourhoods have a higher concentration and Danish neighbourhoods a lower concentration of non-European migrants than the other countries. Thus, Denmark does not have especially high levels of segregation compared to neighbouring countries, which is interesting considering the current 'ghetto' debate.

When we look at socio-economic segregation, we find that segregation of the rich is much larger than segregation of the poor when comparing the capital cities of Norway, Sweden, Denmark and the Netherlands. Macro-scale poverty is most prominent in Stockholm, and quite low in Amsterdam. At micro scales, Stockholm stands out with very high local concentrations of poverty. In such poor neighbourhoods, there are hardly any non-poor, indicating high levels of polarisation. Macro-scale affluence is most pronounced in Oslo, followed by Copenhagen, Stockholm and Amsterdam.

## Policy Implications

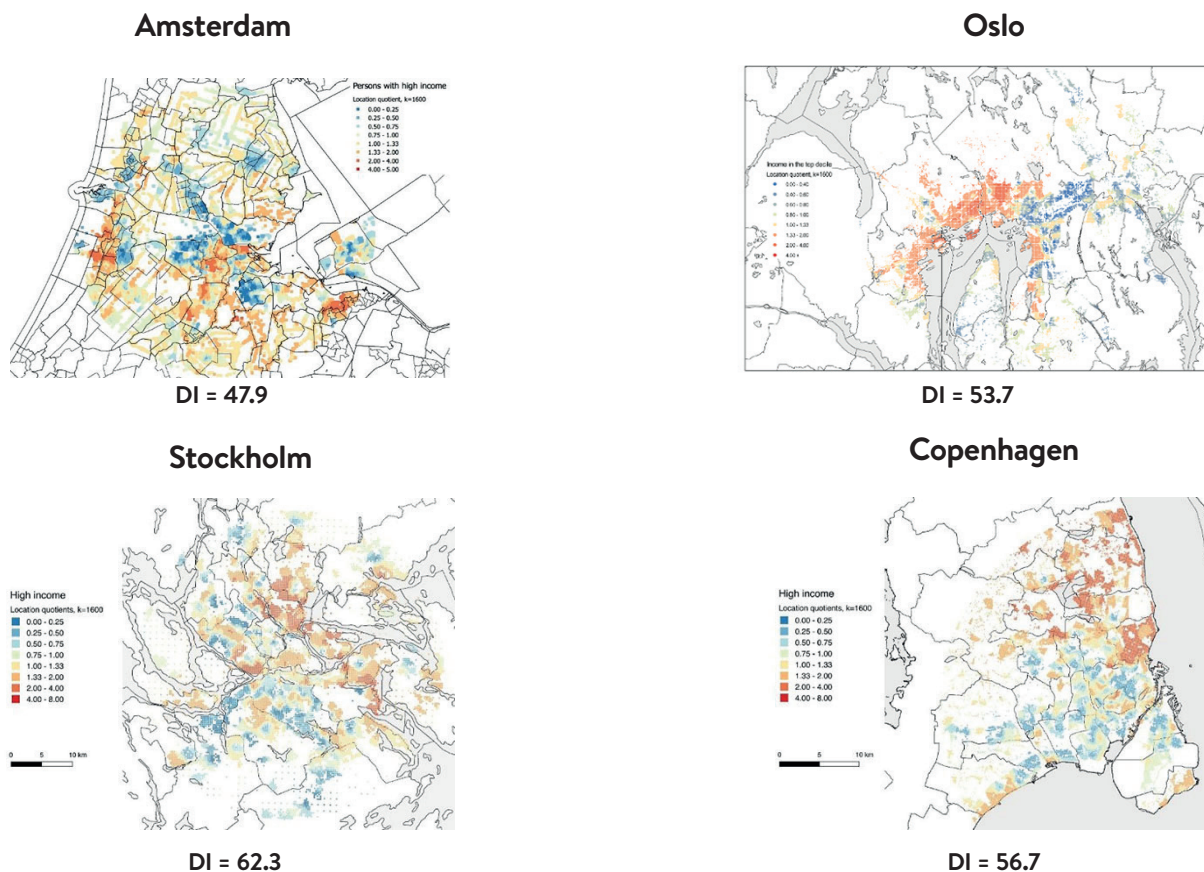
Pronounced residential segregation may lead to fewer opportunities for mixing between natives and migrants, and between rich and poor, and to restricted opportunities related to health, well-being and access to jobs. It is therefore of utmost importance that we have a proper understanding of the extent of residential segregation and how different European cities have similar or different experiences. Our research suggest that four factors play an important role in shaping patterns of residential segregation: welfare regimes, housing market systems, area-based policies, and migration dynamics.

### 1. Welfare Regimes

Firstly, higher levels of wealth distribution are generally linked to lower levels of socio-economic segregation. However, we find that socio-economic segregation in Stockholm is substantially higher than in the other countries and by far the lowest in Amsterdam. This seems to be in contrast to the Swedish universalistic welfare state and its low levels of socio-economic inequality. We must therefore look at other factors as well.

### 2. Housing Markets

Secondly, the structure of the housing market seems to play a more important role in shaping segregation. Liberalisation of the housing market has in most places led to an increased share of home ownership and a decreased share of available rentals. This is directly connected to a decrease in mobility among less affluent groups. A relatively large share of social housing is generally associated with lower levels of socio-economic segregation; which is confirmed for Amsterdam. However, the relationship between the housing system in Norway,



**Fig. 1: Spatial patterns of affluence: Over- and underrepresentation of people with high income (location quotients) among the 1600 nearest neighbours. DI= Dissimilarity index for metropolitan level of segregation.**

Sweden and Denmark and their levels of socio-economic segregation seems more complicated. Norway stands out among the Nordic countries with a very high share of home-ownership and a very low share of public housing, but compared to Stockholm, it has lower levels of socio-economic segregation. In Stockholm, segregation of the poor is very high. The city is characterized by increasing property prices and an increasing share of rentals being transferred to owner-occupied apartments. As a result, low-income groups are forced into multifamily housing estates in suburbs much further away from the city centre. The Danish situation is characterized by a substantial social housing sector in a strongly regulated housing market, which may correspond to the relatively low levels of socio-economic segregation in Copenhagen. Also, refugee placement policies seem to have an effect on segregation patterns.

### 3. Area-based Policies

A third major factor influencing patterns of socio-economic segregation are area-based interventions. Especially interventions directed towards an increasing social mix have been implemented in all cities of the study, with

the aim of decreasing deprivation and increasing social cohesion. Dutch policies might have been more efficient in intervening in deprived areas compared to for instance Sweden, which is a good example of how cities might learn from each other about best practices.

### 4. Migration Dynamics

Fourthly, the role of migration histories is important in explaining segregation patterns. All countries have seen large increases in migration flows throughout the last few decades, but absolute and relative numbers have been by far the largest for Sweden. Ethnic segregation in the countries in this study is highest for the Netherlands on a macro scale, and lowest for Denmark and Norway. On the smallest scale level, ethnic segregation is quite similar across countries, but lowest for Norway. In most studies, many ethnically deprived groups reside in spatially isolated neighbourhoods, in low quality dwellings, and often in areas with high unemployment and low incomes.

## Recommendations

- Policy makers should look at housing policies and area-based initiatives in similar European cities and regions instead of comparing to the US context, which can hardly be compared to the situation in Europe.
- Policies aimed at strengthening the position of low-income groups on the housing market can help to reduce segregation.
- Stimulating further international collaboration between national statistical offices, researchers, politicians and practitioners to enhance knowledge about better methods of residential segregation in order to be better equipped to analyse patterns and determinants of segregation, the effects of segregation, and to examine the policy implications of interventions.
- The interactive maps on our website [www.residentiaalsegregation.org](http://www.residentiaalsegregation.org) should be used by different actors to assess patterns of segregation in places with different political and economic systems and to produce tools for examining inclusion and to counteract social polarization.

## References and further reading

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