Inequality and Urban Diversity: From Different Discourses to a Crucial Connection

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Inequality on the agenda

Capital in the Twenty-First Century
Thomas Piketty
(2014)
Inequality exists

“The richest 5% of the world’s people receive more than 100 times the income of the poorest 5%. In fact, the richest 1% alone receive more income than the poorest half of the world’s people”

(Sernau, 2006, p. 36)
Links to poverty

“... by 2030 around a third of the world’s 9 billion humans could be suffering from multiple deprivation, living in slum-like conditions in the world’s cities”

(Amin, 2013, p. 476)
Another discourse: urban diversity

Living together of socio-economic, ethnic and cultural groups within a specific area (city, neighbourhood)
Aims of this presentation

• Identifying the gap between the literature on urban inequality and urban diversity
• To put some questions marks at the “positive” literature on urban diversity
• To suggest connections between the research agendas on inequality and diversity
Outline

• Introduction: cities as unequal and diverse places
• What is inequality?
• Why is inequality bad?
• Some backgrounds of urban inequality
• Diverse cities
• Inequality, diversity and human agency
• Coping with diversity and inequality
• Conclusions
Cities as unequal and diverse places

• Cities are inherently unequal
• Cities are inherently diverse
• Cities consist of different areas, they are segregated (but also have mixed areas)
• Cities may be more diverse than ever before
• Separate research agendas
• Better to bring these agendas together
What is inequality?

The rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer

(Hamnett, 1996)
Social polarisation

Increasing numbers of lower income and higher income households higher, while the middle category shrinks

Declining middle-class
Why is inequality bad?

• Countries with large inequalities have higher mortality, more mental illness and stress, low trust, more hostility, more racism, more drug use, higher infant mortality rates, etc. (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2010)

• Lower incomes lead to fewer opportunities (housing, buying products, transportation, social contacts, social mobility, etc.)

• Association with bad neighbourhoods (segregation)
Backgrounds of urban inequality

• Global economic restructuring (Mollenkopf & Castells 1991; Fainstein et al. 1992)
• From industrial to service economies (Sassen 1991)
• Always negative effects on the poor (Wacquant)
• Relation with spatial patterns: segregation
• Discourse on the dual city
• Neighbourhood effects?
Diverse cities
Diverse cities

International migration as a main cause of increasing diversity
Super-diversity

"... the dynamic interplay of variables among an increased number of new, small and scattered, multiple-origin, transnationally connected, socio-economically differentiated and legally stratified immigrants who have arrived over the last decade“

(Vertovec 2007, p. 1024)
Hyper-diversity refers to a more intensive diversification of the population, not only in socio-economic, social and ethnic terms, but also with respect to lifestyles, attitudes and activities

(Tasan-Kok, Van Kempen, Raco & Bolt, 2014)
Hyper-diversity means...

- Immense diversification within standard categories (rich/poor, high/low education, immigrant/non-immigrant, old/young, etc.)
- Different lifestyles within these categories
- Different ways of coping with inequality and low incomes
Inequality, diversity and human agency

Urban actors:
“... are not simply puppets dancing to the tune of socio-economic and political logics but rather relatively autonomous agents”

(Beauregard and Haila, 2000)
Inequality and human agency

Global narratives (Piketty, Wilkinson & Pickett and many more) do not predict how (the increasing diversity of) people deal with their environments and organise their daily lives

This is missing link #1
Coping with diversity and inequality

A crucial question:
How do urban residents deal with diversity and inequality?
Diversity is positive

“Contact with, and openness to, the culturally different can broaden our horizon and include the formerly strange in a wider, more inclusive understanding and moral sense”

Van Leeuwen (2010, p. 634)
Diversity is positive

Turks feel comfortable and safe among other Turks
Teahouses as important meeting points

(Ehrkamp, 2010)
Diversity is positive

Conviviality
Civility towards diversity
Commonplace diversity
Unpanicked multiculturalism

(Wessendorf, 2014)
Diversity is positive

“...if you can meet in a short distance Indian, Chinese, African, Latinos communities, I think it can only be a positive factor”

(Milan)
Diversity is positive

“...in my opinion the most beautiful and best feature of District 8 is its diversity. So the foreigners; and I mean, not only the skin colours. Because in Western Europe it is totally accepted that they have different colours, different ethnic backgrounds, and I think this is amazing.”

(Budapest, graphic designer)
Coping with diversity and inequality

A lot of literature sees diversity as something positive or neutral without a focus on inequality and unequal chances

This is missing link #2
Diversity research in neighbourhoods

- It is all quite friendly, nice and positive
- People seem to know and find their way
- There is a diversity dividend (Syrett & Sepulveda)
- Not questioning exclusion
- Hardly attention for the hardship of living on a low income
- Attention for activities, not for non-activities
Slightly different research questions...

- Which groups are able to profit from the diversity in the neighbourhood and which are not?
- Which groups of residents are deliberately excluded from social life in the neighbourhoods and why?
- Does this have something to do with xenophobia, stereotyping and racism?
- How do people cope with income differences in their residential area and beyond?
- Do income differences lead to frustrations among the poor?
- Which people cannot take part in (local) activities, because they simply do not have the financial means?
- Which groups of people are devoid of social contacts, because they do not have the money to go out?
Conclusions

• Research on urban diversity and inequality has proceeded along parallel lines that almost never touch, leading to *missing links*

• Creating these links results in better research and deeper knowledge (how to do that?)

• It is important to find out what people “on the ground” are *able to do* to escape unwanted situations...

• Be careful with *too positive stories* of living in diverse neighbourhoods
Finally

Be aware of *telescopic urbanism*: Research that focuses on cities only as growth machines, as places for prosperity generation, as the place to be for the creative classes:

“*Theirs is a telescopic urbanism, largely numb to the interests of the increasingly disenfranchised and poor majority city*”

(Amin, 2013, p. 479)
Very Finally
Thanks for your attention

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