

Paper Abstract

“ Urban segregation and spatial inequalities in Montevideo”

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Uruguay has a long history of high living standards comparable to many developed countries and has made further progress in improving social conditions during the last decade. On this regard, we emphasize that the recession leading to the 2002 crisis produced severe consequences on Uruguayan society; nevertheless rising employment and labor incomes, as well as public policies and transfers, kept poverty and social problems on a declining trend after 2005 and also reduced income inequality during 2007 - 2014.

However within this context, it is necessary to mention that - even in a society with high relative levels of equity in the Latin-American context -, still prevailing social deficits, feed the cycle of inequality and urban segregation. Furthermore, we assume that urban segregation is not a simple consequence of social inequalities, but is the result of social differentiation within the cities. Certainly, they are processes that feedback the location and identity of a given area, conditioned by its socio-economic structure. Thus, the various forms of segregation represent expressions of the distribution of classes and spatial inequalities in the urban space.

From a sociological perspective, socio-spatial segregation may be characterized as a form of social differentiation, representing the distribution of social classes in the urban space. Likewise, determinants of urban segregation stem from three levels, corresponding to different domains: the collective level of social interaction, the spatial dimension and the symbolic and psychological processes that shape individual behavior.

Social indicators analysis and public perceptions from our field survey in Montevideo, illustrate major trends produced during the last fifteen years in urban lifestyles, which involved significant changes in our cities. On this concern, socio-economic trends have generated long-term effects on social values, behavior, norms, etc. Cultural and consumption patterns, are also related to structural transformations such as economic recovery, social mobility and life strategies; which in turn are closely associated with urban segregation patterns. Moreover, in contrast to other Latin-American cities, we identify as the main components of urban segregation in Montevideo, stratification patterns, education and cultural values.

On this concern, data from household surveys indicate that this city is heterogeneous and complex, with specific characteristics and dynamics. In this context, we argue that while one of the central assumptions about the "global cities", stated that industrial transformations and expansion of services, lead to a dual social structure in levels of employment and income of the population; research conducted in different countries, contrast this bipolarization trend, showing an increase in social inequality between the two extremes of the urban population, but in a fragmented social structure, with a raise of the middle classes in outlying areas. In the light of the case of Montevideo, these hypotheses are confirmed.

In summary, we assume that urban segregation is not a simple consequence of social inequalities, but is the result of social differentiation within the cities. Therefore, the various forms of residential and educational segregation represent manifestations of the distribution of classes and social exclusion in the territory. Likewise, our research findings reflect the interrelation between urban segregation and factors such as economic restructuring, new families arrangements, consumption and stratification patterns, particularly among the middle classes and its distribution in diverse urban areas. On this regard, it may be acknowledged that many social changes and lifestyles prevailing in our cities, promote diverse forms of exclusion and urban segregation.

This Paper analyzes the interrelationship between urban segregation and spatial inequalities. The study was based on an atypical society in Latin America recognized for its "Welfare State" that during the last fifteen years, has consecutively experienced the effects of crisis, economic growth and spatial fragmentation. Our research findings contribute to understand the social processes involving socio-economic trends arisen from quantitative data and qualitative analysis, for the study of segregation and inequalities. In this sense, constitutes an interesting "Case Study" for comparative analysis, within the scope of the ISA RC21 Mexico Conference 2016.

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