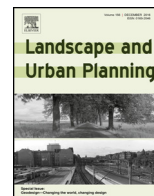




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### Research Paper

# Spatial inequality in the context of city-suburb cleavages–Enlarging the framework of well-being and social inequality

Amnon Frenkel<sup>a,\*</sup>, Emil Israel<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Faculty of Architecture and Town Planning, Technion-Israel Institute of Technology, Haifa 32000, Israel

<sup>b</sup> Samuel Neaman Institute for National Policy Research, Technion-Israel Institute of Technology, Haifa 32000, Israel

### HIGHLIGHTS

- Suburbanites benefit from a greater accumulation of capital forms.
- Social groups in the suburbs benefit from better exposures to life-chances.
- Social space, provides a foundation for the definition of social equality.
- The most influential concept is the institutional-symbolic cultural capital.

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### ABSTRACT

Suburbanization has been accused of imposing a significant cost on spatial equity. The study examined suburbanization (as a form of urban sprawl), not necessarily as the primary driver of fundamental social inequalities, but as an important vehicle by which inequalities might be extended over time and as an important product of fundamental social inequalities. It suggests an innovative measurement that relies upon Amartya Sen and Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical conceptions. The current study suggests that economic, cultural and social forms of capital, formed in an individual's living environment, determine a space's equality of opportunity.

The paper examines this theory by means of a case study that includes a medium sized city and eight of its suburbs located within Israel's central metropolitan region. By using diverse statistical methods, data from 1063 sampled households is analyzed in new indices that measure spatial inequality. The results reveal that suburbanization is related positively to highly unequal patterns of social stratification. Social groups in the suburbs were found to benefit from better life-chances than their urban counterparts. This inequality is positively related to the accumulation of capital forms and the formation of the physical environment. We conclude that urban residents would not be able to fulfill their freedoms to do and to be, a situation that could hurt the distribution of real equal opportunities in space.

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### 1. Introduction

Questions regarding equity and inequality have been discussed occasionally with respect to different spatial processes (Wei, 2015). In recent years, for example, geographers and urban planners have raised allegations of inequality regarding the negative social externalities of suburbanization and urban sprawl. These allegations include the claim that unrestricted suburbanization causes deep social inequality, group segregation and exclusion. The nature of these effects ignited a polemic debate, initially in the United

States, where suburbanization was first created and developed (Williamson, 2010), but also in Europe (Denssen, Driessena, & Sleegers, 2005; Richardson & Bae, 2004) and in Israel (Frenkel & Ashkenazi, 2008). In spite of the fierce arguments, the current research that explores social costs of intense suburbanization suffers from a lack of empirical evidence. More specifically, this body of literature has neglected an analysis of life-chances, equal opportunities, and of social reproduction.

The aim of this paper is to fill the theoretical and empirical lacunae in the study of the effects of suburbanization. It suggests an epistemological framework by which the notion of equal opportunity can be spatially tested and measured. The current study explores the notion of equal opportunity in relation to suburbanization's social effects in democratic and liberal societies. It employs tools and concepts borrowed from political philosophy

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: [amnonf@tx.technion.ac.il](mailto:amnonf@tx.technion.ac.il) (A. Frenkel), [emil@sn.technion.ac.il](mailto:emil@sn.technion.ac.il) (E. Israel).

and the social sciences, applying them in the context of city-suburb cleavages. It relies on the theory that conceptualized the class structure of modern capitalist societies as conceived by the French sociologist, Bourdieu (2001), relating it to Amartya Sen's (1992) 'capabilities' approach. Capabilities are regarded as life-chances (Robeyns, 2005a, 2005b), while Bourdieu's characterization of class structures acts here as the social and spatial conditions in which capabilities are formed. Thus, social equality in this article will be defined as equality between person's life-chances. The paper examines this suggested theory, by means of a regional case study that includes a medium-sized city and eight of its suburbs located within the boundaries of Israel's central metropolitan region.

## 2. Suburbanization and social equalities

Suburbanization and sprawl in the developed world reflect low-density patterns of development of residential areas (Frenkel & Ashkenazi, 2008). This phenomenon, according to economic theories, is the product of rational decisions of individuals resulting from the interaction of various variables: demographic, socio-economic, level of urbanization and spatial location (Brueckner, 2000). Factors encouraging cities' decline and the proliferation of suburbia include changes in lifestyle and consumer preferences, along with deteriorating urban living conditions. The widely described dynamics that characterize suburbanization reflect the ongoing motivation of social groups to create homogeneous living environments, and to avoid socially-integrated ecosystems like cities (Williamson, 2010).<sup>1</sup>

The study of inequality under conditions of urban sprawl has grown in popularity recently amongst those interested in understanding, measuring and managing the outcomes of suburbanization (Ewing, Hamidi, Grace, & Wei, 2016). Various studies have produced several claims that suburbanization comes at the cost of social equity (Jargowsky, 2001; Ledwith & Clark, 2007; Masked for blind review, 2015). There are those that show that when more affluent populations migrate from cities to suburban fringes this results in extreme distributive inequality and social segregation (e.g., Freilich & Peshoff, 1997; Jargowsky, 2001; Williamson, 2010). In Amartya Sen's (1992) terminology, this migration implies that the deep social cleavage between cities and suburbs might have concealed deep inequality in human capabilities to flourish and prosper (Masked for blind review, 2015).

The fact that sprawl is associated with a reduction in personal liberties is not a surprise, as research shows that sprawl within metropolitan areas diminishes trust and social interaction between communities (Freeman, 2001; Leyden, 2003; Rahn et al., 2009). Some speculate that big and ethnically diverse cities reduce social solidarity and, therefore, social capital (Putnam, 2007), while the homogenous conglomerations of the elite at the edges of the metropolitan region seems to produce strengthened social ties (Brueckner & Largey, 2008).<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> It is worth to mention that along suburbanization, urban areas within their metropolitan context experienced a renewed interest and redevelopment (Lees, Slater, & Wiley, 2008). Counter sprawl, urban renewal and gentrification were well witnessed during the last decades within metropolitan region across the developed world. These re-urbanization trends were explained by globalization and the formation of new urban life styles of socially and spatially mobile young groups seeking to be distinct from the suburban middle class mainly by relocating in the inner cities (Lees, Bang-Shin, & Lopez-Morales, 2015; Brown-Saracino, 2010). Although alluring, this 'resurgent city' optimism was critically studied, pointing to the deep inequalities that accompany cities' prosperity (Lees et al., 2015; Hamnett, 2003). All in all, it seems that the new construction in cities does not match that in the suburbs, as central cities continue to decline (Beauregard, 2009).

<sup>2</sup> This theory inspired a body of study that refines or criticizes Putnam's (2007) observations. For a comprehensive review of these research, see: Portes and Vickstrom, 2011.

Although the exploration of suburbanization and urban decline has created a large body of studies, not many of them empirically address issues of social inequality. Contemporary scholars tend to use economic indices in their efforts to measure spatial-social gaps and the costs of urban sprawl (e.g., Foster-Bey et al., 2001; Jargowsky, 2001; Persky & Wiewel, 2000), thus overlooking comprehensive issues of life-chances, equal opportunities, and social reproduction. This seems to impose a serious impediment to potential attempts in measuring and understanding the social externalities of suburbanization. Using Pierre Bourdieu's and Amartya Sen's concepts of class structures and capabilities could be beneficial, as their integration enlarges the traditional assortment of economic indices or variables used in most of the studies that explored the social costs of urban sprawl.

## 3. Sen's capabilities and Bourdieu's forms of capital as a theoretical framework

In order to measure spatial inequality in the context of city-suburb cleavages, the current study adopts the concept of inequality borrowed from Sen's (1992) political philosophy regarding 'capabilities' and 'functionings', along with Pierre Bourdieu's (1985) theory of capital forms. Under the suggested framework, equality of opportunities implies a balance in the production, accumulation and transmission of different forms of capital. The accumulation and intergenerational transfer pattern of capital forms in certain urban entities, such as a suburb, alongside the erosion and injury of the ability to produce these forms in another urban entity, such as a city, may impair social equality of opportunities (Fig. 1). In the following paragraphs, this theory is explained.

Capabilities are opportunities given to people to choose the lifestyle they want in order to live and function effectively in different social fields (Robeyns, 2005a, 2005b). In Sen's definition, equality of opportunities does not address functions (or results) per se, but rather the ability to obtain them. The liberty to be, to do, and to accomplish one's aspirations (i.e., life-chances) are thus the political goal of this liberal theory (Robeyns & Brighouse, 2010). Accordingly, human capabilities are the result of a person's social environment (e.g., social institutions, social norms, traditions and the behavior of others in society), the physical environment in which he or she lives and internal and external personal endowments such as one's mental and physical attributes (Anderson, 2010; Robeyns, 2005b).

Based on these arguments, the means that enable a person to gain liberties (opportunities) are constituted from a person's bundles of capital (i.e., social space). The notion of capital forms is derived from Pierre Bourdieu's theory, which offers an explanation for the complexity of social stratification (1985, 2001). For Bourdieu, society is a network of fields (e.g., arts, religion, academe and science) that are structured systems of social positions anchored in particular forms of power or capital, whether social (social networks and connections), economic (material wealth) or cultural (knowledge of the arts, good education). However, capital forms have spatial substance, as they pronounce human interactions that exist in a certain place and time (Masked for blind review, 2015). They signify a set of strategies aimed at establishing and maintaining social divisions, classification, and distinction (Marom, 2014). These strategies eventually become physical in nature, as they organize space into communities where people share similar social status. It is assumed that suburbanization likewise shapes and amends the urban social space.

People gather into different spatial configurations, as they realize their potential of their various capital forms. As such, one can assume a polarized social space (i.e., the social class ladder) in which

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