
The Broadening and Mystified Margins of Urban Deprivation¹

Thomas Maloutas

Harokopio University and National Centre for Social Research (EKKE)

› **Abstract** *The focus of this paper is on the changing political perception of housing deprivation and neighbourhood decay in Europe, and particularly on recent changes in the new landscape produced by the sovereign debt crisis in Southern Europe. I mainly elaborate on the ways in which urban deprivation is mystified, as egalitarian discourses disappear and liberal positions become so hegemonic as to appear common sense to increasingly larger audiences.*

› **Key Words** *Southern Europe; urban deprivation; housing segregation; migration*

Introduction

Unequal housing conditions and residential areas of very different social composition and quality are certainly not new; they are older than capitalism and they are part and parcel of unequal societies. Capitalism has merely changed the ways socio-spatial inequalities are reproduced by making them the outcome of economic processes rather than the outcome of more open forms of social violence. Capitalism also changed the geography of deprivation, as the housing question and segregation developed especially in rapidly growing industrial cities. By ‘urban deprivation’ I mean the combination of housing deprivation – ranging from homelessness to housing conditions significantly below the national or regional average – and neighbourhood

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characteristics that have an obvious negative impact on the living conditions and social mobility prospects of the population.² The deprivation I refer to is, therefore, a combination of bad housing conditions and segregation.

Urban deprivation has been the subject of debate between liberals and socialists since the early 19th century (Lees, 1985). On one side, cities were seen as expressions of the egotistical and the profit-oriented, breeding inequality and leading to acute and wide-scale deprivation among the working class masses; on the other side, cities were praised for the role they played in economic, political and cultural development, where deprivation of the working classes was the inevitable price industrial societies had to pay for economic development that would eventually profit all of their members.

Many things have changed since the early 19th century, including technology, production processes, work organisation, regulation regimes and social structures, while class relations have been constantly remodelled by local and global events. These changes have produced an increasing complexity that has rendered urban deprivation potentially mystifying, especially as class divisions have become increasingly intricate and cross-cut by ethnic, racial and gender divisions. In this sense, much has changed – from the greedy landlords of the 19th century to the current sub-prime housing loan crisis, and from the parallel formation of wide suburban middle class areas and inner-city slums to the much more intricate and localised processes of socio-spatial partition, exemplified by gentrification, gated-communities, and areas of deprivation and social exclusion.

The mechanisms leading to housing deprivation and segregation have become increasingly complex, but the main parameters of urban deprivation remain essentially the same. Deprivation depends, first of all, on the inequalities reproduced in the labour market and the impact on the social structure of unequally accumulated wealth; secondly on the quantity, quality and spatial distribution of the housing stock; and thirdly, on the dominant modes of housing allocation in terms of the degree of decommodification, as well as the degree to which direct or indirect discrimination (based on non-economic features such as race or citizenship) plays a role in access to housing.

² The question of neighbourhood or area effects is quite complex if the specific spatial effect has to be grasped, i.e. excluding personal and family characteristics and their impact on neighbourhood choice. For a summary, see Buck (2001), Ellen and Turner (2003), Lupton (2003) and Maloutas (2012).

The Mystification of Urban Deprivation

Globalisation, at least in some accounts, has simplified deprivation patterns because it has boosted inequalities. According to the influential global city thesis (Friedman and Wolff, 1982; Mollenkopf and Castells, 1991; Sassen, 1991), it has brought about social and spatial polarisation, while following the quartered or layered city thesis (Marcuse, 1989 and 2002) it has increased the social and spatial partitioning of urban space, though in a more complex way than the dual (polarisation) mode. Some authors, like Sassen (1991), consider deprived groups as part of the functional logic of the new socioeconomic structure, while others, like Wacquant (2008), insist that increasingly large numbers of people are permanently marginalised in the labour market, and consequently within the housing market, a position that Sassen also later adopted (Sassen, 2011). In spite of this divergence, there seems to be agreement on the assumption that problems at the lower end of the social hierarchy are increasing.

However, although the situation may be becoming clearer according to globalisation theorists – in the sense of increasing socioeconomic distances and deepening social dichotomies – urban deprivation is becoming more mystified politically, as neoliberal ideas gain increasing dominance and egalitarian discourses become disused to the point of political irrelevance. With the dominance of neoliberal policies of social regulation and the prolonged crisis of the welfare state, poor neighbourhoods tend to become increasingly problematic due to the lack of resources allocated to meeting local social needs. The constant prioritisation of growth and productivity over social objectives has particularly affected those neighbourhoods that lack the means to function within the standards of their broader urban surroundings.

Neighbourhood hierarchies reflected in the uneven spatial distribution of social groups in urban spaces have become more pronounced with the shortcomings of social services that might otherwise function as equalisers. Neighbourhood hierarchies embody segregation and they contribute – to a greater or lesser degree depending on context – to reproducing social inequality and discrimination through the positive or negative neighbourhood effects they exercise on the population. What appears from an analytical perspective as a rather simple and clear depiction of socio-spatial inequality is buried, however, beneath a fivefold ‘mystification’ that obscures the social nature of the problem.

Levels of mystification

The *first level of mystification* involves the conceptualisation of neighbourhood problems as spatial rather than social. This takes us back to the Chicago School tradition and the substitution of social dimensions with spatial ones, based on the

assumption that the latter can be effectively used as a surrogate in the study of the former.³ In this way, features that are inherently associated with particular types of space, rather than with the underlying social processes, are attributed to different types of spaces – like inner cities in the Anglophone world or the French *banlieues*. Spatializing the problem means putting the question of social inequality aside. The focus on problematic spaces (and groups) may be witnessing social concern, but at the same time, it isolates the problem from the wider, or ‘mainstream’, society that is assumed to be working properly and thus not responsible for producing socio-spatial deprivation (Préteceille, 2012). Spatializing the problem also means inviting solutions for the improvement of the space itself rather than the problematic social content of that space. Spatialization suits a neoliberal approach in the sense that social (inequality) issues can be subjugated to policies of local development that are assumed to be socially beneficial in an undefined future.

The *second level of mystification* involves the consideration of neighbourhood problems in terms of a legal rather than a social issue. This involves a moralist and normative approach with a focus on what ought to be happening rather than on what really happens. When neighbourhoods with acute social problems are primarily identified as places of deviance and anomie, social inequality is put aside by bringing to the fore the rules and norms that should be observed by everyone on the basis of their presumed equal legal rights (and obligations), and on the assumption that, whatever the problems, rules have to be observed by everybody. The receding concern for social inequality in the name of legal equality invites reasoning in terms of individual responsibility and promotes solutions that involve the imposition of adequate behaviour on those that fail to act as they are expected and as they ought to. Neoliberal discourses are inclined to stress individual responsibility and obligations, favouring the lower cost of social regulation through workfare and zero-tolerance rather than welfare entitlements.

The *third level of mystification* involves prioritising the aesthetic over the social dimension of deprivation. Orderly, clean, pleasant and safe neighbourhoods, with some flavour of authenticity and attraction for potential new residents, form the neighbourhood model generally aspired to, rather than being seen merely as agreeable residential spaces that only the middle and upper-middle classes can

³ ‘It is because geography, occupation, and all the other factors which determine the distribution of population determine so irresistibly and fatally the place, the group, and the associates with whom each one of us is bound to live that spatial relations come to have, for the study of society and human nature, the importance which they do. It is because social relations are so frequently and so inevitably correlated with spatial relations; because physical distances so frequently are, or seem to be, the indexes of social distances, that statistics have any significance whatever for sociology. And this is true, finally, because it is only as social and psychical facts can be reduced to, or correlated with, spatial facts that they can be measured at all’ (Park 1916 [1957], p.177).

afford. Lower social groups are usually excluded from such spaces, the aesthetic of which often functions as a symbolic social barrier. Improving, for example, neighbourhood aesthetics in gentrified spaces is, therefore, at the same time an act of social appropriation in the Foucauldian sense of imposing meaning on space through dominant discourses. The transformation of the 'taste of necessity to a taste of luxury' (Krase, 2005, pp.205-8) aestheticizes poverty; it removes its contentious elements and retains only the picturesque surface, and it promotes Disneyfied spaces of gentrification (Zukin, 1995; Sorkin, 1996) following the middle class aversion to, and fear of, real cities and their aesthetic. By dissimulating social appropriation behind aesthetic improvement, it is the aesthetics of poverty, rather than poverty itself, that neighbourhoods seek to relieve themselves from. Neoliberal urban policies can use aesthetic goals to legitimate commodification, competitiveness and private initiative, as well as to relegate social objectives to a lower priority level.

The fourth – and increasingly powerful – level of mystification involves considering local problems of deprivation as economic rather than social. This usually takes the form of either seeing neighbourhoods in difficulty as opportunities for investment – regardless of, and often in spite of, their social content – or considering investment for their improvement as ineffective and, therefore, as wasted. The liberal economic doctrine considers social spending to be inefficient, based on the assumption that it often encourages passive behaviour and dependence on welfare. The social legitimacy of this view stems from the broader liberal assumption that any investment that immediately contributes to increasing productivity and growth will create wealth that will eventually trickle down to all parts of society; such investment should therefore replace direct social spending. Downplaying social inequality in favour of economic necessity leads to a situation in which social objectives are systematically de-prioritized and de-legitimated, and everything is subjected to an economic rationale. This becomes even more pronounced in situations of financial crisis, like the current sovereign debt crisis.

The fifth level of mystification – and the one directly related to migration and demographic change – involves considering neighbourhood problems as cultural rather than social. Angela Merkel has declared multiculturalism to have failed, and David Cameron has followed suit, while Sarkozy and Berlusconi were actively on the same track. Countries that used to be quite open to the 'Other' – like most North European countries and Australia – are changing their attitude, while support for parties and groups that promote intolerance and xenophobia is growing fast. The changing political attitudes of conservative parties and electorates (often not only conservative ones) towards alterity should be interpreted, in my view, in light of two aspects and functions of alterity that are, in part, contradictory.

The first is alterity's function as a dividing, and ultimately as an individualizing, principle. The postmodernist legitimation of difference and hybridity and, in fact, the acknowledgment of increasingly sub-divisible collective identities has nurtured the capacity of social and political systems to break free from the collective identities, once fundamental to the modernist project, and the associated social rights that culminated in the development of the welfare state. In this way, the broad collective identities, around which social rights were anchored, were undermined by the diverse and sometimes contradictory identities they carried internally; age, race, gender or ethnicity have had a dismantling effect on class identity and politics; this should theoretically be part of a continuous deconstruction of collective identities, a process that leads to the liberal Thatcherite ideal of society as the mere aggregation of individuals free to compete with each other, and rational in terms of the selfish disposition that drives their competitive choices. In this sense, the story of the "invention of alterity" (Tsoukalas, 2010) may be read not only as a step towards emancipation and mutual understanding, but as a device that, in emphasising difference, has ultimately served to undermine collective organization and action. In spite of the theoretical possibilities for different political outcomes offered by intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991; Ritzer, 2007), neoliberalism has been feeding (on) this dismantling fragmentation of national and class identities for several decades, generally prevailing as the way to restructure social and political systems.

The second, opposing facet of alterity is its function in re-forming collective identities, especially that of the 'not-Other' as the embodiment of claims on resources attributed to the Other. The increasing political significance of the 'not-Other' within national and sub-national boundaries attests to the fact that it is now the turn of multicultural identities to come under severe attack – not as in the assimilationist ethos of French republicanism, but as a redundancy and alleged threat on multiple levels to the local not-Otherness. However, not all collective identities associated with alterity are coming under attack; some have become mainstreamed. At risk are those identities whose collective organization, action or mere presence has become an impediment to the neoliberal project in claiming resources, despite the fact that such claims usually fall far short of claims for true equity and redistributive justice. Multiculturalism becomes a problem when it demotes the social rights of vulnerable groups that need resources for all sorts of social services and affirmative action, irrespective of economic effectiveness. To attack multiculturalism today is not to negate difference; on the contrary, it is to consider difference as incompatible with the local 'not-Otherness' and to deny on that basis the value of investing in large segments of today's societies, using growing political support for crisis-stricken electorates and the political weakness of the groups under attack. The attack on multiculturalism is in fact deepening the attack on the welfare state, as cheaper solutions in the form of intolerant police-states are sought instead.

On the Contextual Boundaries of Urban Deprivation

The rest of the paper deals with differences in the form and approach of urban deprivation in different contexts. There are, first of all, specific contextual limits to the way I have discussed urban deprivation up to this point. The way I presented the character of urban deprivation and its multiple levels of mystification is, to a large extent, Eurocentric. Housing deprivation and problematic neighbourhoods are approached quite differently on the other side of the Atlantic, for instance.

A comparison of approaches to urban deprivation between Europe and the US

The contextual specificity of approaches to urban deprivation becomes clear in the policies that are supposed to deal with neighbourhood problems. These approaches are deeply affected by the ideological substratum on which they stand. On the American side the concept of segregation is based on the dominance of economic liberalism, personal merit and on a very high rate of residential mobility.⁴ From the era of the Chicago School's *natural areas* onwards, high rates of social and residential mobility led to an intense sifting and sorting of the housing market, and the relation of people to place became increasingly fluid and temporary. People and place formed two distinct, though interrelated, hierarchies: place according to quality, accessible to people according to merit. As the market became dominant in the allocation of housing, the belief became widespread that where people live reflects where they deserve to live, and hence that whatever residential segregation exists should not be considered a social problem.

Racial discrimination, however, has distorted the image of the meritocratic system, which prevents potentially deserving African Americans (and others) from accessing better places, while cracks in the market have created barriers for deserving poor (including Whites). Following the same ideological doctrine, segregation becomes an equal opportunity problem limited to the lower social strata. Policies devised to tackle segregation aim to provide opportunities for escape from bad areas rather than trying to improve the areas; people may be moved to less segregated residential areas or to non-segregated schools. Policies like Moving to Opportunity,⁵ the HOPE program [www.thehopeprogram.org/] and school-bussing fall within such a conceptual and contextual frame.

⁴ Comparative data show that cities of the New World were the champions of residential mobility in the 1980s with annual rates between 15 and 20 percent. European cities had much lower rates of between around 5 and 10 percent (Knox and Pinch, 2006, p.252). More recent figures for Southern Europe show rates clearly below the European average (Allen et al., 2004).

⁵ MTO is a pilot project in the US, the rationale of which is to move people from downgraded social housing projects and control how they fare in less disadvantaged surroundings (Goering and Feins 2003; Orr et al., 2003). As a pilot program it had a rather limited size and impact, while its basic procedures in terms of choice of households to be supported and the fate of those left behind, are questionable. According to Lupton (2003) such a policy rationale would be out of context in the UK.

The tendency in the US to dissociate, in policy terms, the fates of people and places is certainly likely to be related to the contradictory coexistence of a long history of racial discrimination – which flagrantly obstructed access to the land and housing markets for a substantial part of the population – with the high rates of social and spatial mobility for the numerous others that participated in the American dream. Thus, there is an important difference between US and European constructions of segregation as a social and political problem in the continued presence of racialised segregation in the former. This called for the liberalisation of residential mobility for racial groups victimized by discrimination, and their unrestricted participation in the housing market was an obvious improvement over normative or otherwise imposed discriminatory residential space allocation based on racial hierarchy (Massey and Denton, 1993). At some point, the free movement of individuals to any residential locations they could afford became both a recommendation of economic liberalism and a progressive claim of the civil rights movement. However, this liberalisation of residential mobility, taken in conjunction with urban structures inherited from a long period of racial discrimination and the impact of economic restructuring, has led, according to Wilson (1987, pp.49-56), to further segregation of the African-American poor in inner-city ghettos with increasing levels of unemployment and social disorganisation, as Black middle- and working class households relocated.

In Europe, on the contrary, concerns about segregation were based on the negative impact of freely relocating individuals and households in land and housing markets that produce an uneven spatial distribution of social groups and, at the same time, uneven living conditions and life prospects in different localities. The major policy response in Western and Northern Europe has been extensive investment in the social housing sector that, for some decades at least, has countered segregation, particularly where social housing was aimed at a wide range of beneficiaries in an ecumenical welfare state spirit.

The perception of segregation is substantially different in the European city where the life itineraries of people are much more tied to place, regardless of whether they become attached to them or feel entrapped. This is expressed on a practical level in a much lower level of residential mobility and is mainly founded on the comparatively reduced ideological influence of economic liberalism during long periods. The quality of residential areas is a constitutive part of social equality in the French republican ethos, and of the socialist tradition and social rights in Scandinavian welfare societies, and segregated areas represent, therefore, a problem for which organised societies must provide answers. Socially-mixed residential areas have resulted from policies founded on strong welfare states in Western and Northern Europe (Musterd and Ostendorf, 1998; van Kempen 2002; Musterd *et al.*, 2006).

Häussermann (2005) claims that the interventionist welfare state originates from the autonomy of European bourgeoisies in the 19th century and represents the main legacy of the European city. Scandinavian cities have long been accustomed to the regulation of both labour and housing markets in ways that avoid segregation. Framing segregation in this way has lent itself to policies targeted at places separate to people, and is, at least in part, the basis on which area-based policies were developed to combat segregation in several countries around Europe (Burgers and Vranken, 2003, cited in Musterd and Murie, 2006). In certain countries, namely France, the UK and the Netherlands, considerable emphasis is placed on anti-segregation policies; this relates to social issues and a strong social unrest that is considered the result of malignant neighbourhood effects. However, the emphasis on area-based policies and particularly on social mixing in a receding welfare state can be associated with policies that shift the focus from social to spatial issues, legitimate different objectives – such as gentrification (Lees, 2008) – and may eventually lead to increased segregation.

Contextual diversity in terms of the way segregation is perceived is also an issue within Europe. In Southern European cities, for example, segregation has only recently appeared on the political agenda. Relatively low segregation indices, infrequent social unrest related to segregation, family-centred social organisation, and very low residential mobility are all likely to be part of the explanation for this. In the family-centred welfare regimes of this region, people's life trajectories are tied even more strongly to their place of residence than in Western or Northern Europe, but not because of dedicated policies and increased public responsibility; on the contrary, public intervention is much less developed and legitimated, and is expressed in less direct ways; there is less public housing, among other things (Allen *et al.*, 2004). Families cater for the needs of their weakest members and, since family networks have to coalesce in space in order to be effective, the reduced residential mobility that results also tends to reduce the visibility of segregation as a social problem. Urban deprivation and intercultural cohabitation in the neighbourhood are, therefore, quite different issues when addressed in the European or the US context, but also in different European sub-contexts.

The South European Context in Crisis

Southern Europe, with Greece in the leading role, is lately at the forefront of international interest due to the sovereign debt crisis. The countries of this region currently operate on a discipline-and-punish mode, coerced by financial markets and dominant political powers in the EU into following specific policies irrespective of the political colour of their governments. This disciplining, part of the movement towards a specific version of capitalist regulation, is undoubtedly less savage than

that experienced some decades ago in Latin America; it bears some similarity to the transition to unleashed market economies in East European countries in the 1990s in terms of discourses urging economic efficiency and in terms of the quest for political legitimation found in reinstating democratic institutions in Eastern Europe and in doing away with clientelism in Southern Europe.

The attack of financial markets on this region is probably aiming higher; by disciplining the periphery of the European Union and the Eurozone, increased pressure is put on social policies and the welfare state at the European core. For instance, the sovereign debt in Greece is very large and perhaps unsustainable, but the policies prescribed to surmount it involve the usual assortment of remedies: privatization at any cost, reduction of the public sector, reduction of labour costs, reduction of labour protection, etc. For the time being, such measures have repeatedly been implemented and their impact has been only to deepen the recession by producing chain reactions due to decreasing demand. This does not seem, however, to be an issue for the lending institutions and their controlling bodies. Prescribed policies must be observed in order to secure the flow of the loan money. The recipe appears to make more sense in ideological and political terms than in economic terms.

Southern Europe is actually caught up in what is perhaps the final crisis of clientelist regimes, and their legacies. In the early post-war period clientelism was linked to authoritarian and often dictatorial right-wing regimes that favoured their political supporters and oppressed all others. Following political democratization in the 1970s, clientelism was no longer restricted to right-wing parties and involved much larger political audiences within bi-partisan democracies. The 'democratization' of clientelism often brought concessions to broad social categories, including on the lower social strata. The ideological dominance of neoliberalism led to the perception of these regimes as economically inefficient and corrupt, but such accusations mainly target social concessions made under these regimes.

Before the current crisis, the impact of which is still developing, urban deprivation in Southern Europe had evolved in specific ways and with specific patterns. Housing deprivation and segregation issues more generally had not, at least until recently, figured as a frequent or prominent concern on social and political agendas. There are several reasons for this.

Urbanization in this region has been much less dependent on industrial development –except in some core areas of Spain and Northern Italy – than in the classic industrial city. The spectacular population growth in large Southern European cities after the Second World War was triggered by *push* rather than *pull* factors. In most, there was an absence of the rationale and organizational patterns that heavy industry in particular imposed on the industrial city, whether in the form of activity

zoning, organized housing provision near factories for the workers, different transport infrastructures or services related to maintaining and reproducing the work force (Allen *et al.*, 2004). The lack of corporate-type requirements among large numbers of workers with specific skills and in specific places has reduced the social and political pressure to organize amenities in the classic welfare state form, and has facilitated governments opting instead for less comprehensive regulation and less expensive solutions for state funds. Authoritarian regimes and clientelism have regulated the process of urbanization, steering it away from welfarist approaches and towards partisan, discriminating, individualised and family-centred practices of welfare provision.

The outcome of these processes in Southern Europe is the residual welfare state model (Ferrera, 1996; Mingione, 1996; Allen *et al.*, 2004), with housing probably its most characteristic element. Social housing has been poorly developed with very low rates for social rented housing in particular (Allen *et al.*, 2004). New settlers in urban areas have often been left to devise their own housing solutions, encouraged to do so through self-promotion, haphazard construction or through affordable private sector schemes. In spite of the diversity of housing provision schemes in the region, the outcome has been a comparatively high rate of homeownership, which has reduced residential mobility, facilitated the establishment and reproduction of family and common origin self-help networks, and ultimately reduced the formation of socially segregated areas. It has also prevented homelessness to a large extent, as the majority of vulnerable individuals have been protected by their family network.

Reduced residential mobility in Southern Europe has also contributed to the gradual improvement of traditional working class areas through the social mobility of their residents who have not followed the expected pattern of moving to a better area as soon as their social status improved; examples can be seen in traditional working class areas in Madrid and Athens (Leal, 2004; Maloutas, 2004). The relative spatial fixity of the socially mobile – due primarily to the local social networks they depend upon – and the absence of a massive concentration of out-dated social housing projects has prevented most South European cities from developing marked pockets of segregation and deprivation. This is not only true for the first post-war decades of intensive urbanization; it is also true for the last twenty years as Southern Europe has become host to a significant wave of immigration from the South and the East.

Due to the structure of the housing market and the spatial distribution of the different types of housing stock, immigrants with low means have not been compelled to congregate in space and thus enhance segregation. In most cases they have had to rely on the private rented sector, as no alternatives were present. The outcome of this is that the significant inflow of economically deprived people

was broadly distributed within the urban tissue rather than being isolated in certain parts of it. Segregation indices for migrants in most large South European cities are rather low (Arbaci, 2007 and 2008; Maloutas, 2007; Arbaci and Malheiros, 2010). Indices for certain small ethnic groups are sometimes misleadingly high, however; ethnic groups tend to be spatially concentrated according to how they access the housing market, but also according to the spatial proximity of relatives and friends. The classic segregation index of dissimilarity measures the degree of this spatial concentration, which is not the negative aspect of segregation. Small immigrant groups are almost always a minority in their neighbourhood, which means that, even though their members can be found only in some parts of the city, they are never isolated from the rest of the population and they hardly ever represent a majority in the neighbourhoods where they live.

Migrants in Southern Europe, at least during the 1990s, were not only spatially diffused within cities, but also found niches in local socioeconomic structures, even though – contrary to the migration waves of previous periods – migration was largely based on being driven away from their countries of origin rather than being invited by the labour markets of Southern Europe. In fact, immigrants have tended to gain employment in low status jobs left over by locals in the context of relatively high social mobility; they have found employment in construction, agriculture and tourism, as well as in personal services, especially domestic work, elderly care and childcare – in a residual welfare state context replacing the traditional domestic roles of local women as these latter were increasingly taking part in the workforce. Their low wage requirements and the frequent lack of social security within the black economy made them suitable workers for small employers and family businesses, but eventually, as their numbers grew, they became a further problem for the already burdened pension funds and social services.

Urban Deprivation in Southern Europe

Southern European societies are experiencing growing difficulties as their clientelist and family-centred welfare systems become increasingly unsustainable. The ageing of the local population and the record-low birth-rate in Spain, Italy and Greece since the 1980s have impacted on the age structure of the labour market, and on the need for social services (in a context where they were traditionally underdeveloped), and have increased the pressure on the family-centred welfare system which increasingly lacks the human resources for its own reproduction. At the same time, South European societies have been experiencing a standing still or even a drawing back in the social mobility of the middle social strata for some time now; this is reflected both in the difficulties of its reproduction and the falling status of jobs, once considered prestigious, after a period of precipitated growth.

It is characteristic of these trends that, in Spain between the mid 1990s and the late 2000s, it was the salaries of professionals that increased the least within the occupational hierarchy (Dominguez *et al.*, 2012). This pressure on middle class reproduction has increased antagonism with regard to important resources such as employment, housing and local services (like schools), and has made it more difficult for the lower social strata – and even more so for immigrants – to compete. In this sense, the pressure for relative deprivation has increased, while absolute deprivation may also be on the agenda as unemployment rises sharply, small businesses close, and middle class resources, which provided immigrant employment, become restricted.

A further problem, with a negative impact on urban deprivation, is the changing profile of immigration in Southern Europe: from Eastern European or Latin American immigrants to political refugees from war zones and areas in the broader Middle-East and Africa. This means that immigrant groups increasingly have greater needs and fewer personal resources (including language skills and education), and therefore pose a greater challenge for integration, while at the same time the acute public finance crisis affects the region and reduces the means available to facilitate integration.

Moreover, if the low degree of spatial isolation is the bright side of class and ethno-racial segregation in Southern Europe, there is also a dark side in the fact that deprivation, especially for immigrant groups, may be quite significant, even without the support of intense segregation (Arbaci, 2008; Arbaci and Malheiros, 2010). Housing of very different quality may exist in the same area, the same street or even the same building, and households in the same area may be using completely different commercial and social services (such as schools), which may further differentiate living conditions and life prospects in decisive ways. Social and spatial distances are far from corresponding.

In this sense, the management of deprived neighbourhoods in Southern Europe seems to become more difficult as new immigrant groups have greater needs and fewer resources, while public funds are coming under severe stress at the same time. This negative dynamic greatly facilitates the mystification of neighbourhood problems, as social issues become secondary to the need for economic recovery, and may easily be attributed to such things as the ‘incompatible’ cultural diversity of immigrants.

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