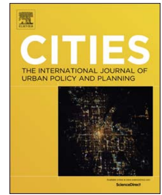
Cities 91 (2019) 23–28

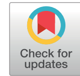
Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Cities

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/cities



The (ir)relevance of economic segregation. Jane Jacobs and the empirical and moral implications of an unequal spatial distribution of wealth



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ABSTRACT

Cities are economically segregated to various degrees. Segregation translates into greater homogeneity of neighborhoods: the rich and the poor usually occupy separate parts of the city. In response, urban-renewal policies often focus on creating an economically more heterogeneous neighborhood composition by replacing lower-income with middle-income households. Arguably with little or mixed success, as those policies seem to focus more on places (i.e. neighborhoods) than on the people who live there. In this regard, Jane Jacobs writings on "slums" and the conditions that favor "unslumming" processes are illuminating. Although in the last decades the word slum has gotten out of fashion (at least in developed countries), her contributions remain relevant in order to address the moral and empirical implications of an unequal spatial distribution of wealth. The paper discusses three aspects of Jacobs' writings and develops them further into three reflections on current ideas about segregation and policies trying to combat that. It concludes that debates and policies may benefit from 1) less focus on the economic *differences* between neighborhoods (and more on the living standard of each neighborhood and the people who live there); 2) more attention to the neighborhood population's own regenerating and development potential rather than the negative effects of segregation processes on neighborhood residents; and 3) a dynamic rather than static view on the neighborhood.

1. Introduction

Jane Jacobs has written extensively on the issue of "slums" – economically homogenous and poor neighborhoods – in cities and the way slum neighborhoods can reinvent themselves and "unslum" without large-scale government intervention that tries to coerce neighborhoods into economic heterogeneity (Callahan & Ikeda, 2004; Cozzolino, 2015; Flint, 2011; Glaeser, 2000; Jacobs, 1961; Zukin, 2006). She deems the latter to be ineffective in genuinely improving the lives of people in neighborhoods (Jacobs, 1961, p. 409): "Planners must […] aim at unslumming the slums, by creating conditions aimed at persuading residents to stay by choice over time. […] They must regard slum dwellers as people capable of understanding and acting upon their own self-interests, which they certainly are. We need to discern, respect, and build upon the forces for regeneration that exist in slums themselves". However, in practice we see many examples of local governments pursuing policies aimed at social mixing, through (forced) relocation of the existing low-income population in exchange for newcomers with a higher income. These interventions do not seem to benefit the remaining neighborhood population nor the people that were displaced to other neighborhoods (Atkinson, 2004; August, 2008; Freeman & Braconi, 2004; Uitermark, Duyvendak, & Kleinhans, 2007; Musterd & Ostendorf, 2008).

Jane Jacobs' writings on 'slums' and 'unslumming', especially in *The Life and Death of Great American Cities* from 1961, are still relevant today. However, knowledge and experience have progressed since. Many of her ideas back then do now have a stronger, theoretical, empirical and philosophical underpinning and have been developed further (implicitly or explicitly). Embedding her pioneering and often intuitive ideas within both the moral-philosophical literature on poverty (e.g. Frankfurt, 1987; Sen, 1983) and the empirical and theoretical neighborhood literature (e.g. Cheshire, 2007; Van Ham & Manley, 2012) sheds a refreshing light on many of today's urban-renewal debates and practices. We discern three elements from Jacobs' writing on slums (see next section) and will develop them further on the basis of (part of) the body of knowledge created since.

The first and foremost important idea is her very focus on the concept of 'slums'. The word slum has gotten out of fashion in relation to poor neighborhoods in developed countries; it has become reserved exclusively for poor neighborhoods, usually informal settlements, in

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https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2018.02.027
Received 6 September 2017; Received in revised form 16 February 2018; Accepted 28 February 2018
Available online 16 March 2018
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developing countries. In developed countries, the abandonment of the word slum seems to indicate a shift in attention away from *absolute* neighborhood poverty to *relative* neighborhood poverty or segregation instead.[1] In other words, from a neighborhood's wealth *level* to wealth *differences* between neighborhoods.[2] Absolute neighborhood poverty can even be seen as the primary reason for the emergence of modern urban planning in the late nineteenth century. Urban planning came about as a coordinated action to deal with the poverty, misery, poor sanitation and dreadful living conditions in most industrial cities (Hall, 2014). Although poverty levels have indeed risen since the beginning of the twentieth century, it does not mean that the notion of focusing on *absolute* neighborhood poverty has become irrelevant. Making sure that no person and no neighborhood is below a socially defined poverty threshold – even though that threshold rises with the passage of time – is a worthy moral ideal. This notion and its policy implications is developed further in Section 3.

Second, she looks at the possibilities of neighborhoods to reinvent and change themselves from inside, as the first paragraph of this introduction shows, rather than on the negative impact of city-wide segregation processes in the form of (negative) 'neighborhood effects', a subject that has received much attention in the literature in recent years (Section 4). And third, her evolutionary approach makes us more aware of the dynamic nature of life and neighborhood trajectories. A static snapshot of wealth levels does not tell us much about the direction that both individuals living in that neighborhood as well as the neighborhood itself are heading toward (Section 5). The aim of this paper is to develop those three ideas further, in order to reflect on current ideas about segregation and about neighborhood policies aimed at targeting segregation.

2. Jane Jacobs on slums

Slums can be seen as the urban manifestation and materialization of deprivation. This state is either temporary or more structural. Jane Jacobs looks at the city as a complex self-organizing system that adjusts its internal order as new circumstances arise (Desrochers & Hospers, 2007; Ikeda & Callahan, 2014; Cozzolino, 2015; see also Jacobs, 2000): clear demonstrations are the cases in which slums are step-by-step rehabilitated and improved without direct planning interventions. In this regard, the author invites the readers of *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* to reflect on unslumming processes in cities; that is, the way through which run-down and poor city districts change unexpectedly, improve and become more attractive and richer as time passes. She does so by confuting the main orthodox ideas of her time about slums, segregation and urban renewal (Alexiou, 2006; Ikeda, 2004).

She uses the example of the North End in Boston, a place that was "officially considered Boston's worst slum" (1961, pp. 8–9): "Twenty years ago, the general effect was of a district taking a terrible physical beating and certainly desperately poor. When I saw the North End again in 1959, I was amazed at the change. Dozens and dozens of buildings had been rehabilitated. […] Mingled all among the buildings were an incredible number of splendid stores". Stunning changes occurred despite the opinions of experts who looked at the North End as an irrecoverable place or, even worse, "a civic shame". Planners believed that "everything they have learned as planners told them the North End had to be a slum in the last stage of depravity". Bankers maintained that there was "no sense in lending money into the North End because it was slum" (ibid., p. 11).

Assessments of this kind were the result of superficial comparisons between the real physical conditions of certain areas with abstract ideas about how (acceptable) neighborhoods should look like and, most of all, *be*.[3] Above all, as Jacobs maintains, these assessments did not consider the local social capital, neither the complexity of different plans, investments and efforts made by individuals to improve their life and their dwellings. In this way, experts reduced the complexity of the social system into simple aggregated problems (ibid., pp. 428–448), without considering which, in practice, were people's real opportunities. In general, what Jacobs demonstrates is that the issue of poverty in cities is a more complex matter. What in the 1960s was often assumed to be a slum, in reality was offering chances and space for improvements.

In short, while orthodox planners looked at the presence of slums as a problem to be solved, Jane Jacobs recognizes certain genuine and beneficial role for such places, above all for newcomers who, with the passage of time, are often and soon assimilated in city's life. However, not all slums are positively perceived by Jane Jacobs. She underscores when and why the concentration of poor people may become a public problem: only in these cases, she speaks of 'perpetual slums'. In doing so, Jane Jacobs proposes a clear distinction between neighborhoods open to unslumming processes and places of perpetual state of poverty, i.e. "slums which show no signs of social or economic improvement with time, or which regress after a little improvement" (Jacobs, 1961, p. 272).

Perpetual slums are the opposite of unslummed or unslumming neighborhoods. Negative common features of all perpetual slums are 'unattractiveness' (an overall lack of people living in other places willing to frequent the area; for instance, "wholesale desertions by their nonslum populations", Ibid., p. 273), 'low sense of belonging' (the diffused will/ability of people to move away: "a ghetto is a place in which most people of spirit will not stay entirely willingly", Ibid., p. 284)[4] and simultaneously falling population and increasing overcrowding (Ibid., pp. 276–277).

Jane Jacobs identifies three main negative conditions that contribute to existence of perpetual slums. The first condition regards the spatial configuration of the neighborhood. She contends that neighborhoods that are built and designed in such a way that *civilized* public life in the street is discouraged are less prone to undergo unslumming processes. The issue is that without extensive and complex networking among people (both within the neighborhood and between different neighborhoods) there are fewer possibilities that a sense of community will emerge.[5] On the contrary, the rise of lively and cohesive environments is more likely to emerge when the spatial configurations of neighborhoods facilitates intense and spontaneous interactions among people (Ibid., pp. 200–240). From this perspective, the main idea of Jane Jacobs is that configurations of this kind emerge organically over time and rarely are built all at once from scratch (see Ikeda, 2004).

The second condition for the persistence of slums is discrimination. This condition regards a widespread negative judgment about particular groups of people (for instance ethnic groups). When this occurs in cities, specific social groups are segregated and isolated from the rest of city's life, reducing enormously their opportunities for new exchanges

[1] Segregation can be defined as the extent to which particular groups are over or underrepresented in particular neighborhoods. The most common measure of segregation is the 'dissimilarity index' (i.e. 'segregation index') which measures "the *evenness* with which two identified groups are distributed across geographical components (e.g., census tracts, postal codes, neighborhoods) that together make up a larger geographical area (e.g., city, municipality, metropolitan area)" (Buitelaar et al., 2017).

[2] It is a shift that is similar to what we see in the general economic-inequality debate. Recently, relative poverty (i.e. income or wealth inequality) has become a dominant theme (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009; Piketty, 2014; Atkinson, 2015), while absolute poverty used to be the primary focus long into the twentieth century.

[3] For instance, experts underscore that "the North End bumps right up against industry", "working places and commerce are mingled with residences", "high concentration of dwelling units", "little park land" or "children play in the streets", etc. (Jacobs, 1961, p. 8).

[4] "Perpetual slums are unable to hold enough its population for unslumming"; "Dull neighborhoods inevitably fail to draw newcomers by choice" (Jacobs, 1961, p. 273).

[5] A "sense of community can be defined as a particular state where individuals realize that all other human beings are potential collaborators and they are capable of recognizing the mutual benefit of cooperation" (Mises, 1949, pp. 143–165).

and interactions with diverse groups holding different knowledge and resources. Only when discrimination is broken – and it is a long and slow process – slumming can be overcome by favoring the emergence of new exchanges and interactions. "Some neighborhoods are apt to undergo sudden wholesale desertions by their nonslums populations. […] This gives a slum its initial opportunity to form" (Jacobs, 1961, p. 273).

The third condition for perpetual slums is the lack of newcomers. In this regard Jane Jacobs maintains that unslumming processes need newcomers thus to contribute to a slow and incremental internal social self-diversification as well as the "gradual assimilation of strangers in a civilized fashion". "The North End is still getting some immigrants. […] Newcomers add to the population diversification. The indispensable foundation for this added population is the self-diversification and stability of the former slum population" (Ibid., p. 283).

2.1. Lessons for today's segregation debate

We believe three elements from Jane Jacobs' writing on slums are worth further exploring and developing in the light of current policies and theories behind policies that are targeting economic segregation. First, is her focus on poor neighborhoods rather than on the economic differences between neighborhoods. Levelling economic differences between neighborhoods is an explicit or implicit goal of today's desegregation policies. Second, her focus is on how people living in slums can improve their own lives and can be enabled to do so, rather than on changing the relatively homogenous socio-economic composition of those slums because of (alleged) negative neighborhood effects. And third, when she discusses slumming, unslumming and perpetual slums, she explicitly brings the *time* dimension into the picture, while polices focusing on segregation and wealth distributions tend to focus on static snapshots.

3. The importance of focusing on absolute neighborhood poverty[6]

Jacobs' concern with perpetual slums – slums in general – shows that she puts more emphasis on absolute neighborhood poverty than on the uneven distribution of wealth over different neighborhoods, that is, on economic segregation. Moreover, she focuses on the conditions of economic development and self-regeneration, regardless of the economic status of the neighborhood. In this section, we advance the moral relevance of absolute poverty of people and neighborhoods. This particularly relevant in times when science and policy seem preoccupied with relative deprivation.

3.1. Moral relevance of segregation

The moral relevance of economic inequality or relative poverty has been debated quite extensively in the economic and political philosophical literature (e.g. Frankfurt, 1987; McCloskey, 2014; Rawls, 1993; Sen, 1983; Chiappero-Martinetti and Moroni, 2007). To our knowledge, this has not yet been done specifically for (economic) segregation (Buitelaar, Weterings, & Ponds, 2017). Segregation is like inequality a relative concept, since it refers to the extent to which (high- and low-income) groups are over- or underrepresented in some neighborhoods compared to other groups (e.g. Tammaru, Marcinczak, van Ham, & Musterd, 2016, p. 17). Is the fact that the rich and the poor live more or less apart from one another of moral importance in itself?

Frankfurt says about economic inequality that it "is not as such of particular moral importance. With respect to the distribution of economic assets, what is important from the point of view of morality is not that everyone should have *the same* but that each should have *enough*. If everyone had enough, it would be of no moral consequence whether some had more than others" (Frankfurt, 1987, p. 21 – emphasis in the original). This is the doctrine of 'sufficiency', which is a distinct theory or idea about justice that differs from the 'doctrine of egalitarianism' or egalitarian justice.[7] The concept of 'sufficiency' has also been emphasized by Nobel laureate Amartya Sen who argues that: "the fact that some people have a lower standard of living than others is certainly proof of inequality, but by itself it cannot be a proof of poverty unless we know something more about the standard of living that these people do in fact enjoy" (Sen, 1983, p. 159). The concept of *absolute* poverty tells us something about the standard of living of a person, while relative poverty does not (it only tells us if someone is poorer/richer than another). Some respond to this notion of absolute poverty by arguing that it is relative too. They often refer to the fact that poverty thresholds change over time – poverty now is different from the late 19th century (Hall, 2014) – or that it varies over space, from country to country. However, this type of relativeness is quite different from the idea how someone's income position relates to others within the *same* society at the *same* time: "absoluteness of needs is not the same as their fixity over time. The relative approach sees deprivation in terms of a person or household being able to achieve less than what others in that society do, and this relativeness is not to be confused with variation over time (and space)" (Sen, 1983, p. 155 – parentheses by the authors).

An overemphasis on inequality might obscure our sight on poverty. If there is a decline in prosperity because of a recession or depression, leading to great misery, starvation and hardship among a large part of the population, inequality statistics might not pick that up since the relative picture need not change (Sen, 1983, pp. 156–157). Put in extreme terms: there can be perfect equality below the (absolute) poverty threshold and, alternatively, there can be great inequality with no-one in (absolute) poverty. For instance, two homeless people are perfectly equal in their homelessness, but generally very poor (in absolute terms) at the same time. On the contrary, Bill Gates is estimated by Forbes to be almost twenty times wealthier than Richard Branson, but very few consider the latter to be poor.

We could say that for economic segregation, the same reasoning applies as for economic inequality: it is of less importance that others (in other neighborhoods) have more material resources than that one has enough, in his/her own neighborhood (Frankfurt, 1987; Moroni, 2013, 2015; Sen, 1983). The fact that people live physically separated does not change this moral claim. A 'slum', like poverty, is an *absolute* concept, not relative. A neighborhood is a slum or not, we do not say it is 'slummer' or 'less slum' than another. Once a neighborhood shifts below a particular culturally and politically determined prosperity threshold, it becomes a slum. In *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Jane Jacobs, too, seems to take an absolutist position as she is concerned with slums, slumming and unslumming, and much less with segregation and desegregation, even though she mentions it occasionally. In fact, she maintains that (1961, pp. 113–114):

"We cannot conclude that middle-class families or upper-class families build good neighborhoods, and poor families fail to. For example, within the poverty of the North End in Boston, within the poverty of the West Greenwich Village waterfront neighborhoods, within the poverty of the slaughterhouse district in Chicago, good neighborhoods were created. Meantime, within the once upper-class grace and serenity of Baltimore's beautiful Eutaw Place, within the one-time upper-class solidity of Boston's South End, within the culturally privileged purlieus of New York's Morningside Heights, within miles upon miles of dull, respectable middle-class grey area, bad neighborhoods were created, neighborhoods whose apathy and internal failure grew greater with time instead of less". She continues: "To hunt for city neighborhood touchstones of success in high standards of physical

[6] This section is largely derived from Buitelaar et al. (2017).

[7] And distinct from other forms of justice such as utilitarianism, procedural justice, framework justice (i.e. nomocracy), intergenerational justice, and others (see for application to urban and spatial issues for instance Smith, 1994; Needham, Buitelaar, & Hartmann, 2018; Thaler & Levin Keitel, 2016). Some of them may be relevant to slums as well but we explore their implications no further in this paper.

facilities, or in supposedly competent non-problem populations, or in nostalgic memories of town life, is a waste of time. It evades the meat of the question, which is the problem of what city neighborhoods do, if anything, that may be socially and economically useful in cities themselves, and how they do it."

3.2. Deprivation of what? The issue of spatial primary goods

In *A Theory of Justice* from 1971 and *Political Liberalism* from 1993 John Rawls advances the idea of *justice as fairness*, part of which is an 'index', of 'social primary goods', that everyone should possess or have access to, as free and equal persons: "a. basic rights and liberties […]; b. freedom of movement and choice of occupation against a background of diverse opportunities; c. powers and prerogatives of offices and positions of responsibility in the political and economic institutions of the basic structure; d. income and wealth; and finally, e. the social bases of self-respect" (Rawls, 1971, 1993 p. 181). The exact scope and demarcation of these goods is a contextual or place- and time-specific matter. The important point here is the existence of a notion of 'social primary goods' and the idea of a sufficiency threshold of such goods, under which someone is defined as 'poor'.

In the case of slums, too, a large part of the population is deprived of the social primary goods, particularly of sufficient wealth. But *additionally*, the neighborhood itself is usually deprived of some basic social and physical conditions. Therefore, (Moroni, 1997), in (Basta, 2016) transfers the idea of Rawls' primary goods to space by defining *spatial* 'primary goods' that people in cities should possess or have access to. Moroni distinguishes between four spatial primary goods: decent housing, access to basic transport, availability of green areas and a safe living environment. This is the very (spatial) minimum people should have access to in their neighborhood. Again, changes and extensions of the list are possible and maybe necessary (such as good schools and health care). And indeed, Jacobs in *Dark Age Ahead* from 2004 is very explicit and elaborate in identifying more and other 'spatial primary goods', without referring to them as such, such as affordable housing, publicly funded transportation, water and sewage systems, fire protection, public health and safety inspections and enforcement, schools, public libraries, large-scale public recreation facilities, parks, ambulances and other emergency services (Jacobs, 2004, pp. 34–35).

Others have added that the possession of or access to (spatial) primary goods may be necessary but not sufficient as people's *capabilities* may not allow them to use such goods properly (Basta, 2016; Sen, 2009; Nussbaum, 2011). For instance, the presence of schools in the vicinity is of little help if people are denied access or if they lack the learning capacity to attend classes and pass school tests.

4. Homogeneity of neighborhoods and its effects on individuals

Neighborhoods without 'unslumming capacity' rather than unequal neighborhoods (i.e. segregation) is Jacobs' major concern. However, many urban-renewal policies are explicitly focused on levelling wealth and problems over space. One of the key assumptions behind such policies is that the better the economic composition of the neighborhood, the better it is for instance for individual income and wealth and for labor-market chances. This policy theory has received a lot of attention in the urban literature.

Segregation is the aggregate distributional result of a spatial sorting process in which both preferences and abilities affect individual households' residential location decisions. Tammaru et al. (2016) show that economic inequality usually translates into economic segregation (Gans, 1961), but not necessarily so. Economic inequality is a necessary condition for economic segregation (if there would be no inequality, there can be no spatial sorting thereof), not a sufficient one. Whether, when and to what extent this occurs depends on a country's welfare and housing system and on a city's spatial and housing policies (Tammaru et al., 2016). In other words, the spatial sorting of economically unequal individuals is a contextual matter.

The neighborhood composition becomes relevant from a societal and policy perspective if it is not 'simply' the spatial result of a sorting process, but if it also has *additional* positive or negative (economic) effects on those people's opportunities or income position. These are called 'neighborhood effects' (e.g. Cheshire, 2007; Galster, 2012; Van Ham & Manley, 2012; Boschman, 2015; Miltenburg & Van de Werfhorst, 2017). In public policy, there is a long history of aiming for class (and age and race) heterogeneity in neighborhoods, as it is assumed to add variety and 'enrich' people's lives, to promote tolerance of social and cultural differences, to broaden the educational influence on children, to encourage exposure to alternative lives (Gans, 1961, p. 177). However, identifying and proving the presence of (sizeable) neighborhood effects and linking them to processes of segregation is complex.

First, this is complex because segregation does not necessarily lead to neighborhood effects. If negative effects of the composition of neighborhoods are found, those might be 'selection effects' rather than neighborhood effects (Boschman, 2015). Put differently: in the case of selection effects, neighborhoods do not make people worse off, people who are worse off move to particular neighborhoods, for instance because of the availability of affordable housing. Such sorting processes are driven by people's preferences and opportunities (i.e. many people can only afford to live in certain neighborhoods). It has turned out to be difficult in empirical research to completely isolate neighborhood effects and distinguish them from selection effects (Van Ham & Manley, 2012; Boschman, 2015). It is an important reason for Paul Cheshire's conclusion that "there is surprisingly little evidence that living in poor neighborhoods makes people poorer and erodes their life chances, independently of those factors that contribute to their poverty in the first place" (Cheshire, 2007, p. 2).

Second, not all neighborhood effects are (solely) due to processes of segregation. In the literature, some refer to the importance of neighborhood infrastructure for the accessibility of jobs and schools (e.g. Galster, 2012). And indeed, accessibility seems vital for neighborhoods and the people who live in them. In the previous section, this is even indicated as one of the 'spatial primary goods' (Basta, 2016; Moroni, 1997). However, the absence of such a good is not necessarily, or solely, the result of segregation and the economic composition of the neighborhood, rather of poor transportation planning.

Given the complexity of the logical-causal relationship between neighborhood composition and individual behavior, and the scant empirical proof for negative (and positive) neighborhood effects, it is perhaps not surprising that neighborhood policies aimed at social mixing are often found to be ineffective in improving people's job opportunities, wealth and neighborhood satisfaction (Atkinson, 2004; Miltenburg & Van de Werfhorst, 2017; Posthumus, Bolt, & van Kempen, 2013). They are more likely to be effective in increasing property values, tax bases and government control over neighborhoods (Gans, 1961; Uitermark et al., 2007).

5. A dynamic view on people and places

With her focus on the perpetuity of neighborhood poverty (i.e. 'perpetual slums'), Jane Jacobs clearly indicates it is important to take a dynamic perspective on (neighborhood) poverty. Perpetual slums are places that are incapable to hold or attract the people that can help them 'unslum'.

In current policy and academic studies, urban segregation or neighborhood composition is usually measured statically. The most common indicator for segregation, the 'dissimilarity index', measures "the *evenness* with which two identified groups are distributed across geographical components (e.g., census tracts, postal codes, neighborhoods) that together make up a larger geographical area (e.g., city, municipality, metropolitan area)" (Buitelaar et al., 2017). In

longitudinal urban studies, this measurement is repeated annually. Although such numbers tell us something about the overall development of segregation, they remain (static) snapshots that miss essential information about the underlying dynamics (de Vos, 2015). At least two issues are underemphasized by those statistics.

First, those yearly segregation snapshots do not tell us anything about which neighborhoods show concentrations of wealth in which year. In theory, in year 1 neighborhood X might contain the greatest concentration of people in the lowest income decile, while in year 2 it might be neighborhood Y. If income distributions over neighborhoods vary as this example illustrates, segregation is much different (i.e. less problematic) from a situation in which the same neighborhood contains the greatest concentration of poor(er) people year after year.

Second, though related to the first point, segregation snapshots obscure residential mobility. In theory, again, a neighborhood might always contain the greatest concentration of people in the lowest income decile, but if this group renews and changes every year, we have a different issue than when it remains (virtually) the same and people cannot/do not move out to other places. In the first case, a slum might be a stepping stone for the newly arrived toward other neighborhoods in a city, in the second case it is a dead-end, as Jacobs emphasizes as well.

The alluvial in Fig. 1 illustrates a way to capture some (not all) neighborhood dynamics. It shows, for the city of Rotterdam, the spatial distribution of those living in the two lowest income deciles (lowest 20%) over the neighborhoods in 2003 and the residential mobility of these people since. This groups appears to be rather immobile: in 2012, 77% still lives in the same neighborhood as in 2003, 13% moved to a neighborhood with a lower share of low-income households, and almost 10% moved to a neighborhood with a higher share of low-income inhabitants (Buitelaar et al., 2017).

Following neighborhoods in time, and following (generations of) people in neighborhoods in time, provides us with more information about whether ‘slums’ are ‘perpetual’ or are prone to processes of ‘unslumming’ (Jacobs, 1961). Nowadays, the availability of detailed and accurate longitudinal datasets and of statistical and econometric techniques to process these data, allow for such Jacobsian evolutionary analyses, even intergenerationally (Hochstenbach & Boterman, 2017).

6. Conclusion and policy implications

The abandonment of the word slum in developed countries might indicate a shift in attention away from *absolute* neighborhood poverty to *relative* neighborhood poverty (i.e. segregation) instead. The focus on *relative* neighborhood rather than *absolute* neighborhood poverty may, however, lead to targeting the wrong social problem. From a moral perspective, the possession or access to a minimum level of social and spatial primary goods is more or at least as relevant. Jacobs' writing on slums is still very relevant today in discussing such goods and in establishing an urban-policy agenda aimed at their provision. There is, however, not only the moral perspective on segregation and policies aimed at creating economic desegregation (or less segregation). From both a logical and empirical point of view, social-mixing policies are unlikely to increase people's wealth or their chances of wealth improvement.

However, being critical of social-mixing policies does not mean there is no room for *place*-based policies per se. Distinguishing between placed-based and people-based policies and discrediting the former (see e.g. Glaeser, 2011) is too categorical. Certain place-based policies can make an important contribution to providing social and spatial primary goods, such as good infrastructure and decent housing. Urban design, for instance, may play an important role in creating the necessary (but not sufficient) spatial conditions (Talen, 2013). In fact, as Jacobs states (1961, p. 71) “Design can […] provide the means to the people to keep a civilized public life”.

Nevertheless, in case of depressed environments, small physical interventions (i.e. what Jane Jacobs defines as ‘tactics’) are preferable both to slum clearance and large-scale structural top-down interventions (Ibid., pp. 392–427). Tactics, according to Jacobs, are light actions aiming at breaking the perpetuity of slums by creating the condition to

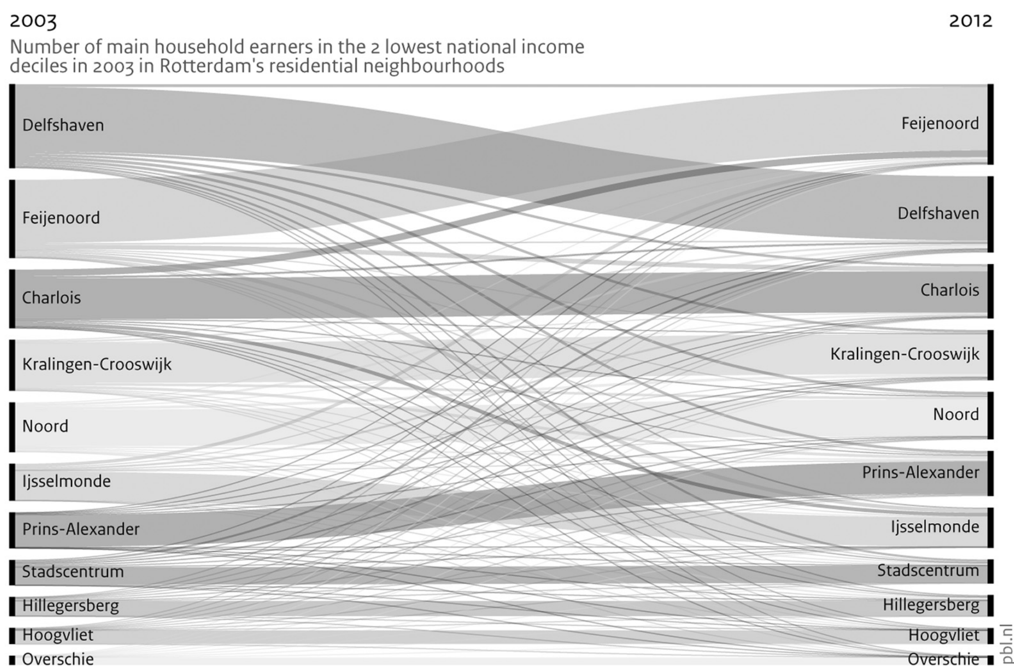

Fig. 1. Changes in residential location of low-income inhabitants of Rotterdam, 2003–2012.

increase the livability of neighborhoods and ameliorate their infrastructures (for instance by improving their accessibility or adding new publicly relevant uses and functions). In general, their goal is to improve and intensify social interactions in public spaces, increase their level of attractiveness, and create new opportunities for local people (for instance cultural, economic and social opportunities).

However, following Jacobs, planning interventions and policies may fail if they do not take the time dimension into the picture distinguishing between neighborhoods that are "perpetually slumming" and those that are "unslumming". In the latter case, despite the supporting measures that can be taken, Jane Jacobs fully recognizes that unslumming is "a process of steady but gradual change" (Ibid., p. 294), with a fundamental role played by self-improvements and spontaneous actions. In her view, governments should - first of all - facilitate those actions instead of actively boosting heterogeneity and social mixes.

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