

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

**Ronald van Kempen**  
**Professor of Urban Geography**  
**Utrecht University**

# 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

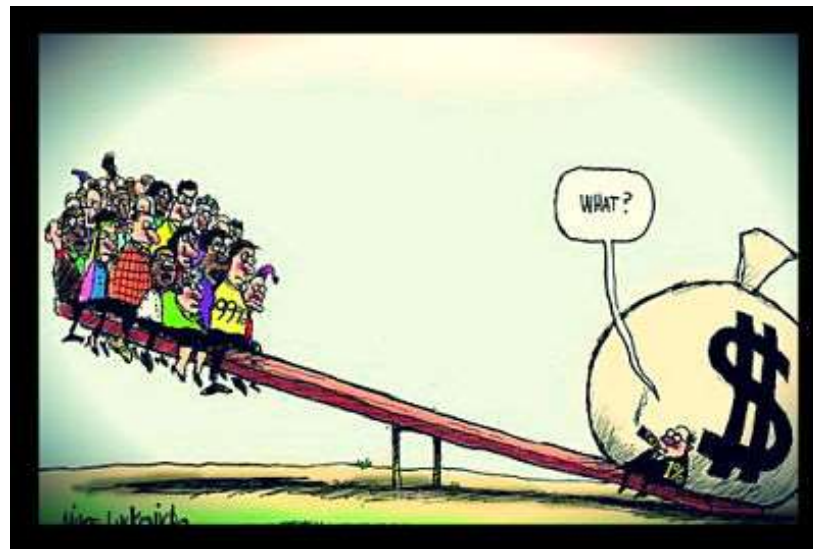




# What is inequality?

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

*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

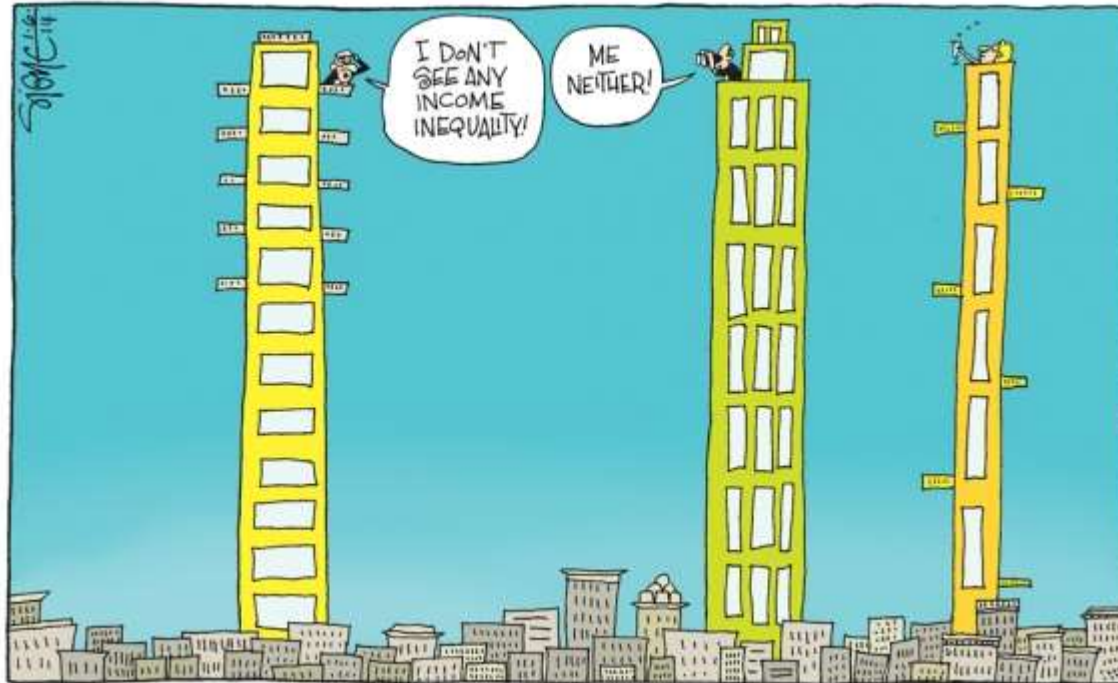
Be aware of *telescopic urbanism*:

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

**Ronald van Kempen**  
**Utrecht University**  
**Faculty of Geosciences**

[r.vankempen@uu.nl](mailto:r.vankempen@uu.nl)  
[www.urbandivercities.eu](http://www.urbandivercities.eu)