

**Do Immigrants' Preferences for Neighbourhood Qualities Contribute to Segregation?
The case of Oslo**

Susanne Søholt

susanne.soholt@nibr.no

0047 461 70 341

Brit Lynnebakke

brit.lynnebakke@nibr.no

0047 461 70 324

Norwegian Institute for Urban and Regional Research, Gaustadalléen 21, 0349 Oslo, Norway.

Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 2015

Vol. 41, No.14, 2314-2335, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2015.1054795>

Abstract

Ethnic residential segregation is often explained with the claim that 'immigrants don't want to integrate – they prefer to stick together with co-ethnics'. By contrast, mixed neighbourhoods are seen crucial for achieving social cohesion. In line with spatial assimilation theory there is a normative assumption that people interact with those living nearby. From interviews on neighbourhood qualities and locations valued by Oslo residents of Turkish, Somali and Polish backgrounds, we raise questions about the validity of two assumptions: that most immigrants want to live in the same neighbourhoods as co-ethnics; and that they want to live close to co-ethnics because they do not want to integrate. For reasons of socialisation, main preferences were for mixed neighbourhoods that included ethnic Norwegians. Whereas the preference for people of other immigrant backgrounds was linked to possibilities for socialisation, the preference for ethnic Norwegians in the neighbourhood was linked to possibilities for social integration. Co-ethnic networks could be maintained on the city level. Importantly, housing moves tended to be guided by other factors than population composition in the area.

Key words: immigrants, neighbourhood preferences, mixed neighbourhoods, social integration, segregation.

Introduction

This article examines the often-heard claim, ‘immigrants don’t want to integrate – they prefer to stick together with co-ethnics’. For many years, there has been talk in the Norwegian public discourse of ‘failed integration’ in Oslo, with high concentrations of immigrants living in certain areas. (See, for example, the quality daily *Aftenposten* 18.04.01, 14.06.08, 13.10.24.) Immigrants are often blamed for not taking responsibility for their own integration by choosing to live in immigrant-dense areas, maintaining a distance to the ‘Norwegian community’. This article draws on a qualitative study on neighbourhood preferences among residents with Turkish, Somali and Polish backgrounds. The study area is Oslo, where the share of the population with backgrounds from Eastern Europe, Asia, Africa and Latin America rose from 7% in 1988 to 25% by 2014 (Statistics Oslo 2015). The segregation index (D-index)ⁱ has remained quite stable since around 2000, even with a weak decline, from 34.2% in 2003 to 33.4% in 2011 at the city district level (Blom 2013).

Ethnic residential segregation is not unique to Oslo. The focus on areas of immigrant concentration reflects wider European concerns as to the inclusion of immigrants and the need for social cohesion across ethnic lines, spurred by ‘the war on terror’ (Phillips 2010). Currently dominant political discourses in the EU tend to point to the failure of minority ethnic groups to assimilate to the majority’s normative models of social and spatial integration (Phillips 2010; Antonsich 2012). Ethnic residential segregation and the processes that produce such segregation are deemed unfavourable for cities as such. A recent Nordic study underscores that the majority of natives in Oslo see ethnic residential segregation as a problem for Norwegians and immigrants alike (Andersson et al. 2013).

Norwegian policies for promoting a multi-ethnic inclusive society have focused on participation, equal opportunities, solidarity and tolerance, as well as work against racism and discrimination (White Paper no. 6, 2012/2013). In everyday life, however, differing points of departure, various worldviews, life ambitions, and practices are constantly questioned and challenged.ⁱⁱ People of colour, and in general all those with immigrant backgrounds, are often treated differently in the labour and housing markets, even if they have formal socio-economic characteristics deemed important in society (Midtbøen 2013; Søholt and Astrup 2009). Moreover, in Norway today, a person’s wellbeing is seen as being an individual responsibility, within the framework of the welfare state. The residential patterns of

immigrants are interpreted not only as a function of availability and societal structures, but even more so as a function of individual priorities. This article asks: *What kinds of neighbourhood qualities do ethnic minorities value? Do these preferences contribute to segregation in Oslo?* The intention is to supplement earlier survey and register studies in Oslo on neighbourhood preferences and intra-urban mobility with an account of immigrants' views on neighbourhood qualities (Blom 2012; Magnusson Turner and Wessel 2013).

Preferences are here understood as shaped by the more general goals the individual has in life, translated into neighbourhood qualities and locations. In this article, people are referred to by their country of family origin: Turks, Somalis, Poles and Norwegians. Especially immigrants with long-term residence may define themselves in terms of dual nationalities like Norwegian-Turk; others, perhaps descendants in particular, may see themselves as Norwegian, whereas those with less time in Norway and those who plan return migration might identify with their country of origin. The term 'Norwegian' is restricted to native-born with two native born parents.

Mixed Neighbourhoods vs. Social Integration

Mixed ethnic neighbourhoods are seen crucial for achieving social cohesion (Phillips 2006; Brown 2013). Social cohesion refers to the bonds or the 'glue' that hold people together in society, particularly in the context of cultural diversity. In line with spatial assimilation theory, there seems to be a widespread belief that people interact with those living nearby (Park 1926, in Peach 2005). From this, it is assumed that ethnically mixed neighbourhoods will promote social relationships and thereby social integration between the majority and ethnic minorities. This perspective has three normative assumptions: that trust between neighbours is independent of ethnic diversity, that neighbours interact regardless of ethnic and social belonging, and that such interaction will facilitate immigrants' adoption of social norms and practices necessary for functioning well in society.

The population composition of a neighbourhood is vital if neighbourhood interaction is expected to encourage social integration. A recent longitudinal register study of nine immigrant groups in Oslo showed that ethnic minorities did not relocate in accordance with the majority pattern (Magnusson Turner and Wessel 2013). This study found that only Vietnamese and Iranians conformed partly to spatial assimilation theory by having a similar mobility pattern in the neighbourhood hierarchy as the majority. Turks, who generally have

low labour-market participation rates, have nevertheless moved upwards and outwards, but have often relocated in the same areas (Fig.1). Among Somalis, some have moved upwards, but more have moved sideways or downwards. The study does not explain if these moves were in line with the immigrants' own preferences or if spatial assimilation contributed to social integration. A German study (Lersch 2012) shows that Turkish households are less likely than German households to improve their neighbourhood through moving. A Dutch study (Schaake et al. 2013) shows that non-Western minority groups have a smaller increase in socio-economic status and share of natives in their neighbourhood after moving, compared to members of the majority population. Members of stigmatised ethnic minorities, like Somalis in Norway, show the weakest relationship between socio-economic status and change of neighbourhood characteristics.

Other studies have described ethnically diverse neighbourhoods as characterised by distrust and low social cohesion (Putnam 2007; Sturgis et al. 2013). Empirical research has shown that the link between spatial and social assimilation is unclear at best. As regards bridges between ethnic minorities and majority on neighbourhood level, critics have noted that neighbourly proximity does not necessarily entail interaction (Bolt et al. 2010; Brown 2013). The amount of interaction between social groups falls short of expectations (Bolt and van Kempen 2013). A German study (Grüner 2010) has shown that neighbourly relationships tend to follow ethnically defined lines: white residents dissociated themselves from people of colour and thereby from inter-ethnic neighbourly relationships. Another Dutch study confirms that ethnic diversity is negatively related to personal contacts between native and immigrant neighbours (Huijts et al. 2014). Furthermore, researchers have argued that there has been a preoccupation with residential interaction, and not ethnic relations in spheres like work, education and leisure (Ellis et al. 2004; Bolt et al. 2010; Kokkonen et al. 2014).

Voluntary Segregation vs. Constrained Choice

Ethnic residential segregation has been explained by voluntary processes, or processes characterised by constrained choice. *Voluntary segregation* builds on the freedom to move and is characterised by desired clustering defined by ethnicity, religion, language or lifestyle as related to group distinctions (Young 2000; Clark 2002; Knox and Pinch 2010).

Decisions to live close to family and kin can foster co-ethnic clustering (Peach 1998; Skifter Andersen 2010). While ethnic segregation is stigmatised in public debates, research has shown that ethnic communities may play an acculturative role in helping newcomers to adapt to the new country of residence (Kivisto 2001; Søholt 2013). In his multi-city study on

urban inequalities in the USA, Clark (2002) found that ‘own-race’ preference and other ‘race’ avoidance have important influences on the patterns of ethnic residential separation in urban areas. Not only do white households prefer majority white neighbourhoods: all minorities opt more for neighbours of their own backgrounds than for white neighbours. This trend is confirmed by De Souza Briggs (2005), who reports that survey after survey indicates that people of all ‘racial’ backgrounds want some neighbourhood diversity, but not too much. Networks and group attachment create a preference for having some co-ethnic neighbours, which might limit housing choice in ways that contribute to segregation. *Heterolocalism* (Zelinsky and Lee 1998) offers an alternative approach for exploring ethnic communities in urban areas. Heterolocalism dismisses the relationship between spatial propinquity and ethnic communities, holding that ethnic communities are nurtured by other means than mere physical proximity. As a contrast to ethnic clustering, this approach opens for a multifaceted use of the city. Heterolocally inclined individuals may belong to ethnic communities without having a preference for spatial overlap between residence, social relations, workplace and sites of social activities.

When housing is distributed through market mechanisms, the complex interaction of preferences, resources, possibilities and constraints becomes decisive. The challenge is to match knowledge about options and how the housing system works, with purchasing power and preferences for housing and neighbourhoods. In addition to financial resources (income, security of income, and access to credit), information and support through ethnic networks have proven vital (Søholt 2013). Constraints can be defined as obstacles and pressures that prevent people from regarding parts of the housing market as opportunities (Özüekren and van Kempen 2003). Most important are arguments that minority groups internalise external constraints so that they choose only realisable options (Sarre et al. 1989). Related constraints are fear of harassment and fear of isolation in predominantly white neighbourhoods (Phillips 2006; Dhalmann 2013). Constraint-oriented explanations are based on the idea that housing is a scarce resource, and that immigrants’ limited resources, discrimination and blocking all affect their access to a desired housing and neighbourhood situation (Özüekren and van Kempen 2010, Bråmås 2006). However, immigrants in the same urban areas have achieved different housing and locational situations, indicating that there is room for choice and individual room of manoeuvre. While some ethnic populations exhibit a clustering pattern, others have more dispersed residential patterns (Peach 1998).

Different locational patterns among different ethnic groups in the same urban area make it relevant to ask whether ethnic minorities are sorted by place according to their relative standing in society (Alba and Logan 1993), or whether this pattern is affected by neighbourhood preferences. A Norwegian study of immigrant residential preferences (Blom 2012) found that a third of the respondents were indifferent to questions about the proportion of immigrants in their neighbourhood. According to that study, immigrants' future preferences for type of neighbourhood might have some relevance for segregation, but only 7% of the respondents wanted a higher share of immigrants in their neighbourhood. This study opens for an interpretation of segregation patterns not only as a picture of preferences, but as a result of *constrained choice* and *stratification*.

The Context, the Oslo Housing Market

As noted by Massey (1985), national and local housing policies shape immigrants' possibilities in the housing market. The Oslo housing market is characterised by deregulation of all tenures, high prices and the dominance of home ownership and cooperatives, combined with limited social housing. Allocation of housing through market mechanisms is the main rule, so household purchasing power is vital. Short-term contracts are common in social and private rentals, making it difficult for tenants to establish themselves. Housing types, tenures and market prices vary substantially between city districts and neighbourhoods, and contribute to promote segregation (Nordahl 2012). Neighbourhoods change character over time, through gentrification of former working-class and immigrant-dense areas in the city centre and through ethnification of suburbs. The main tenure type in the 'ethnoburbs' are cooperatives where allocation regulations forbid discrimination. Apart from comprehensive area programmes in immigrant-dense areas, there are no other political measures to influence population composition. Housing policy is residual and targeted towards the most disadvantaged households. The main pattern of ethnic residential segregation in Oslo is one of multi-ethnic neighbourhoods, not neighbourhoods characterised by only one population group, except for Norwegians (Aalandsli 2007). Immigrants and Norwegians living in immigrant-dense areas have to find their place in this mosaic. Immigrants are expected to adapt not only to Norwegian society, but to a dynamic multi-ethnic society and ethnically mixed neighbourhoods. Within Oslo, up to 199 country/national origins are represented (Høydahl 2014).

The Turkish, Somali and Polish Populations in Oslo

To study preferred neighbourhood qualities among immigrants, three immigrant categories with different migration histories were selected: Turks, Poles and Somalis. Differing grounds for being granted a residence permit, length of residence and social status might influence neighbourhood preferences and perceived options. The major migration of Turks and Poles to Norway was linked to labour immigration, whereas Somalis have come as refugees. Within all three groups, initial immigration has been followed by family reunion. When Turks arrived in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the housing market was regulated, and many ‘guest workers’ lived together in cramped, low-standard private rental housing (Bø 1980).

Since 2004, Poles have been allowed to settle in Norway as long as they can support themselves (the EU expansion and the EEA Agreement). They have met a liberal housing market with high and still-rising prices, especially in the Oslo region (Søholt et al. 2012a).

Since the 1980s, Somalis have arrived as refugees, and through family reunion. As refugees, they have met changing reception and integration conditions. Refugees have been settled all over Norway; assistance has been provided with their first home, as have language courses, economic support and gradually mandatory introduction programmes. One intention with these policies has been to ease the refugees’ way into the labour market so as to foster self-sufficiency.

Table 1 shows that the Turkish population in Oslo is about half the size of the two other categories. The Somali and the Polish populations are about the same size, but the share of all Poles in Norway who live in Oslo is only 17%, compared to around 43% of the Somalis. This high concentration of Somalis in Oslo results from their moving in, from the municipalities in which they were originally settled.

Poles are currently the largest migrant category in Norway and are the most widely dispersed.

The Turkish, Somali and Polish populations in Oslo differ in demographic development. Population growth in the Turkish population has remained rather stable, while Somalis have increased rapidly after 2002 and Poles after 2005. Over the years, the Turkish population has come to include all generations. The Somalis are still a population of refugee young adults and children. The Polish population consists mostly of young adults and relatively few children.

Table 1 about here.

The size and residential pattern of ethnic minority groups may be relevant for the development of ethnic networks and communities in geographical areas, like the city of Oslo. With greater ethnic populations come greater possibilities of meeting co-ethnics. Long-term residence on the group level opens for experienced adaptation to and knowledge of how society works, including the housing market. This can serve as an asset for members of the community, *if* there is a network of reciprocal understanding of support and help. Earlier studies have shown that housing resources are exchanged in ethnic and religious networks in Oslo (Søholt 2013). Embedded in our research questions is whether spatial proximity to such networks is part of immigrants' preferred neighbourhood qualities.

Compared to the average D-index in Oslo, especially Turks but also Somalis are more segregated than average, whereas Poles show a low D-index (see Table 1).

The Turkish, Somali and Polish populations in Oslo differ in levels and types of labour market participation and in housing tenure. As of late 2011, 20% of Somalis were unemployed, compared only to 7% among Turks and 5% among Poles (Statistics Norway 2011b). In the 2011 Census, 70% of all households in Oslo were homeowners: the corresponding figures were 68% among Turks, 41% among Poles and 26% among Somalis (Statistics Norway 2011a). Thus, Turks and Poles are finding their way into the mainstream tenure structure. The low share of Somali homeowners can be explained by low purchasing power, religion-based reluctance to take up mortgages, and uncertainties about return to Somalia (Søholt 2013; Skovgaard Nielsen et al. 2014).

Residential Patterns of Turks, Somalis and Poles in Oslo

Figure 1 shows the pattern of ethnic residential segregation in Oslo in 2012. At the city district level, the share of immigrants varied between 15 and 49%; on the neighbourhood level, it had reached 66%. (Statistics Oslo 2013).

Figure 1 about here

People of Turkish, Somali and Polish backgrounds have developed different residential patterns in Oslo. The majority of Turks live in immigrant-dense areas in the suburbs built in the 1970s and 1980s. These areas have the highest share of homeownership in Oslo and are characterized by blocks of flats/ terrace homes and by cooperative housing.ⁱⁱⁱ When Turks

arrived in the 1960s and 1970s they first settled in private rentals in the city centre. Also today, higher proportions of Turkish immigrants than Turkish descendants live in the city centre – descendants are more likely to live in the suburbs (Statistics Oslo 2013). In general, Turks are shifting their place of residence from the city centre to better housing and home ownership in the suburbs.

Like the Turks, Somalis live in all city districts, but with the highest proportions in the city centre. Due to their relatively low labour-market participation, many Somalis depend on public support and social housing. In 2005/2006, 84% of Somalis in Norway were tenants; of these, 44% rented from the municipality (Blom and Henriksen 2008). In Oslo, social housing and private rentals are concentrated in the centre. Thus, viewed from the outside, the Somali residential pattern is related to the structure and allocation of social and private rental housing.

In contrast to the two other groups, Poles have a relatively dispersed residential pattern and are the most spatially assimilated of the three categories.

The Turks are the most segregated of the three categories, and there has been an increase in their clustering from 1998 to 2010. The two other groups have shown a decrease in segregation, particularly on the neighbourhood (not municipal) level (Blom 2013). But what about immigrants' own views as to the kinds of neighbourhood they would prefer, and do their preferences contribute to segregation?

Methodological Approach

To understand the patterns of segregation (Fig. 1) and explore the kinds of neighbourhood qualities valued by people with immigrant backgrounds, and why, a strategic qualitative case study was designed. Turks, Somalis and Poles were selected due to their different migration history and status in Norwegian society. The results must be assessed in terms of the relevance of the findings for understanding neighbourhood preferences among similar and other immigrant categories, and for residential patterns of immigrants in other localities (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009).

Semi-structured interviews (1–2 hours) were conducted with 45 adults, 15 in each migrant category. Interviewees were found through diverse informal channels.^{iv} Interviews were conducted in cafés, workplaces and schools as well as in private homes. Few of the

interviewees knew each other. Care was taken to include people with a range of individual characteristics, and experiences as regards housing and neighbourhood.

Table 2 about here.

Interviewees had arrived in Norway at various times and under varying immigration regulations and terms – they had not all encountered the same initial integration and housing conditions. However, at the time of the interviews, they were all part of the same urban housing market, although diverse in terms of city districts, tenure and socio-economic and family position. Through intra-urban moves, they had experienced varying kinds of neighbourhoods as regards immigrant concentration, location and the location's status in the Oslo neighbourhood hierarchy. The interviewees' similar urban context combined with their differing individual and minority contexts opens up possibilities for obtaining a wealth of information about how they have experienced and assessed neighbourhood opportunities and qualities in Oslo.

The interviews were conducted in spring 2012, after considerable public debate about immigration and segregation in Oslo. Stigmatisation of immigrant-dense areas (Brattbakk and Hansen 2005), immigrants in general, and Muslims and Somalis in particular (Fangen 2006) featured in the debates. In focus were insufficient integration, and school segregation. Our interviewees were not unaffected by this public climate. The public debate on immigrant-dense neighbourhoods, where the immigrants' own preferences are assumed to be the main force behind segregation, can make those who prefer living close to co-ethnics (or to kin) defensive and reluctant to share their views. To try to elicit genuine responses, the topic was introduced at the end of the interview, when rapport had been established with the female Norwegian researcher. It has been argued that interviewers with similar ethnic background as their interviewees engender more confidence and get more frank responses about living in ethnic vs. neighbourhoods dominated by the majority (Shah, 2004). However, experience from fieldwork in Oslo among Pakistanis, Somalis and Tamils has shown that political conflicts and social control in certain ethnic communities may make it easier for majority-background interviewers to get access than for interviewers from the same ethnic background (Søholt 2003). The main point is for the researcher to be aware of possible pitfalls when interpreting the interviews.

Neighbourhood Qualities: Preferences and Explanations

The theory of voluntary segregation has focused on ‘pull’ factors: people decide to move to immigrant-dense areas because of ethnic or religious affinity or lifestyle options (Young 2000, Clark 2002). Can the segregation pattern in Oslo (Fig. 1) be understood as an expression of immigrants’ preferences for neighbourhood qualities linked to ethnic clustering? From the interviews, we distinguish between neighbourhood preferences and explanations of why interviewees actually live where they do. The preferences are interpreted as dimensions linked to expectations for social integration with Norwegians, socialising as such, preferences for co-ethnics, and lifestyle options. These dimensions are used as a tool for elaborating on preferences as to population composition and other neighbourhood qualities.

Expectations for Social Integration

The popularity of the idea of mixed neighbourhoods is linked to the normative assumption that spatial proximity will foster social integration between neighbours (Park 1926, in Peach 2005), thereby promoting social cohesion. Our interviewees had held similar assumptions at the outset, expecting neighbourly proximity to provide opportunities to engage in casual encounters with Norwegians. Moreover, interviewees of all backgrounds were concerned about their children’s possibilities for becoming integrated in society by learning the language and getting a good education.

If my child is together with only immigrant children he won’t learn the language or Norwegian culture, which is necessary in order to take care of yourself when you grow up. People need to mix. (Somali single mother, living in an affluent neighbourhood, but in a block of flats with mostly immigrants)

This mother saw her child’s social and school environment as essential for his future possibilities for becoming part of society. She went on to stress the importance of good neighbours and how she had succeeded in establishing relations with some Norwegian neighbours in such a way that they could visit informally. For her, this was an opportunity to learn about other worldviews, social norms – and cookery.

However, actual experiences were not necessarily in line with expectations. Interviewees of all backgrounds reported some positive experiences of socialising with Norwegian neighbours, although Poles seemed to have found it easier to establish good relations. A few Poles had developed family-like relations with their Norwegian neighbours and landlords.

One was invited to family celebrations like Christmas, and he and his wife joined their landlord on holiday weekends. Another Pole received an inheritance from a neighbour whom she had voluntarily looked after for years. A Turkish descendant, who had experienced outmigration of Norwegians from her neighbourhood, visited a former neighbour in a nursing home. To this interviewee, this old neighbour represented a memory of the past, when more neighbours were Norwegians and neighbourly socialising was more common.

Although there were expectations and various experiences of neighbourly contact with Norwegians, interviewees interpreted Norwegian ways of behaviour as generally pleasant, but distant. A Somali woman who had lived more than 20 years in Oslo had realised that Norwegian neighbours were not necessarily being negative if they did not say 'hello': they might not be interested in neighbourly socialising, or perhaps did not know how to take the initiative. Another Somali woman living in a middle-class district in the centre of Oslo stated:

This area is good, but not the absence of interaction among neighbours. I want to integrate, but I can't because I don't get in touch with them. If I meet the neighbours in the street they just say 'Hi' and nothing else. Other Somalis tell me it's like this in all of Oslo. I miss visiting and going to cafés with Norwegians. Where I used to live, in the southwest of Norway (...) we would sit down and chat with the neighbours. People were polite.

This statement expresses the desire to socialise with Norwegian neighbours. Some said that, since they were living in Norway, they wanted to be part of the culture, and that this could be achieved through interaction with neighbours. One Polish interviewee was especially concerned with getting on the 'inside' of what is Norwegian:

I want to be multi-cultural when it suits me. But my first priority is Norwegian culture. I am an immigrant and I depend on access to Norwegians to succeed. I have a hunger; I want to know everything about Norway and have to build strong relations to a local community. (Highly educated Polish woman, long-term residence)

The expectations and benefits of socialising with Norwegians expressed by interviewees indicate that they saw the neighbourhood as an important arena for social integration. However, their experiences were mixed when it came to opportunities for engaging in informal socialisation with their Norwegian neighbours.

Expectations for Socialising

Expectations for socialising in the neighbourhood were highlighted. Two aspects were communicated: socialising regardless of the neighbour's background, and socialising with Norwegians. In the first case, it was the neighbour's character that mattered, not his or her ethnic background. The statement by a Pole, 'as long as I am surrounded by good people, I am content' sums up this position. However, the same people often found it easier to establish neighbourly contacts with other immigrants than with Norwegians. This can be interpreted as an expression of trust between neighbours of diverse immigrant background in multi-ethnic neighbourhoods in Oslo. It is also in line with recent research from the Netherlands, where it was found that ethnic diversity increases personal contact with neighbours of other immigrant backgrounds, while negatively affecting personal contacts with neighbours of the majority population (Huijts et al. 2014).

When interviewees elaborated on what kind of social neighbourhood they preferred, they contrasted the current situation with how they used to socialise in their country of origin. Interviewees of all three backgrounds seemed accustomed to socialising with neighbours.

You can't just say hello; you have to talk, visit, and drink coffee. Norwegian people are in fact afraid. They think there is something wrong with us. Old ladies can be afraid, they don't want visits. They are not only afraid of us, they are afraid of getting Norwegian visitors too.....People socialise more in Turkey. They like to meet. (Turkish family man)

Norwegians are reserved. That's why most foreigners don't like neighbourhoods with only Norwegians. People from Africa, and I think also from Asia, need people to socialise with. All immigrant women get depressed in Norway. (Somali single mother)

A neighbour [in Norway] died without anybody knowing. In Poland people are more curious, but here neighbours are extremely isolated. It used to be more open here. We have an African neighbour and we know his family who used to live here. I prefer to live somewhere where I feel I belong, where you greet each other and talk. But when I ask for help, I always ask friends, not neighbours. (Polish woman, married to an African)

The quotes show a perception of Norwegians as reserved and sometimes sceptical towards strangers regardless of background – unlike what is said to be common neighbourly interactions in the interviewees' countries of origin and among immigrants in their neighbourhoods. Such experiences had led interviewees to prefer ethnically mixed

neighbourhoods, as these were seen as more sociable than neighbourhoods dominated by Norwegians. The emphasis was on neighbours with different national backgrounds, not on co-ethnics. However, despite difficulties in establishing neighbourly contacts with Norwegians, interviewees preferred mixed neighbourhoods with both immigrants and Norwegians, for similar reasons – expected interaction.

While expectations for socialising could ‘pull’ interviewees to multi-ethnic neighbourhoods, some preferred these neighbourhoods because they felt pushed out of predominantly Norwegian neighbourhoods, where they feared becoming isolated and marginalised.

Co-ethnics of less Importance

The assumption that immigrants prefer co-ethnics in their neighbourhood is only a partial truth. Regarding expectations for socialising with and a preference for living close to *some* co-ethnics, the arguments were very much in line with earlier research (De Souza Briggs 2005). Interviewees spoke of socialisation and exchanging favours made possible by physical proximity.

I know other Somalis in the building because we happen to live in the same place. We talk, visit each other, and help out with the children, for example by taking them to the kindergarten. (Somali mother)

This woman lived in social housing with disadvantaged households, as do many Somalis in Oslo. In this situation, socialising with co-ethnics may appear predictable and safe. Another reason given for preferring some co-ethnics was the difficulty in understanding the unstated, taken-for-granted (Norwegian) social codes in the neighbourhood.

Even if I have lived in Norway for many years, it's a little bit difficult to understand the Norwegian culture. You don't ask a Norwegian about something, because you don't know if it's appropriate. You don't know your neighbours and you don't want to bother them. (Polish woman)

This insecurity could be due to lack of informal contact, in the neighbourhood and elsewhere. In such situations, some may find it easier to rely on co-ethnics. However, and among some of the same persons, there was a preference for privacy and being able to stay out of the reach of ethnic social control. Among Somali interviewees, and also among Turks, expectations of always having an open door conflicted with individual needs to decide when to have visits. Their need for privacy clashed with traditional conventions about visits. Some of the Somalis

and Poles wanted to live in neighbourhoods where they could escape gossip. Indeed, some Turkish interviewees who had adapted well to life in Norway avoided Turks who followed more traditional lifestyles, in their neighbourhood and elsewhere. They spoke of differences in mentality and life-styles, combined with motivations for adapting to local conditions.

The few who expressed a preference for having some co-ethnics nearby explained that this did not guide their actual moves. However, a few had moved house, or knew others who had moved or stayed on, in order to be close to family.

Many Turks live at [location]) because they like to live near their sister, their children etc. It's nice to live close to your family. In [location]) there are 100 different families [of Turkish origin]. If you go there you can meet many of them at once.

Importantly, ethnic residential clustering was not deemed necessary for maintaining co-ethnic relations. Interviewees explained that intra-ethnic sociability could be achieved in Oslo without having to live in the same neighbourhoods. One Turkish interviewee told how he could enjoy co-ethnic relations through Turkish clubs in the inner city. Going to these clubs was important to him, but he preferred to live in a different neighbourhood. One Turkish descendant met his siblings every day, but did not express a need to live in the same neighbourhood. Another descendant avoided moving to a neighbourhood where she had relatives because she wished less intrusion, but she maintained close relations to her family. These interviewees had regular contact with co-ethnics, without living in or having a preference for living in the same neighbourhoods. Interviewees from all three backgrounds valued Oslo because of its manageable size and its good public transport network. They could live practically anywhere in town and still keep in touch with co-ethnics or family if they wanted. These examples support the argument that socialising with co-ethnics in neighbourhoods is only one way among several to maintain co-ethnic ties (Bolt et al. 2010). As noted by Massey (1985:318), public transportation, and modern social media reduce the need for ethnic clustering to sustain ethnic communities in urban areas.

Lifestyle Options

Lifestyle options and individual identity influence peoples' preferences for where and in what kind of neighbourhood they would like to live. Interestingly, the interviewees were less concerned about neighbourhood population composition than were the researchers. Only when asked did interviewees express opinions on desired population composition in their neighbourhood. This did not appear to be a motivating force in their choice of areas where

they would like to live. Instead, explanations were linked to lifestyle options, social and physical qualities, locations and specific neighbourhoods. Interviewees of all three backgrounds placed a high value on qualities like pleasant natural surroundings combined with clean, fresh air, as well as child-friendly neighbourhoods, safety, quiet, and the availability of public transport. Some expressed a preference for living in the suburbs because they appreciated green open spaces compared to the few parks in the immigrant-dense areas in the city centre. In the suburbs, they could let their children play outside, in the centre they had to hold them by the hand. A Polish single woman living in the city centre appreciated places with public transport that could take her quickly to green areas.

I go out there every day. I am attached to this place. I need nature, quietness and to be in harmony with nature. I feel well in Norway.

Green areas and nature were mentioned as related to well-being and sense of belonging, as a physical place with possibilities for doing things like walking, exercising and letting the children play. A Polish woman linked the importance of nature and sports to integration:

You don't get far socially [in Oslo] if you don't go skiing, exercise and do sports together with Norwegians or people in your neighbourhood. This goes also for Norwegian newcomers to the city. You don't get to know people in the streets.

Safety was another quality that guided neighbourhood preferences. Even though interviewees of all backgrounds were attracted to the city centre – whether because of the cosmopolitan urban atmosphere or specific services like shops with ‘ethnic’ goods, mosques, ethnic clubs etc. – only a few wanted to live there. Several felt uncomfortable in the streets because of drug-dealing, fear of crime, and social control from co-ethnics. However, those who were accustomed to living in big cities and young people knew how to act and feel safe in these areas. They preferred the inner city life and its multi-cultural ambiance.

For some interviewees, preferences for middle-class neighbourhoods seemed to correspond to their own middle-class identities. This supports similar findings from Helsinki, where Russians were more concerned about living near other people of similar class background than living near other Russians (Dhalmann 2013). Among the interviewees, only Poles had moved to white middle-class suburban areas, mostly as tenants. Those who preferred urban anonymity found their niche in mainly white middle-class neighbourhoods in the centre, and expressed no expectations about socialising with the neighbours. However, this was an option few interviewees could afford. Of two Somalis with well-paid jobs, lengthy residence in

Norway and a preference for middle-class areas, only one had moved to a private rental in an expensive white middle-class area; the other still shared a dwelling with compatriots.

In talking about specific localities with qualities like closeness to nature, immigrant suburbs were mentioned as being attractive; the ethnic composition of the area was not seen as a negative factor. However, some young people who wanted to live in the city centre preferred gentrified to the more immigrant-dense areas. Others had a preference for areas they knew, either because they had lived there before or because they knew people there. Some spoke about Oslo as their preferred location, but exactly *where* in Oslo was not important.

Explanations for Actual Place of Living

Is the fact that immigrants live in immigrant-dense neighbourhoods an expression of voluntary segregation? The answer is not straightforward. Our interviewees' accounts are characterised by constrained choice: they had to find locations that were accessible and affordable, and pay attention to tenures, housing type and size in the ethno-urban landscape. Immigrant-dense areas are less expensive, for home ownership as well as rentals. And, access to co-operative housing is regulated by non-discriminatory conditions.

The residential patterns of the three categories (see Fig.1) indicate that it appears easier for Poles to succeed in renting a dwelling in a middle-class area than for Somalis. Except for one person, Somali interviewees with experiences from these areas had lived in private rental blocks or in social housing with other immigrants. For those living in social housing, the official allocation rules allowed little choice.

Earlier research has shown that housing information through ethnic networks guides people of the same networks to the same areas (Farley 1996). This was the case in Helsinki as well, where Somalis did not want to move to neighbourhoods they did not know (Dhalmann 2013). Experiences within networks contributed in shaping preferences. Such network information helps to explain the *increase* in segregation among Turks when they relocated in order to improve their housing situation. Qualitative studies among Turks in Germany have shown that despite residential patterns of ethnic clustering, Turkish migrants have heterogeneous preferences. Only some wanted to live in ethnically segregated areas (Lersch 2012).

Other explanations for why immigrants (and interviewees) live in immigrant-dense areas can be linked to 'white flight and avoidance' (Bråmås 2006, Sørli and Havnen 2006). Some of our

interviewees had lived in their neighbourhoods for a long time and experienced a change in population composition:

When we moved in there were mostly Norwegians living here. Today all the neighbours in this entrance are immigrants. When I was young and went to the local school I was the only immigrant. Today it is the other way around. I don't know why the Norwegians move out, whether they're fleeing from the area or looking for better places to live. It might be because immigrant families usually have more children and are noisier. But I don't know. (Turkish man)

Similarly, a Somali woman reflected on the immigrant-dense neighbourhoods where the Norwegians have been leaving. She said: *'I don't know if they [the Norwegians] are ashamed of living in immigrant-dense areas or if they are afraid'*. Not having the possibility to choose one's neighbourhood because of external factors and constrained choice means that preferences for neighbourhood qualities like population composition are not necessarily in line with the characteristics of where the interviewees actually live.

Concluding Discussion

Within the frameworks of mixed neighbourhoods vs. social integration and voluntary segregation vs. constrained choice, this article has examined the neighbourhood qualities valued by people of immigrant background, and if these preferences contribute to segregation in Oslo. Our point of departure was the public debate, with its repeated claims that immigrants fail to take responsibility for their integration, expressed through an assumed preference for ethnic residential clustering. To assess the viability of this statement, a strategic selection of three immigrant categories was studied. Turks, Somalis and Poles were interviewed about neighbourhood qualities. We found that their preferences were related to lifestyle options and expectations for socialisation through neighbourly interaction. Our interviewees emphasised qualities like green and child-friendly surroundings, as well as specific locations and neighbourhoods related to lifestyle options.

In general, and regardless of the proportion of immigrants in their neighbourhood, our interviewees expected physical proximity at neighbourhood level to lead to casual interaction with neighbours. Such interaction was common in their countries of origin and was deemed important for their quality of life. However, they had mixed experiences when it came to

interaction with Norwegians; the assumption that mixed neighbourhoods would foster social interaction between immigrants and Norwegians found limited support. For reasons of social integration, a preference for ethnically mixed neighbourhoods that included Norwegians was still dominant. Whilst a preference for people of other immigrant backgrounds was linked to expectations for socialisation, the preference for Norwegian neighbours was also linked to expectations for social integration as a way of furthering functional integration. With some exceptions, Norwegian neighbourhood culture was experienced as pleasant, but also by social distance, non-involvement and limited casual encounters, making it difficult for immigrants to develop informal relations with Norwegian neighbours. From the interviewees' perspective, Norwegians' reluctance to engage in casual inter-ethnic socialisation in the neighbourhood could be interpreted as 'white avoidance in place', much in line with other recent research (Grüner 2010; Huijts et al. 2014). Conversely, the experience of inter-ethnic socialisation indicated that the trust necessary for neighbourly socialisation did not necessarily become eroded with ethnic diversity, as postulated by Putnam (2007). Socialisation among neighbours of different backgrounds corresponded with the Dutch study where ethnic diversity on neighbourhood level provided opportunities for socialising with neighbours of various minority backgrounds (Huijts et al. 2014).

As to socialising with co-ethnics, which has been held to spur voluntary segregation, none of our interviewees preferred to live in neighbourhoods with only co-ethnics. This conforms to the German study of residential preferences among Turks (Lersch 2013). However, some socialised because co-ethnics happened to live nearby; and others valued having some co-ethnic neighbours mostly because of socialisation and exchange of favours, as shown by previous research (De Souza Briggs 2005). More interviewees said they preferred *not* to live near co-ethnics, citing fears of less privacy, social control, gossip, or expectations of having an open door, as well as a desire for acculturation and anonymity. However, that did not obstruct relating to ethnic or religious networks in Oslo, since Oslo was experienced as small enough to make it possible keep in touch. In other words, interviewees did not prefer spatial overlap between ethnic community and place of living. The approach termed 'heterolocalism' explains their preferred residential pattern and use of the city better than 'ethnic clustering'. These preferences partly confirm the findings of earlier research: neighbourhoods are merely one arena for interaction – among majority and minority populations and among co-ethnics (Bolt et al. 2010; Brown 2013). On the other hand, our interviewees underlined the

importance of the neighbourhood for social interaction with Norwegians, probably because informal meetings with Norwegians are otherwise scarce.

More important than voluntary segregation for understanding the actual residential pattern of ethnic minorities in Oslo is *constrained choice*. Purchasing power, combined with capacity to handle information about options and localities, as well as access conditions in different tenures is vital for navigating in this liberal and high-priced housing market. However, even though none of the interviewees expressed a preference for or had moved in order to live close to co-ethnics, the ethnic residential patterns of Oslo show differences between ethnic groups. From the findings in this study one may ask whether there are discretionary allocation processes that result in a stratified urban area where immigrant groups face different options when it comes to housing and thereby neighbourhood. Immigrants like Poles, who are seen as having a cultural background more similar to that of Norwegians than do, e.g., Somalis, appear to have better access to private rentals and social interaction with Norwegians in middle-class areas. On the other hand, Somalis feared being more isolated in such areas because of few visible immigrants. Moreover, as noted, expectations of socialisation with Norwegians were low in predominantly white neighbourhoods.

Our findings bring new insights into the dynamics of segregation. Importantly, when interviewees were asked open questions about neighbourhood qualities, population composition did not feature prominently in their responses. Our findings indicate that the neighbourhood preferences of ethnic minorities cannot adequately explain the *de facto* ethnic residential segregation in Oslo. Their preferences for social integration with Norwegians should in fact contribute to desegregation. On the other hand, their valuing of socialisation as such, regardless of background, and of neighbourhoods attractive for their lifestyle options regardless of the ethnic diversity, might promote segregation. To get behind the complex dynamics of segregation and desegregation, further analysis is needed of neighbourhood preferences for diversity vs. homogeneity as regards ethnicity as well as class. In this study of how immigrants assess desirable neighbourhood qualities, social well-being emerges as more important than advancing in the neighbourhood hierarchy.

Acknowledgements

This study is part of the comparative research project ‘Nordic Welfare States and the Dynamics and Effects of Ethnic Residential segregation’ (Nodes). Financial support from

NORFACE research programme on Migration in Europe – Social, Economic, Cultural and Policy Dynamics is acknowledged.

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Figures and tables

Figure 1: Residential pattern of the immigrant population in Oslo municipality, 2012. Share of immigrant population at city district level. Share of all residents with Turkish, Somali and Polish backgrounds living in Oslo, at city district level.

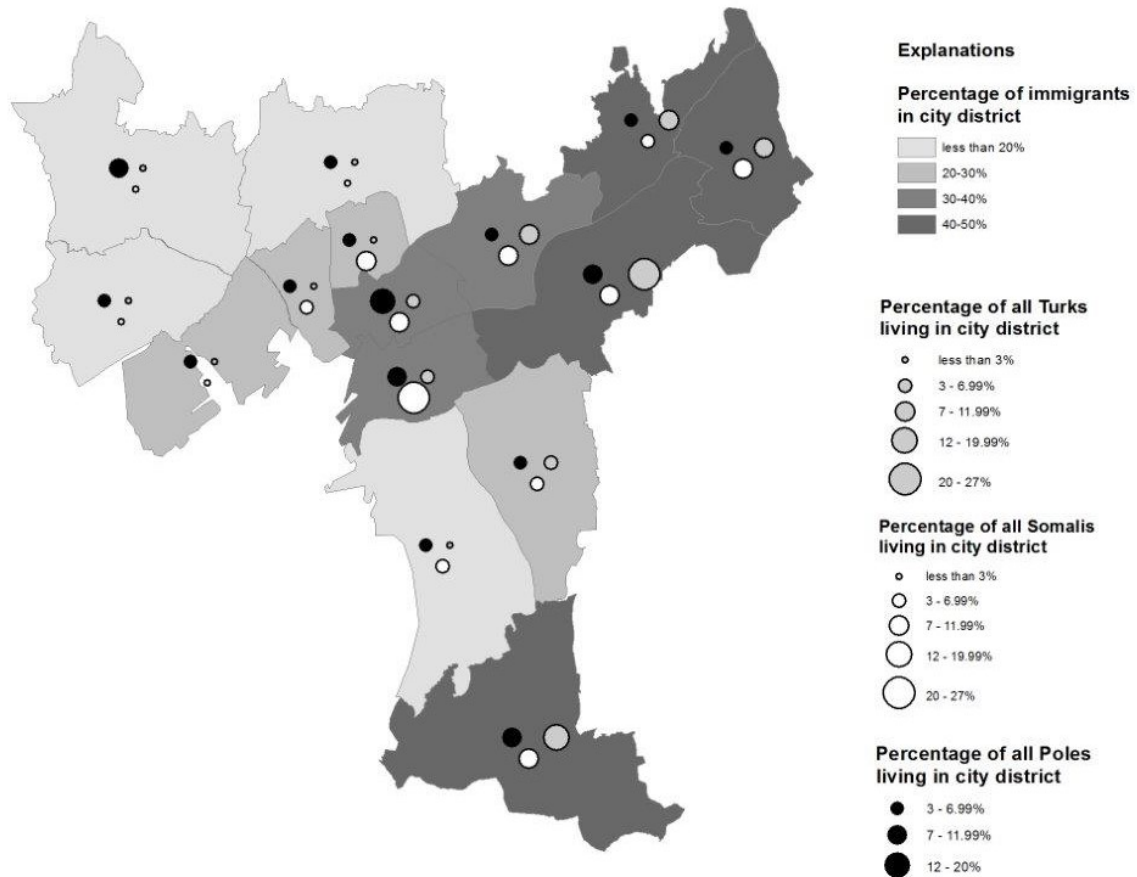


Table 1: Population in Oslo 2012. Whole population, immigrant population and people with Turkish, Somali and Polish backgrounds. D-index 2010 for immigrant population and the three ethnic groups on city district level.

Populations	Oslo	Per cent of all in Norway living in Oslo	D-index 2010 City District *
Whole population	613 285	12	
Immigrant population	171 719	26	33.2
Turkish origin	6 206	37	48.6
Somali origin	12 779	43	36.8
Polish origin	12 180	17	13.4

Immigrant population: immigrants from Eastern Europe, Asia, Africa and Latin America, and their descendants.

Sources: Statistics Norway, Statistics Oslo, 20120101.

* Blom 2013.

Table 2: Characteristics of the interviewees and their housing and neighbourhood situation

	Turkey	Somalia	Poland
Male	9	6	7
Female	6	9	8
Single*	6	13	6
Married**	9	2	9
Living with children	9	14	8
Aged 19-30	6	4	2
Aged 31-59	9	10	13
Aged 60 +		1	
At least one employed in the household	14	6	14
<i>Time of staying in Norway:</i>			
Less than 1 year	0	0	2
1-5 years	0	0	5
6-10 years	0	6	3
10 – 20 years	5	7	4
20 >	6	2	1
Descendants	4		
<i>Tenure:</i>			
Owner-occupation***	8		5
Rental, private	6	8	9
Social housing		3	
Other		1	1
Homeless	1	3	
<i>Share of immigrants in city district:</i>			
Less than 20%	0	2	6
20-30%	2	5	3
30 – 40 %	6	5	3
40-50%	6	3	1
Other			2

* Singles are singles, divorced, separated. ** Married are married and cohabitants. *** Owner-occupation includes housing cooperatives.

ⁱ The Dissimilarity index (D-index) is a demographic measure of the evenness or inequality in which two groups are distributed across the component geographic areas that make up a larger area. The measure computes the sum total in a larger area of the differences in the relative populations in subareas (Reardon and Firebaugh 2002). The index score can also be interpreted as the percentage of one of the two groups included in the calculation that would have to move to different geographic areas in order to produce a distribution matching that of the larger area.

ⁱⁱ <http://www.aftenposten.no/meninger/leder/A-Mobler-valgte-rett-6598504.html>

ⁱⁱⁱ In Norway, cooperative housing has become similar to home ownership. Both tenures are distributed through the market, according to the highest bid. In Oslo, location is more important for price than is the type of ownership tenure.

^{iv} Due to Norwegian legislation on privacy protection, interviewees were found through informal channels. The researchers had no individual knowledge about the interviewees beforehand.