The Preferred Neighbourhood: The Role of Migrant Background and Income in Sorting towards Segregation

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Abstract

Neighbourhood preferences form an important mechanism for spatial segregation patterns. The preference to live amongst people you believe you are similar to affects the spatial sorting of people by migrant and income status. Such patterns are impacted by the neighbourhood level of income and ethnic diversity, and changes therein. The aim of this paper is to examine the preferred composition of migrants and low- and high-income residents among neighbours, using the Neighbourhood Survey 2020, that is representative for Swedish neighbourhoods. Respondents were asked to denote their preferred neighbourhood in terms of ethnic and income composition. Our preliminary findings show that first, the majority prefers a mixed neighbourhood, if they could choose freely. Second, individual ethnic background and income level is associated with neighbourhood preferences for ethnic diversity and income composition, i.e. likes like like. Third, the type of neighbourhood is an important determinant of residential preferences, with those in the most ethnically and otherwise diverse areas, and those in urban academic areas, being the most positive towards ethnic diversity in their neighbourhood. Residents of less ethnically diverse areas prefer much less ethnic diversity, especially when they live close to distressed areas. The same applies to home owners with a Swedish background. Preferences for high-income neighbours are especially prevalent among those voting to the right side of the political spectrum. It is likely that these distinct preferences in neighbourhood preferences will impact residential sorting.

Keywords: residential segregation; spatial sorting; residential preferences; survey data; Sweden.

1. Introduction

Consequences of people living in rather different geographical contexts –residential segregation – is a challenge for societies aiming for social cohesion. Besides social cohesion, other societal concerns include uneven educational opportunities (Kuyvenhoven and Boterman, 2021; Andersson et al., 2021), safety concerning crime, and employment opportunities, all of which are connected to segregation (Sampson, 2012). Also, the deeper the divide, as regards segregation, the more differing neighbourhood effects are due to different contexts people live in (Andersson and Malmberg, 2018; Wimark et al., 2018 *+ more refs*). Some of the proposed mechanisms of residential segregation are people's residential preferences, incomes, discrimination, housing systems, welfare state policies, residential building development eras, and migration flows (Haandrikman et al. 2023). In Sweden, levels of ethnic and socioeconomic segregation are relatively high in a European context (Andersson et al., 2018; Haandrikman et al., 2023; Malmberg et al., 2018; Marcińczak et al., 2023). Especially the high share of affluence segregation stands out, the high share of pockets of poverty segregation, and an increase among non-European migrants to be living in segregated areas (Haandrikman et al., 2023; Malmberg et al., 2018).

In this study, we will focus on the *neighbourhood preferences* for ethnic diversity and income mix, as a residential sorting mechanism. The preferences for diversity of ethnicity and income in a neighbourhood will then be related to a person's own status, as regards among other characteristics their ethnic background and income level. In addition to individual determinants of neighbourhood preferences, we are also interested in the effect of the specific neighbourhood type people live in. Thus, the aim of this paper is to examine the preferred composition of migrants and low- and high-income residents in the neighbourhood and how these are related to individual and neighbourhood characteristics.

We use the Neighbourhood Survey 2020, a representative survey stratified across 10 different neighbourhood types in Sweden (Haandrikman and Strömblad, 2022). The survey question *'If you could choose completely freely, in what kind of area would you like to live?*' was the basis for the analysis of the preferred neighbourhood. On a scale from minimal ethnic diversity to maximum ethnic diversity, and on a scale from only low-income earners to only high-income earners (11 possible answer options), respondents could indicate their preferences. In the analyses, we explain the preferred neighbourhood with individual-level characteristics from the survey and linked register data, as well as neighbourhood characteristics developed directly from register data in an earlier study (Kawalerowicz and Malmberg, 2021). Information on neighbourhood preferences are rarely found in large surveys, and the linkage to register data is an additional strength of the paper.

The preferred neighbourhood and the role of migrant background and income in sorting towards segregation is a complex and multifaceted issue influenced by various factors. While it is true that individuals with different migrant backgrounds and income levels may exhibit distinctive preferences for certain types of neighbourhoods, it is important to approach this topic with caution and avoid generalizations. In the paper, we add a large set of potential determinants based on the Neighbourhood Survey 2020, such as values and attitudes, that may help us to nuance the analysis of preferences. An analysis of neighbourhood preferences related to migration background and income will help us in understanding the process of residential sorting leading to residential segregation.

2. Theoretical perspectives

Residential preferences impact residential sorting and segregation, both as an extended result and an elongation of societal structures. Preferences can be viewed as the uttermost 'acting out' of the impact of societal structures, a sort of micro–from macro–outcome. Place of residence reflects both one's position in society and one's preferences (Bourdieu, 2014). Living in a disadvantaged neighbourhood is not the fault of the individuals living there, but the result of politics and societal structures shaping 'relegated areas' in cities (Wacquant, 2016).

In this paper, the preferences investigated can be seen as *symbolic space* in that they convey the mental categories through which we perceive and organize the world, that is, symbolic space is expressed in how individuals want to live; having preferences for more or less ethnic diversity and more or less income mixing. The preferences show a form of self-congruency along the lines of mental categories that is important for the process of residential segregation. The associations between symbolic space, as conveyed in the preference for diverse or less diverse areas, with neighbourhood types show the *social space*, i.e. the distribution of capital in its different forms. Wacquant further states that "mental and social structures are closely correlated with spatial divisions; that power relations find their expression and solidity in the manipulation of spatial distance (keeping afar or bringing in close) and topography…" (Wacquant, 2022, p. 29). Lastly, symbolic and social space

are associated with physical space, that is, the built environment. These spaces can, according to Wacquant, be adopted to analyse the spatial divisions in cities within the Bourdieusian framework (Wacquant, 2022).

Within these structures and politics, governmental impacts, and the historical course of events, segregation is a multiscalar process. Scholars research the process of segregation with the above proposed mechanisms that include people's residential preferences, but also include studies of segregation caused by differing incomes, discrimination, housing systems, welfare state policies, new construction, area-based initiatives, and migration flows (Arbaci, 2007; Haandrikman et al., 2023; Musterd, 2005; Tammaru et al., 2015; Veneri et al., 2020).

Individuals with different backgrounds are influenced by their preferences for specific neighbourhoods, due to factors such as social networks, services, cultural familiarity, group dynamics, and access to ethnic communities, a sense of belonging and even social media (Clark, 1991, Clark and Fossett, 2008; Clark et al., 2018; Marcuse, 1997). The classic Schelling model states that even when everyone desires spatial integration into society, segregation will still result (Clark and Fossett, 2008; Zhang, 2004), as each group will prefer neighbourhoods where their group is a majority.

However, depending on individual background, these preferences might induce a sorting depending on the setup of neighbours with different backgrounds. Persons may prefer neighbourhoods where they can maintain connections to individuals providing a sense of heritage, language, and community, that creates a feeling of belonging. This is what we can call "the birds of a feather" reasoning (McPherson 2001; Sampson 2012): people tend to live with like-minded people. This might of course be true according to many aspects, such as age and socioeconomic position, but in this paper, we specifically focus on migrant or non-migrant background, and income position, as these are the characteristics most evidenced to, through choice or constraints, result in spatial sorting (Clark, 2017; Galster and Magnusson Turner, 2017; Marcuse, 1997).

Income plays a role in shaping residential preferences but perhaps less so if the question about preferred neighbourhood is asked stating '*if you could choose completely freely*', that is, irrespective of income. Those with a higher income often have more options and resources to choose neighbourhoods that align with their preferences, including access to better schools, amenities, and safer environments. However, this does not mean that low-income residents have fewer preferences for good quality services in their neighbourhood, or would prefer a less attractive environment in general. In the paper, we will test whether people with different backgrounds in terms of income and migrant background have similar or dissimilar preferences

Here, we investigate preferences as a source for the process of residential sorting and thus do not look at the resulting segregation. In the realisation of preferences, discrimination is of course an important factor to consider. Not being able to take discrimination into account is a limitation of this study, at the same time as it is a possibility to understand how large such a factor of discrimination can be against the backdrop of for instance similar wishes and preferences, but a clearly visible segregation. Individuals with few financial resources, and migrants, particularly those from marginalized backgrounds, may face barriers such as housing discrimination, limited access to resources, and lower social mobility, which can result in concentrated poverty and segregation in specific neighbourhoods.

Further, the functioning of the housing market is something to benchmark against when investigating neighbourhood preferences. If we find similar preferences, the functioning of the housing market will be an even bigger issue to deal with in the work against residential segregation (Fossett, 2006). The availability and affordability of housing in certain neighbourhoods influences sorting patterns. High-demand neighbourhoods with desirable amenities may be more expensive, making them less accessible to lower-income individuals. As a result, individuals with similar income levels may be more likely to live in the same neighbourhoods, leading to socioeconomic segregation (Haandrikman et al., 2023).

It is thus essential to note that while these factors can contribute to the process of residential sorting towards segregation, they do not determine the preferences and choices of individuals. People's decisions regarding where to live are influenced by a multitude of factors, including personal preferences, family traditions, way of life, and individual circumstances. Therefore, the outcome of living in a residential area is filtered through preferences, but very much decided by economic and other individual variables as well as structural societal factors.

Policymakers and urban planners have recognized the importance of promoting diverse and inclusive neighbourhoods to foster social cohesion and reduce segregation. The mixing of population by tenure type or socioeconomic status is generally seen as an effective way to improve life chances (Bolt et al. 2010; Söderhäll and Alm Fjellborg, 2022), though in reality, most new developments tend to attract affluent families (Boschman et al. 2013; Vogiazides and Mondani, 2023). In this paper, we examine the extent to which individuals would like to see mixing in regards to ethnicity and income in their neighbourhood.

3. Previous studies on preferences for ethnic and income mix in the neighbourhood

To be written.
Earlier literature could be this section including more precise citing to our aims. The above text brings in an overview of where we find neighbourhood preferences among many other mechanisms leading to segregation.

Hypotheses to be included.
Like likes like:
low-income earners will be more likely to prefer a high share of low-income earners in the neighbourhood;
high-income earners will be more likely to prefer a high share of high-income earners in the neighbourhood;
individuals with a migrant background more likely to prefer higher shares of ethnic diversity in the neighbourhood;
individuals with a Swedish background more likely to prefer lower shares of ethnic diversity in the neighbourhood.

4. Data and methods

The Neighbourhood Survey 2020 is a nationally representative survey, based on a stratified sample of 18-80-year-old individuals, located in 10 different neighbourhood types, that are clusters of demographic, socioeconomic and ethnic composition in Sweden. These clusters were identified using register-based data, with the aim of revealing to what extent neighbourhoods are demographically and socioeconomically homogeneous on a detailed geographical level. The neighbourhood clusters may be seen as modernized versions of geographically shaped social communities. Below we describe how the neighbourhood clusters were identified, how the survey was organized, and the sampling was conducted within these neighbourhood clusters, and what methods were employed to study the determinants of preferred neighbourhoods.

Neighbourhood clusters
The neighbourhood clusters were created using register data for the year 2016, using demographic, socioeconomic, geographic and migration-related variables. The main data sources are Statistics Sweden's Total Population Register for information on country of birth and birth year; the Geographical Database, containing annual geographical information connected to properties, with coordinates collected by the Swedish mapping, cadastral and land registration authority; the Swedish multi-generation register for information about residents and their parents; and Statistics Sweden's longitudinal integration database for health insurance and labour market studies (LISA), which includes annual registers on residents aged 16 and older with information on labour market status, income, educational and other related information (SCB 2011a; 2011b).

Table 1. Variables used to create the neighbourhood clusters

Category label	Description of neighbourhood indicator
Tertiary education	Share of the population aged 25–64 with tertiary education
High income	Share of the population aged 25–64 who have levels of taxable income in the highest decile
Employment	Share of the population aged 25–64 in employment
Social assistance	Share of the population aged 18–64 who have received social assistance at some point in the year
At risk of poverty	Share of the population aged 25 or older who have a disposable income below 60 percent of the median disposable income value
Non-European immigrants	Share of the population born outside of the EU28/EFTA region
European immigrants	Share of the population born in the EU28/EFTA region (excluding Sweden)

The main geographical unit used in the analysis of neighbourhood clusters is the geographical grid, which was available as 250-meter squares in built-up areas, and as 1000-meter squares in rural areas. In total, about 200,000 inhabited grid cells were included, from here on referred to as residential areas. The neighbourhood typology is based on multi-scalar measures of population composition computed for individualized neighbourhoods with equal population size, ranging from the nearest 200 to the nearest 51,200 neighbours

(details may be retrieved from Kawalerowicz and Malmberg, 2021). The typology is based on 7 variables that were calculated using register data, as shown in Table 1.

Individual-level register data was aggregated to residential areas, and neighbourhood indicators were calculated using nine different scale levels: the share of the population in question (see Table 1) among the nearest 200, 400, 800, 1600, 3200, 12800, 25600 and 51200 neighbours. In this way, 63 neighbourhood indicators were obtained, that were then subjected to a factor analysis through which the indicators could be reasonably summarized by 8 orthogonal factors. A final step consisted of a cluster analysis to create neighbourhood clusters capturing important dimensions in the spatial variation of geographical context. Based on rather poor cluster quality statistics, two clusters were removed before survey sampling was employed, and one additional cluster comprised of deprived areas, was added. More details are available in Haandrikman and Strömblad (2022).

Table 2 shows the neighbourhood clusters. Note that labels indicate an urban or rural location of each cluster, though geographical location was not a determinant of the clusters, and specific locations or residential areas may vary. The cluster Rural homogeneous is the most common cluster, both in terms of the proportion of residential area it encompasses, and to population share. As evidenced, more than a fifth of the population of Sweden resides in areas that belong to this cluster. Moreover, two other clusters that are rurally located, Rural town adjacent and Rural town working-class, are second and third respectively in terms of total share of areas included. Nevertheless, it should also be noted that the third most populated cluster is Urban academic, covering 17.5 percent of the population. A detailed description of the neighbourhood clusters is available in Haandrikman and Strömblad (2022) and Kawalerowicz and Malmberg (2021), the latter also including an extensive collection of maps of the different clusters.

Table 2. Neighbourhood clusters

Neighbourhood cluster label	Share of residential areas (%)	Share of population (%)	Key characteristics*
Rural homogeneous	44.3	21.0	Few migrants
Rural town adjacent	12.6	9.0	Adjacent to social assistance
Rural town working-class	10.3	9.4	Employed, low-income, EU migrants
Rural town diversity	8.1	13.9	Small-scale migration
Urban homogenous	7.1	5.6	Medium-academic with high income
Urban academic	5.4	17.5	Academic with medium income
Urban elite	3.1	7.7	Academic with high income
Urban adjacent	2.2	3.5	High contrast over scales
Urban diverse core	0.5	3.8	Large-scale migration
Deprived areas**	n/a	n/a	High share of migrants; low employment, high social assistance

* From Kawalerowicz and Malmberg, 2021, p. 38

** Urban policy program-based selection of areas, added at a later stage to ensure inclusion of deprived neighbourhoods.

Neighbourhood Survey

In the period December 2020 to March 2021, a large-scale survey was conducted in collaboration with Statistics Sweden, using a place-based approach, which sought to tease out the role and importance of the neighbourhood on attitudes, values and worldviews. The questionnaire contained four sections: housing situation and housing history; the neighbourhood where you live; attitudes, values and views on society; and demographic and socioeconomic information. The goal of the survey was to obtain survey data that was representative of the different neighbourhood clusters in Sweden. The survey was offered in Swedish only.

The overall sampling frame of the survey were individuals 18 to 80 years of age, living in one of the 10 neighbourhood clusters. Within each neighbourhood cluster, the sample was stratified on age and Swedish/foreign background, to ensure a large enough sample for two groups that are known to have higher non-response in surveys (SCB, 2015): younger people (age 18–30) and people with a foreign background (individuals either born abroad, or born in Sweden with two parents born outside of Sweden). 20,000 respondents were sampled living in so-called Demographic Statistical Areas (in Swedish, Demografiska Statistikområden, or DeSO): we drew 500 persons from each of the four following categories: persons aged 18–30 with a Swedish background; persons aged 31–80 with a foreign background; persons aged 18–30 with a Swedish background; and persons aged 31–80 with a foreign background.

The timing of the survey coincided with the Covid-19 pandemic. In Sweden, there were no lockdowns, but residents were encouraged to isolate when having Covid-like symptoms, to refrain from social contacts, to work

remotely as much as possible, to apply social distancing and to refrain from visiting elderly. These measures led many people to spend much more time in their neighbourhoods.

In total, 4,784 respondents answered the survey, of which 80 percent answered online and 20 percent on paper. This amounted to a 24 percent response rate, with women, older people, people with a Swedish background, higher educated people, people with a higher income, people with tenant or home ownership and married individuals, being overrepresented among those who answered. This profile was incorporated in the creation of a calibration weight that is used in the analyses of this paper. Response rates varied slightly between neighbourhood clusters, with the highest rates in the urban elite and the urban academic cluster, and the lowest response rates in deprived areas and rural town diversity neighbourhoods.

Data that could be retrieved from the population registers, such as income, educational level and geographical coordinates of places of residence were retrieved from the population registers, with respondents consenting to this linkage.

Dependent and independent variables

Our question of interest was: "Imagine your ideal neighbourhood. What would it look like? For each of the following neighbourhood aspects, mark where you would position yourself on the scale given the set of options. The middle option represents a mixed neighbourhood." (main question in Swedish: "Om du kunde välja helt fritt, i vilken typ av område skulle du vilja bo?", question 14). Six aspects were asked for; in this paper we are interested in two of them: the scale low-income earners – high-income earners, and the scale minimal ethnic diversity-maximal ethnic diversity. There were 11 possible boxes to cross, from 0 to 11, indicating for income mix: only low-income earners (0) to only high-income earners (11), and for ethnic mix: minimal ethnic diversity (0) to maximal ethnic diversity (11), with the middle category indicating a mixed neighbourhood. In the analyses, we use the score respondents indicated, as dependent variables.

Table 3. Independent variables included in the analyses

Variable group	Variable	Source	Categories
Demographic characteristics	Age	Register data	<30; 30-49; 50-64: 65+
	Gender	Survey data	male; female[1]
	Migrant background	Register data	born in Sweden with parents born in Sweden (Swedish background); born in Sweden with at least one parent born abroad (second generation); born abroad (first generation)
	Household composition	Survey data	couple, no children; couple with children; single parent family; single; other
Socioeconomic characteristics	Disposable family income	Register data	Deciles 1-2; 3-8; 9-10 (based on full population in 2020)
	Completed education	Register data	Primary (up till *grundskola*); secondary (*gymnasium*); tertiary (*university*)
Geographical characteristics	Neighbourhood type	Register data	rural homogeneous; rural working-class; rural adjacent; rural diverse; urban adjacent; urban academic; urban elite; urban homogeneous; urban diverse; deprived areas
	Housing type	Survey	owns house; owns tenant cooperative; first-hand rental; second/third-hand rental
	Housing type at age 10	Survey	owns house; owns tenant cooperative; first-hand rental; second/third-hand rental
Attitudes and values	Personality trait	Survey	indices for openness; agreeableness; neuroticism; extraversion; conscientiousness
	Life style	Survey	same life style than my neighbours; not the same life style than my neighbours
	Same SES as neighbours	Survey	same education and income as my neighbours; not the same education and income as my neighbours
	Worries for the future	Survey	very worried about social inequalities; very worried about increasing number of refugees
	Voting preference	Survey	a scale ranging from 1 (most left) to 11 (most right)

The main independent variables can be grouped as demographic, socioeconomic, geographical and personality characteristics. Table 3 shows what aspects of each group of factors were included in the analyses, and whether they were based on self-reported answers in the survey, or retrieved from register data.

Personality traits were operationalised following Rammstedt and John's (2007) 10-item short version of the Big Five inventory based on the original longer versions as formulated by McCrae and Costa (1985) and John (1990). Table 4 shows descriptive statistics on the personality traits as asked about in the survey, on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). Respondents score highest on "doing a thorough job", which is a dimension of conscientiousness, and on "generally trusting" - a dimension of agreeableness. In order to include these traits in a multivariate analysis, the dimensions were subjected to principal component analyses for each of the five personality traits using the weighted data, to prevent issues with multicollinearity. Each of the five principal component analyses yielded a single component representing the main trait; these were the variables included in the analyses.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics on personality traits among survey respondents

Personality trait	Personality dimension[1]	Mean	St. dev.	missing %
Openness	I have few artistic interests	2.33	0.994	2.0
	I have an active imagination	2.67	0.869	2.2
Agreeableness	I am generally trusting	3.25	0.662	2.2
	I tend to find faults with others	2.04	0.762	2.2
Neuroticism	I tend to be relaxed and handle stress well	2.82	0.745	2.0
	I get nervous easily	2.12	0.864	2.3
Extraversion	I tend to be reserved	2.31	0.869	2.0
	I am outgoing and sociable	2.93	0.816	2.2
Conscientiousness	I tend to be lazy	1.87	0.821	2.1
	I tend to do a thorough job	3.37	0.643	2.3

[1] These questions were formulated as: "To what extent you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?" Answer categories: strongly disagree (4), disagree (3), agree (2) and strongly agree (1).
N.B. Unweighted data.

Table 5 shows descriptive statistics on the study population. There is quite an equal distribution across age and sex, with a relatively large share being foreign born, due to the oversampling of people with a migration background. Most respondents live with partner, and a majority has secondary or tertiary education. The share of respondents across the different neighbourhood clusters varies slightly, as response rates were not equal across areas. A majority lives in first-hand rental housing while another large group owns their house or owns a tenant cooperative (*bostadsrätt*), while even more lived in owned housing at age 10, and relatively few lived in rental housing while living with their parents.

In terms of attitudes of values, about 30 percent think they have a different lifestyle than their neighbours, and a similar share thinks they do not have same education and income than their neighbours. Quite many are very worried about social inequalities in society (32 percent), while 28 percent is very worried about the increasing number of refugees. The survey population is quite average in terms of political orientation, with a means of 5.98 on a scale of 1 to 11 for voting preference (from left to right).

Table 5. Descriptive statistics on the independent variables

Variable	Category	Unweighted data, %	Weighted data, %
Age	<30	26.6	21.0
	30-49	25.2	26.4
	50-64	23.6	27.4
	65+	24.6	25.2
Gender	male	45.7	48.0
	female	51.8	47.8
	other or does not want to answer[1]	2.5	4.2
Migrant background	Swedish background	59.2	49.2
	first generation	27.6	38.8
	second generation	13.2	12.0
Household composition	couple, no children	36.0	34.2
	couple with children	35.7	33.0

	single parent family	4.1	5.8
	single	22.1	24.5
	other	2.1	2.5
Disposable family income	D1-2	15.6	19.7
	D3-8	58.2	59.3
	D9-10	25.2	19.8
	missing	1.0	1.2
Completed education	primary education	14.5	17.0
	secondary education	36.3	44.5
	tertiary education	46.3	34.9
	missing	2.8	3.6
Neighbourhood type	rural homogeneous	10.5	8.3
	rural town working-class	9.4	8.8
	rural town adjacent	9.2	3.6
	rural town diversity	7.0	3.6
	urban elite	12.9	8.2
	urban adjacent	10.9	10.3
	urban academic	12.4	13.1
	urban homogeneous	11.0	10.1
	urban diverse	9.9	8.8
	deprived areas	6.9	25.1
Housing type	owns house	43.9	34.3
	owns tenant cooperative	22.1	18.9
	first-hand rental	29.7	40.7
	second-hand rental	3.3	5.0
	missing	1.1	1.1
Housing type at age 10	owns house	57.1	53.1
	owns tenant cooperative	10.2	9.5
	first-hand rental	27.4	27.9
	second-hand rental	1.3	2.7
	missing	4.0	6.7
Personality trait index (means)	openness	-0.007	0
	agreeableness	0.000	0
	neuroticism	-0.002	0
	extraversion	0.042	0
	conscientiousness	0.072	0
Life style	same life style than my neighbours	28.2	27.2
	neutral	39.1	40.6
	not the same life style than my neighbours	30.2	28.8
	missing	2.5	3.5
Same SES as neighbours	not the same education and income	25.0	27.3
	neutral	45.7	45.3
	the same education and income as my neighbours	26.5	23.8
	missing	2.8	3.7
Worries for the future	very worried about social inequalities	31.1	31.8
	very worried about increasing number of refugees	26.1	27.8
Voting preference (means)	on a scale of 1 (most left) to 11 (most right)	6.06	5.98
N		4,784	338,169

[1] Given the small number of responses for the category “other”, this category was excluded from further analyses.

5. Results

5.1 The preferred neighbourhood: ethnic diversity and income composition

Figure 1 shows that the overall majority of respondents in the survey indicates a preference for a mixed neighbourhood, the middle category. Especially in terms of the income composition of the neighbourhood, people prefer a mixed neighbourhood (51 %). In terms of preferred ethnic diversity, the most preferred distribution is a mixed ethnic neighbourhood but the share preferring a perfect mix (score 5) is slightly lower (41 %) than for the perfect mix of low- and high-income earners (51 %). The average score is 5.7 for ethnic diversity and 6.7 for the income distribution, indicating that people have a larger preference for high income earners in their neighbourhood than for ethnically diverse neighbourhoods. The meaning of these averages as well as how these preferences have been interpreted by respondents may be quite different. A mixed neighbourhood in terms of ethnic diversity may mean 50 percent people with a Swedish background and 50 percent people with a migrant background, but might have been interpreted in various ways, and in addition, the question does not ask about the origin of migrants either.

Figure 1. Composition of the preferred neighbourhood
Based on weighted data.
Source: Neighbourhood Survey 2020 data, authors' calculations.

Figures 2A and 2B show how people with different incomes and ethnic backgrounds answered the question on preferred neighbourhoods. These descriptive graphs confirm our expectations: own ethnic background and income status is associated with neighbourhood preferences. Figure 2A shows that those with the highest incomes (those belonging to the 20 percent highest incomes in the population) prefer a higher share of high-income earners in their neighbourhood compared to low-income earners (belonging to the 20% lowest incomes in the population). Figure 2B shows that those with a migrant background prefer more ethnic diversity in their neighbourhood than those with a Swedish background (born in Sweden with two parents born in Sweden). The effect is slightly stronger for those that are foreign born (the first generation) compared to those growing up in Sweden with parents born abroad (the second generation). In the second part of the results, we will add other factors that may explain these preferences and see if these results hold when we add neighbourhood-level determinants.

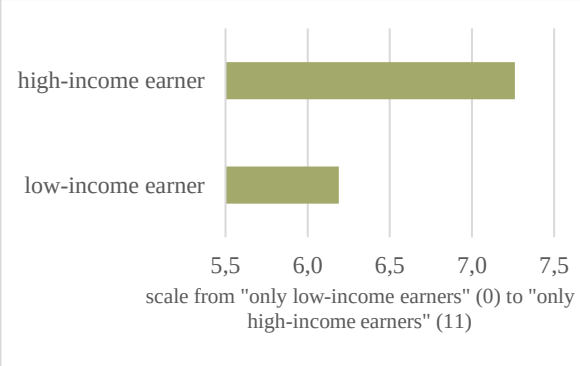

Figure 2A. Preferences for low-income earners by individual income, mean scores

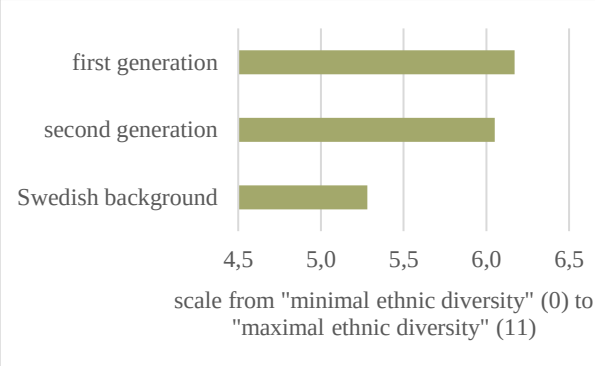

Figure 2B. Neighbourhood preference for minimal to maximal ethnic diversity by own ethnic background, mean scores

Based on weighted data.
Source: Neighbourhood Survey 2020 data, authors' calculations.

5.2 Determinants of ethnic diversity in the preferred neighbourhood

In order to examine what the determinants are of people's preferred neighbourhoods, we performed a step-wise regression analysis. In this part of the results, we report on the preferred ethnic diversity of neighbourhoods. We have performed these analyses for people with a Swedish background (born in Sweden with both parents born in Sweden) and for people with a migrant background (either born abroad or born in Sweden with at least one parent born abroad) separately, to be able to single out how these background impact these groups differently. In the first model, we added neighbourhood type, while in model 2, all other demographic, socioeconomic and housing characteristics, as well as attitudes and values were added to further explain the variation in preferred ethnic diversity in the neighbourhood.

For both models, adding neighbourhood type explains a significant though small part of the explained variance in preferred ethnic diversity in the neighbourhood. People with a Swedish background who are living in urban academic neighbourhoods, urban diverse areas but especially those in deprived areas are most positive towards more ethnic diversity in their neighbourhoods. For those with a migrant background, this is mostly similar, but in addition, those in urban homogeneous and rural diverse neighbourhoods are also more in favour of ethnic diversity. This mostly speaks to those living in homogeneous areas, with little ethnic diversity, to prefer little ethnic diversity. The exception is urban academic neighbourhoods – although the effect decreases when controlling for for instance educational attainment and openness in Model 2, especially for those with a Swedish background. For both groups, preferred ethnic diversity is lowest in urban adjacent areas. Such areas are located close to urban diverse areas and are relatively affluent, with low shares of migrants.

In Model 2, a set of socioeconomic and demographic characteristics is added to explain possible variation in preferred ethnic diversity. Those with the highest incomes (highest 20%) prefer higher ethnic diversity, for both groups. People in the lowest quintile with a Swedish background prefer lower ethnic mix in the neighbourhood, while the same group with a migrant background prefers a higher ethnic mix (compared to middle incomes), independent of the income in their neighbourhood, which is included in neighbourhood type. Those with the lowest and the highest educational levels prefer more ethnic diversity compared to secondary educated individuals (with "gymnasium" education but no further university education), for both groups. Women and younger people are much more positive to near ethnic diversity than men and older people, for both groups. Couples with children are most positive towards ethnic diversity while singles are least positive among those with a Swedish background, while for people with a migrant background, couples without children are the only family type that is negative towards ethnic diversity.

Owning your house is associated to negative attitudes towards ethnic diversity in the neighbourhood as compared to all other tenure types, for those with a Swedish background. For those with a migrant background, living in tenant cooperatives and second or third rental housing is associated with decreased ethnic mix. Even the housing situation in childhood plays a role in later-life attitudes towards ethnic neighbourhood mix. Growing up in tenant cooperatives or second or third-hand rental housing is associated to more positive attitudes towards ethnic diversity in the neighbourhood compared to growing up in owned housing for respondents with a Swedish background, while for those with a migrant background, growing up in tenant cooperatives is negatively associated with ethnic mix.

The last set of factors that may possibly affect attitudes towards ethnic diversity in the neighbourhoods are attitudes and values that were measured in the survey. The largest effect comes from those that are very worried about the increasing number of refugees in Sweden; these people, both with a Swedish and a migrant background, are most inclined to prefer little ethnic diversity in their neighbourhoods. People were also asked about how they placed themselves on a scale of voting left to voting right; as expected, people voting to the right side of this spectrum are more likely to prefer less ethnic diversity nearby. In addition, personality traits were included in the model. The results show that especially the agreeableness index is important in explaining preferences for ethnic diversity in the neighbourhood; scoring higher on this index is associated with an increased preference for ethnic diversity. Results for the other personality traits are as expected, except for that higher scores on openness are related to decreased preferences for ethnic diversity for those with a Swedish background (but to increased preferences for those with a migrant background).

5.3 Determinants of the income composition of the preferred neighbourhood

In Table 7, we present results from an OLS regression explaining the preferred income mix in the neighbourhood, for all respondents. Model 1 includes only neighbourhood type, while Model 2 includes socioeconomic, demographic, housing variables as well as attitudes and values. Compared to Tables 6A and 6B, the models including only neighbourhood type do better in explaining neighbourhood income mix, compared to neighbourhood ethnic mix (9.3 percent explained variance vs 3.3/4.8%). Interestingly, residents in all neighbourhood types except for urban elite areas, prefer more lower than higher-income neighbours, after controlling for own income. Especially those in rural homogeneous and deprived areas are likely to prefer lower-income neighbours. In rural homogeneous areas, people have relatively lower incomes compared to other areas, and very low ethnic diversity (Kawalerowicz and Malmberg, 2021), so this result could be explained by residents preferring equal neighbours than themselves.

In terms of demographic and socioeconomic individual characteristics, the results show that those with a migrant background prefer a higher share of higher income neighbours compared to those with a Swedish background, after controlling for neighbourhood type and individual income. Residents with lower incomes tend to prefer neighbours with a lower income while those with higher incomes prefer higher-income neighbours; confirming the like likes like-hypothesis. Women and middle-aged people prefer higher-income neighbours while men and older age groups, especially those aged older than 65, prefer neighbourhoods with lower income residents. The higher educated and couples without children prefer higher shares of high-income neighbours, while couples with children and single parent families are more likely to prefer low-income neighbours. The results on housing show that more unstable housing situations are related to preferring lower-income neighbours compared to house owners who prefer higher income neighbours.

The results on attitudes and values show that especially voting direction is important: voting to the right side of the spectrum is associated with preferring higher-income neighbours. If you think your neighbours are similar in terms of life style, education and income, you are more likely to prefer higher-income neighbours. The results on personality are a bit mixed, with those scoring high on neuroticism and agreeableness being associated with increased preferences for lower-income neighbours.

Table 6A. OLS regression results for the preferred ethnic diversity in the neighbourhood. Respondents with a Swedish background

		Model 1					Model 2				
		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta			B	Std. Error	Beta		
Constant		5.260	0.017		302.4	<.001	6.403	0.031		204.7	<.001
Neighbourhood cluster (ref: urban elite)	Rural homogeneous	-0.291	0.023	-0.043	-12.4	<.001	-0.200	0.022	-0.030	-9.3	<.001
	Rural working-class	-0.236	0.026	-0.030	-9.2	<.001	-0.313	0.023	-0.040	-13.9	<.001
	Rural adjacent	0.013	0.031	0.001	0.4	0.674	0.035	0.027	0.003	1.3	0.197
	Rural diverse	-0.267	0.041	-0.018	-6.6	<.001	-0.096	0.036	-0.006	-2.7	0.007
	Urban adjacent	-0.422	0.023	-0.063	-18.0	<.001	-0.306	0.020	-0.046	-15.4	<.001
	Urban academic	0.510	0.022	0.085	23.1	<.001	0.076	0.020	0.013	3.8	<.001
	Urban homogeneous	-0.170	0.023	-0.025	-7.2	<.001	0.021	0.020	0.003	1.0	0.311
	Urban diverse	0.403	0.041	0.027	9.8	<.001	0.109	0.036	0.007	3.0	0.002
	Deprived areas	1.019	0.028	0.115	36.9	<.001	0.506	0.026	0.057	19.5	<.001
Disposable family income (ref: D3-D8)	D1-D2 individual income						-0.110	0.018	-0.014	-6.3	<.001
	D9-D10 individual income						0.098	0.012	0.019	7.9	<.001
Gender (ref. male)	Female						0.402	0.010	0.086	38.3	<.001
Age (ref. 30-49)	<30						0.742	0.015	0.134	48.0	<.001
	50-64						-0.199	0.016	-0.037	-12.7	<.001
	65+						-0.123	0.017	-0.024	-7.1	<.001
Educational level (ref: secondary)	Primary education						0.044	0.015	0.007	3.0	0.003
	Tertiary education						0.148	0.012	0.030	12.8	<.001
Household composition (ref: couple, no children)	Single						-0.121	0.013	-0.023	-9.1	<.001
	Couple with children						0.235	0.014	0.046	16.3	<.001
	Single parent family						-0.035	0.028	-0.003	-1.3	0.205
	Other						0.166	0.042	0.009	4.0	<.001
Current housing (ref: owns house)	Owns tenant cooperative						0.099	0.015	0.017	6.7	<.001
	First-hand rental						0.199	0.015	0.038	12.9	<.001
	Second/third-hand rental						0.729	0.042	0.038	17.2	<.001

Tenure type at age 10 (ref: owned housing)	Owned tenant cooperative		0.215	0.018	0.025	11.8	<.001
	First-hand rental		-0.017	0.012	-0.003	-1.4	0.164
	Second/third-hand rental		0.631	0.073	0.018	8.6	<.001
Personality trait	Openness index		-0.045	0.006	-0.017	-8.0	<.001
	Agreeableness index		0.210	0.006	0.082	35.4	<.001
	Neuroticism index		-0.001	0.006	0.000	-0.2	0.878
	Extraversion index		0.105	0.006	0.044	18.9	<.001
	Conscientiousness index		-0.075	0.006	-0.030	-13.0	<.001
Same life style as neighbours (ref. neutral)	Same life style		-0.055	0.012	-0.011	-4.6	<.001
	Not the same life style		-0.051	0.012	-0.010	-4.1	<.001
Worries for the future	Very worried about social inequalities		0.464	0.012	0.091	39.7	<.001
	Very worried about increasing number of refugees		-1.758	0.012	-0.341	-148.1	<.001
Voting direction left-right			-0.187	0.002	-0.204	-80.2	<.001
Adjusted R Square		0.033	0.342				

Based on weighted data.
Source: Neighbourhood Survey 2020 data, authors' calculations.

Table 6B. OLS regression results for the preferred ethnic diversity in the neighbourhood. Respondents with a migrant background

		Model 1					Model 2				
		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta			B	Std. Error	Beta		
Constant		5.571	0.025		225.9	<.001	6.688	0.035		193.4	<.001
Neighbourhood cluster (ref: urban elite)	Rural homogeneous	-0.292	0.043	-0.021	-6.8	<.001	-0.361	0.037	-0.026	-9.7	<.001
	Rural working-class	-0.078	0.033	-0.009	-2.4	0.017	-0.074	0.028	-0.009	-2.6	0.009
	Rural adjacent	0.174	0.053	0.010	3.3	<.001	0.090	0.044	0.005	2.0	0.044
	Rural diverse	0.742	0.038	0.066	19.5	<.001	-0.015	0.034	-0.001	-0.5	0.651
	Urban adjacent	-0.399	0.033	-0.045	-12.0	<.001	-0.284	0.028	-0.032	-10.1	<.001
	Urban academic	0.744	0.032	0.094	23.6	<.001	0.380	0.028	0.048	13.7	<.001
	Urban homogeneous	0.157	0.033	0.018	4.7	<.001	0.134	0.029	0.015	4.7	<.001
	Urban diverse	0.756	0.030	0.113	25.6	<.001	0.258	0.027	0.039	9.6	<.001

	Deprived areas	1.038	0.027	0.219	39.1	<.001	0.524	0.025	0.111	20.8	<.001
Disposable family income (ref: D3-D8)	D1-D2 individual income						0.118	0.013	0.022	9.0	<.001
	D9-D10 individual income						0.145	0.016	0.022	8.9	<.001
Gender (ref. male)	Female						0.400	0.011	0.087	37.4	<.001
Age (ref. 30-49)	<30						0.574	0.015	0.102	37.4	<.001
	50-64						-0.461	0.015	-0.091	-30.7	<.001
	65+						-0.504	0.018	-0.084	-28.1	<.001
Educational level (ref: secondary)	Primary education						0.392	0.016	0.064	25.2	<.001
	Tertiary education						0.092	0.012	0.020	7.5	<.001
Household composition (ref: couple, no children)	Single						0.155	0.015	0.028	10.1	<.001
	Couple with children						0.193	0.015	0.041	12.8	<.001
	Single parent family						0.286	0.023	0.033	12.597	<.001
	Other						0.436	0.034	0.031	12.9	<.001
Current housing (ref: owns house)	Owns tenant cooperative						-0.137	0.018	-0.023	-7.8	<.001
	First-hand rental						0.184	0.017	0.040	10.7	<.001
	Second/third-hand rental						-0.515	0.027	-0.059	-19.0	<.001
Tenure type at age 10 (ref: owned housing)	Owned tenant cooperative						-0.463	0.017	-0.063	-26.7	<.001
	First-hand rental						-0.026	0.012	-0.005	-2.2	0.027
	Second/third-hand rental						1.576	0.033	0.123	47.1	<.001
Personality trait	Openness index						0.226	0.005	0.107	43.7	<.001
	Agreeableness index						0.059	0.006	0.027	10.3	<.001
	Neuroticism index						-0.079	0.006	-0.035	-13.7	<.001
	Extraversion index						0.097	0.006	0.041	17.3	<.001
	Conscientiousness index						-0.085	0.006	-0.038	-14.0	<.001
Same life style as neighbours (ref. neutral)	Same life style						0.143	0.013	0.027	10.6	<.001
	Not the same life style						-0.225	0.013	-0.045	-18.0	<.001
Worries for the future	Very worried about social inequalities						0.677	0.012	0.139	55.3	<.001
	Very worried about increasing number of refugees						-1.505	0.012	-0.286	-121.6	<.001
Voting direction left-right							-0.177	0.002	-0.199	-79.1	<.001

Adjusted R Square	0.048	0.340

Based on weighted data.
Source: Neighbourhood Survey 2020 data, authors' calculations.

Table 7. OLS regression results for the preferred income mix in the neighbourhood

		Model 1					Model 2				
		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta			B	Std. Error	Beta		
Constant		7.784	0.010		804.2	<.001	6.666	0.018		377.1	<.001
Neighbourhood cluster (ref: urban elite)	Rural homogeneous	-1.708	0.014	-0.294	-124.3	<.001	-1.245	0.014	-0.214	-90.2	<.001
	Rural working-class	-1.110	0.014	-0.192	-81.1	<.001	-0.703	0.013	-0.122	-52.6	<.001
	Rural adjacent	-1.232	0.018	-0.141	-68.6	<.001	-0.778	0.017	-0.089	-44.9	<.001
	Rural diverse	-1.496	0.018	-0.167	-82.0	<.001	-0.897	0.018	-0.100	-49.4	<.001
	Urban adjacent	-0.695	0.013	-0.132	-53.4	<.001	-0.469	0.012	-0.089	-37.9	<.001
	Urban academic	-0.668	0.012	-0.143	-54.3	<.001	-0.295	0.012	-0.063	-23.9	<.001
	Urban homogeneous	-1.076	0.013	-0.204	-82.4	<.001	-0.870	0.013	-0.165	-68.8	<.001
	Urban diverse	-1.023	0.014	-0.168	-72.4	<.001	-0.427	0.015	-0.070	-29.2	<.001
	Deprived areas	-1.602	0.011	-0.413	-140.9	<.001	-0.994	0.013	-0.257	-77.7	<.001
Migrant background (ref: native)	First generation						0.156	0.007	0.046	21.9	<.001
	Second generation						0.144	0.009	0.029	16.1	<.001
Disposable family income (ref: D3-D8)	D1-D2 individual income						-0.323	0.008	-0.075	-41.4	<.001
	D9-D10 individual income						0.202	0.007	0.050	26.9	<.001
Gender (ref. male)	Female						0.131	0.006	0.040	23.4	<.001
Age (ref. 30-49)	<30						-0.001	0.008	0.000	-0.1	0.936
	50-64						-0.214	0.008	-0.058	-26.1	<.001
	65+						-0.642	0.009	-0.168	-68.6	<.001
Educational level (ref: secondary)	Primary education						0.002	0.008	0.000	0.3	0.789
	Tertiary education						0.085	0.006	0.025	13.5	<.001
Household composition (ref: couple, no children)	Single						-0.007	0.008	-0.002	-0.9	0.376
	Couple with children						-0.312	0.008	-0.091	-40.0	<.001

	Single parent family		-0.403	0.013	-0.056	-30.8	<.001
	Other		-0.532	0.020	-0.047	-27.1	<.001
Current housing (ref: owns house)	Owns tenant cooperative		0.079	0.009	0.019	9.2	<.001
	First-hand rental		-0.180	0.009	-0.054	-20.9	<.001
	Second/third-hand rental		-0.246	0.016	-0.031	-15.3	<.001
Tenure type at age 10 (ref: owned housing)	Owned tenant cooperative		0.103	0.010	0.019	10.9	<.001
	First-hand rental		-0.104	0.006	-0.029	-16.3	<.001
	Second/third-hand rental		0.794	0.022	0.068	36.9	<.001
Personality trait	Openness index		0.016	0.003	0.009	5.4	<.001
	Agreeableness index		-0.091	0.003	-0.055	-29.8	<.001
	Neuroticism index		-0.096	0.003	-0.059	-32.0	<.001
	Extraversion index		0.023	0.003	0.014	7.6	<.001
	Conscientiousness index		-0.021	0.003	-0.013	-6.8	<.001
Same life style as neighbours (ref. neutral)	Same		-0.024	0.007	-0.007	-3.3	0.001
	Not the same		0.108	0.007	0.030	14.8	<.001
Same education and income as neighbours (ref. Neutral)	Same		0.234	0.008	0.062	31.1	<.001
	Not the same		0.056	0.007	0.016	7.8	<.001
Very worried about social inequalities			-0.163	0.006	-0.047	-25.9	<.001
Voting direction left-right			0.158	0.001	0.253	135.4	<.001
Adjusted R Square		0.093	0.221				

Based on weighted data.
Source: Neighbourhood Survey 2020 data, authors' calculations.

6. Conclusions and discussion

In this paper, we aimed to address the individual and neighbourhood factors that may explain the type of neighbourhoods people prefer. We used a large-scale survey, representative of Swedish neighbourhoods, where respondents were asked to denote their preferred neighbourhood in terms of ethnic and income mix.

Examining neighbourhood preferences is important as they allow for an investigation of what different groups of people think of as their preferred neighbourhoods, which increases our understanding of the mechanisms of segregation. Using individual socioeconomic status and migrant background in combination with attitudes and values as well as neighbourhood type, we have been able to shed some light on residential preferences.

Our first finding is that surprisingly many people prefer a mixed neighbourhood, if they could choose freely, in terms of a mix of low- and high-income earners, and a mix of people of Swedish and migrant background.

Second, we find that individual ethnic background and income level is associated with neighbourhood preferences for ethnic diversity and income composition. Those with a migrant background are more likely to prefer ethnic diversity compared to those with a Swedish background, and high-income earners prefer a higher share of high-income neighbours compared to low-income earners. This confirms the like likes like-hypothesis. For income, this might be surprising as the question was "if you could choose completely freely", i.e. irrespective of own income. When we add other variables to the analyses, we see that the interaction between income and migrant background is important. Residents with a migrant background are more positive towards high-income earners as well as ethnic diversity in the neighbourhood, whereas low-income respondents with a Swedish background prefer less ethnic diversity. These findings are important as they indicate distinct preferences among different groups that may impact residential sorting.

Third, when we add neighbourhood type to the analysis, we find that the type of neighbourhood is important in explaining one's residential preferences. Those living in ethnically and otherwise diverse areas are most positive towards ethnic diversity in their neighbourhoods, and this is equally likely for people with a Swedish and a migrant background. In addition, people in urban academic areas are also more inclined to prefer ethnic diversity, regardless of migrant background. On the other hand, residents of less ethnically diverse areas prefer little ethnic diversity, especially so if they are located close to distressed areas. In all but urban elite areas, people prefer a higher share of low-income than high-income earners, which was a surprising finding, especially in a country with very high levels of micro and macro-level affluence segregation (Haandrikman et al., 2023). When adding housing type to the analyses, we see that especially home owners with a Swedish background prefer less ethnic diversity in their neighbourhood, while residents of rental housing are more positive towards ethnic diversity.

Besides gender, age, family type and housing playing a role, we also examined the impact of attitudes and values on residential preferences. We found that especially worries about an increasing number of refugees, among both people with a Swedish and a migrant background, is associated to decreased preferences for ethnic diversity. Those who tend to vote to the right side of the political spectrum prefer a high share of high-income neighbours.

Some of the next steps we are thinking about is to examine how the preferred neighbourhood is associated with the wish to leave the neighbourhood. Another thought is to examine residential preferences of residents in neighbourhoods that have recently changed in terms of ethnic concentration. We will also do more advanced analyses and add more literature.

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