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**The parasite syndrome.
Urban and metropolitan social inequality
- a global, European and Polish outlook**

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Abstract

In this article, the authors analyse selected outlooks of social inequality as it can be observed in cities and metropolises. Attention is paid to three aspects of the question: income inequality, housing inequality and the risk of poverty. The text points out the spatial dimension of urban and metropolitan inequality and also differences in levels of inequality on the global, European and local scales. The analysis of available data shows that inequality most seriously affects cities located in the developing world (mainly in Africa), but it appears to a similar extent in the US cities. The situation of European cities regarding inequality looks much better. This does not mean, however, that European cities have avoided inequality and its negative results. In Europe, the “urban paradox” can be observed as the cities accumulate wealth and growth multipliers and concentrate social inequality. Although the cities of Central and Eastern Europe appear to be in a better position, their situation must be seen in the context of their more difficult demographic situation. The most significant inequalities in Poland, as in other European countries, can be observed in metropolitan cities. The increasing income differential may be considered the basis of the distinction between the well-qualified workers of specialised metropolitan services and the workers in traditional occupations; this confirms a division in the metropolitan class, as well as urban middle and lower classes. The revealed factors lead to two principal conclusions. The first one highlights the multidimensionality of urban and metropolitan inequality,

resulting in a *dual city*. The second factor concerns the potential social conflicts, known as the *parasite syndrome*. The two are connected with a rise in the level of intra-metropolitan inequality.

Key words: social inequality, metropolis, city, poverty, parasite syndrome.

1. Introduction

The issue of social inequality is frequently addressed in analyses devoted to social and urban development (cf. Pobłocki 2017; Modai-Snir, van Ham, 2018; Hryniewicz 2019; Nijman, Wei, 2020; Tonkiss 2020; Zhu et al., 2020). The interest in this topic stems from at least two sources. The first one is the noticeable increase in inequality around the world. The deepening of inequality is associated with changes in the global economic system resulting from the mechanisms for functioning the information-based economy (Nijman, Wei, 2020) and with the advent of crises set off by finance capitalism (Pobłocki 2017; Hryniewicz 2019). This situation is also reflected in the logic of urbanisation, which, in contrast to the 20th century, present nowadays the most significant dynamics in developing and low-income regions (Gleaser, Henderson, 2017).

The second reason for the current interest in social inequality is the presence of this issue in the most important documents relating to global, urban and metropolitan development. The question of inequality and its adverse global effects is raised in, among other places, the UN's "2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" (2015) and "The New Urban Agenda" (2016), while the European perspective of the inequality issue is treated in the European Commission's "Towards a Sustainable Europe 2030" (2019). The perception of inequality as one of the fundamental challenges of the contemporary world (along with the climate and demographics) has caused the analysis and multidimensional understanding of this phenomenon (cf. Nijman, Wei, 2020; Tonkiss 2020) to become an academic, economic, social and political task.

Therefore, the present article makes a contribution to the contemporary discussion on social inequality. The authors aim to present certain aspects of urban and metropolitan inequalities considered on various scales – global, European and national (Polish) – and discuss the possibilities of their reduction. The reference to the Polish situation points to the specific forms of social inequality in the Central European

countries. In these countries, the logic of city formation in the second half of the 20th century and the resulting social structure of urban residents were different from those observed in Western Europe (de Lille 2009, 2012, 2016; Lorens 2012). These differences, as shown by data cited later, can still be observed.

Three main fields displaying inequality are emphasised in the paper: income inequality, housing inequality and poverty risk. Data presented in the article justify a thesis that the failure to stop the growth of inequalities will lead to more frequent and violent social conflicts related to the growing social stratification. In this text, special attention is paid to metropolises, which are more exposed than other categories of cities to increases in social inequality.

2. The specificity of social inequality in cities – a conceptual framework

The issue of social inequality is situated in the context of analyses of social structures and their hierarchical diversity. The diversity may pertain to social positions and access to social resources, e.g. power, prestige, income or cultural goods. Similarly, inequality itself may be described as a form of diversity, which takes the form of a hierarchy of resources (Domański 2004: 23-34). Three basic categories of inequality are distinguished, corresponding to particular resources: economic (including income, employment, property and living conditions), social (including prestige, lifestyle, participation in culture and social capital) and political (including differences in access to power and in civic engagement) – (Wnuk-Lipiński 2008: 66; Wójcik-Żołądek 2013; Mikuła 2016). This general division takes on a particular form in cities and metropolises, even though many kinds of inequality are not strictly connected with cities; rather they are generated by global, national or regional systems of distribution and capital flows (Castells 2007; Pobłocki 2017; Tonkiss 2020). Nonetheless, it is important to emphasise that cities, and even more metropolises, are main hubs in networks of capital flow (Castells 2007). Therefore it is within them that inequalities become particularly evident.

Spatial distribution is characteristic of urban social inequality. This feature was already discussed in studies conducted by the Chicago School of sociology (e.g. Anderson 1923/1961; Zorbaugh 1929), especially those ascribed to urban ecology

(Czekaj 2007). More recently it has been stressed that the spatial distribution of urban social inequality is harnessed to the crisis-prone logic of global finance capitalism (Glaeser et al. 2009; Pobłocki 2017; Brossaud et al., 2019). The higher profits that result from market speculation propel the growth in inequality. And in this context, gentrification emerges as a particularly significant phenomenon in creating inequality (Lees 2019; Couture et al., 2020). It is evident that gentrification is associated with re-urbanisation, often in a policy of interwoven urban redevelopment (Lees 2019) and, in connection with that, it is harnessed to the mechanism for the global flows of speculative capital (Lees 2019; Couture et al., 2020). Urban renewal causes specific outcomes related to increases in social segregation and the incidence of inequality in access to urban amenities. And the inability to obtain access to public services (in particular education, health and transit), green areas and potable water is a key dimension of urban inequality (Gleaser 2011a; Lelo et al., 2018; Rose 2019: 307-407; Couture et al., 2020; Nijman, Wei, 2020: 5-6). Moreover, as studies in American cities have shown, intra-urban mobility of lower income groups, who often belong to ethnic minorities, does not lead to the improvement of residential areas but often to the reproduction of lower social indicators in other disfavoured neighbourhoods (De Luca, Jang-Trettien, 2020).

Gentrification also impacts the social conditions of those in the suburbs, which have become ever more diversified (Florida, Adler, 2019; Nijman, Wei, 2020: 3). Near the suburbs inhabited by middle- and upper-class residents, there is an increase in suburban housing estates occupied principally by members of the lower classes and underclass. In extreme cases, such housing estates become urban slums (Davis 2009; Roy et al., 2018). Housing inequality thus appears as the second most significant aspect of social inequality in cities after income inequality, to which it is closely related.

A contemporary overview of cities, and particularly those forming metropolises, leads to some key observations. First, it can be distinguished the “patchwork metropolises” regarding the spatial dimension of social inequality (Florida, Adler, 2018). The challenge is to recognise their patterns; Richard Florida and Patrick Adler (2018), based on an analysis of 12 American metropolises, identify three such types: core-

oriented, class block and fractal. This is an intriguing starting point for further research. Second, in the context of urban inequality one can refer to a paradox noted by Edward Glaeser (2011b; cf. Sampson 2019): inequality in cities also rises because cities generally provide greater opportunities for people to improve their social position, and this attracts immigrants. Only a small fraction of the new urban inhabitants, however, actually succeed in their social improvement. At the same time, the remainder further enlarges the categories of the urban poor, leading to an increase in social inequality. Third, it must be emphasised that the specific form of urban inequalities is their multidimensionality, but income inequality is a universal factor of other forms of social inequality (Nijman, Wei, 2020: 5-6).

The overlapping of social inequalities is described in the present article as the *parasite syndrome*, in reference to Bong Joon-ho's Oscar-winning film *Parasite* (2019). This film's depiction of the social relations between two families living in a metropolis perfectly illustrates the fact that, aside from the income factor, social inequality affects living conditions, possessions, educational and employment opportunities, and access to the internet, and is also expressed in the aroma and variety of foodstuffs (Liu 2020; Octavia 2021; Sihombing, Sinaga, 2021; Turner 2021). It is not an exhaustive list of social inequalities manifestations. However, it should be emphasised that they are interrelated and significantly affect metropolitan inhabitants. Therefore, the term *parasite syndrome* is used to emphasise that the statistical data cited in this article conceal a multidimensional phenomenon affecting the entire ways of life of the inhabitants of cities and metropolises.

3. Data sources and specificity

This article is devoted to analysing urban and metropolitan inequality on different scales: from local (various categories of Polish cities) through European to global. In this context, data were drawn from various sources, including the databases of the World Bank, Eurostat and the Polish General Statistical Office (GUS), which is supplemented by information from official reports. The authors' compilation of global, European and, specifically, Polish data permits a new light to be cast on urban social inequality.

The most frequently employed indicator of inequality is the Gini coefficient, which is also often referred to in this article. "It provides information about the degree of concentration of particular goods (salaries, property, etc.) in a society" (Wójcik-Żołądek 2013: 2). In this text, it is referred to as income diversity. It has to be acknowledged that the methodology of calculating the Gini coefficient differs from country to country. In Poland, the most frequently presented data were collected based on survey responses. In other countries, the most frequently used data may come from tax returns. The source of the data, i.e. input, influences the results of the analysis, as it was demonstrated by Paweł Bukowski and Filip Novokmet. These authors, in calculations based on data gathered from tax forms, indicated a higher value of the Gini coefficient (0.44) than produced by the statistics of GUS (0.33) – (Bukowski, Novokmet, 2017: 19; cf. Brzeziński 2017). Regardless of these discrepancies and contrasts, data used in this article were supplied by statistical offices or international comparative studies.

In the case of data derived from the Eurostat archives, particularly useful were those which incorporated the degree of urbanisation indicator, DEGURBA ("degree of urbanisation"), which arose a few years ago as a joint initiative of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the European Union. While recognising the blurred transition in today's world from one category to another, DEGURBA distinguishes three levels of urbanisation, i.e. (1) cities, (2) towns and suburbs and (3) rural areas¹. In such a division, cities are characterised as clusters, comprised of adjacent cells of single units of 1 km² with a population density of at least 1,500 each (Dijkstra, Poelman, 2012). This way of aggregating data is particularly useful in analyses of suburbanisation and human migration between metropolitan areas and their surroundings; it also facilitates the analysis of the diversity of selected dimensions of inequality among the three types of area.

¹ The DEGURBA classification is also applied to the territorial units of the EU on the basis of their population density of and spatial continuity on a grid of 1 km². The degree of urbanisation identified by DEGURBA defines the character of an area in a uniform way throughout the EU. It is used for, among other things, designating functionally urban areas, and also helps to create a typology of metropolitan areas. In Poland, this classification is based on the administrative unit of the *gmina* (*Polska w Unii...*, 2019: 15).

The remaining types of data and indicators (e.g. the inequality index S80/20, household infrastructure or indices of poverty) are less extensive and used in the standard indication of social distinctions.

4. Income inequality

In the last few decades, social inequality has been rising notably faster in the metropolitan areas of the United States than in those of Europe. This is clearly shown by the Gini coefficient, which in many US metropolitan areas has significantly exceeded 0.5. In 2019, the highest coefficient was noted for Atlanta (0.573), followed by Miami (0.567), New Orleans (0.562), New York and Cleveland (0.547) – (Bach 2020). Higher values than these for the metropolitan inequality coefficients can be noted only for some cities in Africa, e.g. Durban and Johannesburg (0.63), Bamako (0.62) and Addis Ababa (0.61), as well as in South America, e.g. Rio de Janeiro (0.63) and La Paz (0.57) – (da Cruz et al. 2020). European cities are in the opposite situation. Among the 58 metropolises on all continents included in the study carried out by Nuno F. da Cruz, Do Young Oh and Nathalie Badaoui Choumar (2020), the lowest Gini coefficients were recorded for Berlin (0.29), Barcelona (0.30) and Manchester (0.31). From this quick review of the data, it is evident that the issue of income inequality affects particular cities of developing countries and those in the United States. In contrast, the indices for European cities and metropolises are rather favourable.

The Gini coefficient for Polish cities is close to that for other European metropolises. In the GUS report (*Income levels...*, 2019), the inequality indices are presented under six categories of places (Table 1). The values of the Gini coefficient indicate that income inequality in Polish cities and villages has decreased over recent years. It is also worth noting that the value of the Gini coefficient in Poland (0.278) is below the EU average (0.308), as has been revealed by Eurostat data for 2018.

Table 1. Comparison of measures of disposable income differentiation by class of localities, 2008, 2015 and 2018

| Indicator | Year of survey | Class of locality | | | | | | |
|-------------------|----------------|-------------------|-------------|---------|---------|-------|------|-------|
| | | Urban size (,000) | | | | | | Rural |
| | | Total | 500 or over | 200-499 | 100-199 | 20-99 | < 20 | |
| Gini coefficient* | 2008 | 31.6 | 36.9 | 29.5 | 28.7 | 29.3 | 27.8 | 29.1 |
| | 2015 | 29.9 | 32.5 | 29.3 | 27.0 | 28.4 | 28.6 | 29.3 |
| | 2018 | 27.3 | 28.7 | 27.2 | 26.7 | 25.8 | 26.1 | 26.5 |
| S80/20 | 2008 | 5.0 | 6.3 | 4.5 | 4.5 | 4.5 | 4.2 | 4.5 |
| | 2015 | 4.7 | 5.1 | 4.5 | 4.1 | 4.4 | 4.4 | 4.6 |
| | 2018 | 4.1 | 4.4 | 4.0 | 4.1 | 3.8 | 4.1 | 4.0 |

Source: after *Dochody i warunki...* (2019: 99).

* In the source material the Gini coefficient is presented on a scale of 0-100 (where 0 indicates lack of inequality and 100 indicates full inequality).

In the context of the observed data, it should be noted that the most significant inequalities in Poland, as in other European countries, occur in metropolitan cities. This, in turn, suggests that the division into a metropolitan class (now also called *transnational* – Pobłocki 2017: 502-503) and urban middle and lower classes, implied by Bohdan Jałowicki (2000: 95-101), has not lost its relevance. This increasing income differential, which may be considered the basis of the distinction between the well-qualified workers of specialised metropolitan services and the workers in traditional occupations (sales, transit, health and social services), has also been noted by J. Nijman and Y. D. Wei (2020: 2-3).

It is also necessary to point out the income differentials between metropolises, cities and towns (Table 2). To make the extreme comparison – between metropolitan cities and rural areas – the income of the latter's inhabitants reaches only 66.2% that of the former, and the inhabitants of small towns (sized less than 20,000) earn an average of just 78.1% that of the residents of metropolitan cities. When referencing data

of this kind, however, it should be kept in mind the respective differences in the cost of living (which is much higher in metropolitan areas) and the fact that great differences of income exist within, as well as between, all localities. It is also worth pointing out that the differences between the metropolises and the smaller cities are being reduced. This reduction may be connected with the burgeoning of policies of social transfer (“redistributive policies”) in recent years, e.g. the “500+ programme” (Woloszyn, Wysocki, 2020: 363, 367).

Table 2. Average disposable income, median and ratio of median to income by classes of localities, 2018

| Indicator | Currency | Urban size (,000) | | | | | | Rural |
|--|----------|-------------------|-------------|---------|---------|-------|-------|-------|
| | | Total | 500 or over | 200-499 | 100-199 | 20-99 | < 20 | |
| Disposable income | PLN | 34293 | 40264 | 35293 | 33652 | 32396 | 31469 | 26671 |
| | EUR* | 8050 | 9452 | 8285 | 7900 | 7605 | 7387 | 6260 |
| Median | PLN | 30553 | 35913 | 31306 | 30577 | 29238 | 29034 | 24144 |
| | EUR* | 7172 | 8430 | 7349 | 7178 | 5863 | 6815 | 5668 |
| Median to average ratio of disposable income (%) | | 89.1 | 89.2 | 88.7 | 90.9 | 90.3 | 92.3 | 90.5 |

*Authors' estimate, average annual exchange rate (2018) according to data from the National Bank of Poland: 1 EUR = 4.26 PLN

Source: *Dochody i warunki...* (2019: 93).

The analysis of inequality based on the Gini coefficient presents a general outlook of the situation in a given city or metropolitan area. However, social inequality most commonly has also a spatial dimension, which is reflected in socio-spatial segregation. The metropolitan cities are particularly concerned as their boundaries en-

compass a mosaic of cultural zones (to use this term in the classic form propagated by the Chicago School of sociology), which include neighbourhoods homogeneous in terms of social status. It is often connected with the ethnic affiliation of the communities (cf. Lelo et al. 2018; Modai-Snir, van Ham, 2018; Mossay, Picard, 2019: 481). The situation looks somewhat different in post-socialist cities, where housing estates built during the 20th century (including block housing estates) mostly retained their heterogeneity (Szafrńska 2016). Irrespective of these historical distinctions, however, phenomena associated with inequality in large cities tend to accumulate: from income, through access to transport and other public services, to political inequality and health. As an illustration of the latter, one can review recent figures for average life expectancy. In Warsaw, according to 2012-2014 data, the average life expectancy for the most advantageous district (women 86.0, men 80.9) was almost by ten years higher than that for the most disadvantageous (women 79.4, men 71.1) – (Olsińska 2016). In London, the difference in average life expectancy between residents of the wealthiest and poorest boroughs is as much as 20 years (Rose 2019: 391), and in São Paulo reaches 25 years (*Public good...*, 2019: 34).

5. Housing inequality

Socio-spatial segregation is directly associated with access to housing and the cost of purchase or rent an apartment. Surveying the spatial distribution of urban social inequality in the city from a global perspective, one can find that the most serious issue involves the number of people inhabiting informal housing settlements or slums². It is a problem taken up in a series of international documents and reports concerned with global urban development. It was addressed in the Urban Agenda (Habitat II, 1996), and then, in connection with the persistence of this problem, in the New Urban Agenda (Habitat III, 2016), where it was considered in reference to section 11.2 of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals to 2030 (2015). The data testify to the scale of this phenomenon. According to UN Habitat, the global proportion of urban dwellers living in slums in 2014 was 29.7%. Admittedly this percentage had fallen by 1.9% from 2001 (31.6%), while, in absolute terms, the number of people

² The term *slums* is used herein for informal or unauthorised urban housing, rather than, as frequently in North America, for any disadvantaged neighbourhood.

living in informal housing increased from 689 mln in 1990 to 881 mln in 2014 (World Cities Report 2016: 14).

This indicates that about a quarter of all inhabitants of urban areas on the Earth live in slums (*Quartiers informels...*, 2015: 3-4). According to the World Bank figures, in countries with the lowest incomes, this figure equals to 64.4%; in three African countries, the figure is higher than 90%, and in two others higher than 80% (Data Bank, World Bank 2020). The UN estimates that the number of people living in non-permanent housing will rise to 1.2 bln by 2050. The chances for newcomers to a slum to leave it are not high. For example, in the countries of sub-Saharan Africa for every 10 mln new urbanites, 7 mln live in slums, yet only 2 mln of them have a chance to leave them (*Quartiers informels...*, 2015: 3-4). The process of urbanisation in Africa is, therefore, often described as “urbanisation without development” (Bairoch 1996: 47-48), highlighting the increase in the number of people living in urban areas and the persistence of infrastructure shortage and difficult living conditions. Living in slums is also associated with other forms of inequality, e.g. in education, health and transport, and even more deleterious phenomena, including crime, prostitution, child labour, etc.

Inequality is also expressed in unequal access to sanitation services. A lack of access to running water and sanitation was characterised by Mike Davis as “living in shit” (Davis 2009: 194-201). The global urban population in 2017 generally had better access to this kind of basic amenity than the rural one (globally the access was reported for 84.4% of the urban population and 58.7% of the rural one). The access to basic sanitation is closely correlated with the income levels of individual categories of countries (Table 3). In the countries and regions of the world with the lowest incomes this access in urban areas was 44.8% in 2017, while at the same time for urban inhabitants of countries with the highest income levels it was 99.0%.

Table 3. Percentage of people with access to basic sanitation infrastructure, 2000-2017

| Region/Country | People with access to basic sanitation infrastructure | | | |
|----------------------------|---|------|-----------|------|
| | Urban (%) | | Rural (%) | |
| | 2000 | 2017 | 2000 | 2017 |
| Poland | 94.0 | 98.5 | 77.2 | 99.2 |
| World | 77.5 | 84.4 | 34.3 | 58.7 |
| East Asia & Pacific | 76.5 | 89.3 | 45.0 | 74.1 |
| Europe & Central Asia | 96.1 | 98.0 | 84.0 | 93.1 |
| Latin America & Caribbean | 82.0 | 91.3 | 46.4 | 68.5 |
| Middle East & North Africa | 90.6 | 94.1 | 71.4 | 81.2 |
| North America | 100.0 | 99.9 | 99.8 | 99.8 |
| South Asia | 50.8 | 70.5 | 8.1 | 52.8 |
| Sub-Saharan Africa | 36.9 | 44.9 | 16.6 | 21.7 |
| Low income | 35.1 | 44.8 | 13.9 | 23.6 |
| Lower-average income | 58.8 | 71.9 | 19.0 | 53.6 |
| Higher-average income | 82.6 | 91.9 | 50.6 | 78.3 |
| High income | 99.0 | 99.3 | 96.2 | 98.9 |

Source: Data Bank, World Bank (2020).

In the case of regions, the access to basic sanitation is lowest in sub-Saharan Africa (44.9%). This is also the only region in which the access to sanitation in recent years rose more quickly in urban than rural areas. In Southern Asia, access to sanitation for urban populations has reached 70.5%.

In Poland, the access to basic sanitation in cities rose from 94.0% in 2000 to 98.5% in 2017, and in rural areas from 77.2% to 99.2% (Data Bank, World Bank 2020). Access to the other infrastructure amenities, e.g. water from municipal mains, connection to gas mains and central heating, has been rising for the last two decades (*Mały Rocznik...*, 2019). Still, however, basic infrastructural amenities are inaccessible for everybody, and the availability is higher in cities than in rural areas (Muzioł-Węclawowicz, Nowak, 2018: 41-44). Therefore Poland's situation is similar to that of

other regions (even though on different levels of indicator value) and the living conditions are higher in the cities than in rural areas.

From the Polish perspective, the inadequate sanitation infrastructure is connected with substandard housing³. At the beginning of the 2010s (based on data from the National Census), “more than 1.3 [mln] housing units in Poland were substandard, which comprised 10.7% of the total of permanent usable housing. In the cities, there were 0.6 [mln] substandard units, and in rural areas 0.7 [mln]. [...] 5.3 million people inhabited these units in 2011, comprising 14.1% of the total population, of which 2.2 [mln] lived in cities and 3.1 [mln] in the rural areas. [...] Substandard conditions are found relatively frequently in the housing stock of local authorities and in private housing stocks with a long term of use” (Muzioł-Węclawowicz, Nowak, 2018: 41-44). It can be supposed that since 2011 this situation has somewhat improved, it is certain, however, that the problem of substandard housing has not been resolved.

A related issue is the question of the indebtedness of housing units in Poland. The difficulties with the payment of rents most seriously affect the tenants of municipal apartments – for whom the average amount of arrears owed by indented tenants was 10,728 PLN in 2018 (the average for Poland in 2018 was 3,407 PLN, the total indebtedness being almost 6.5 bln PLN, and there were 7.5 mln indebted units or 25.5% of the total number of units). A similar scale of indebtedness was found only in case of company-owned flats (9,709 PLN on average), but debts on these apartments totalled only 3.2% of the total indebtedness on apartments in Poland, and that on municipal apartments 64.7% (*Gospodarka mieszkaniowa...*, 2019: 19). It is also municipal apartments and subsidised housing that most frequently include units categorised as substandard.

Arrears in rent (especially in municipal apartments) illustrate a problem of the urban housing policies, which is related to the insufficient supply of subsidised housing. Data from 2018 show that more than 85,000 households (of which 91% were urban) sought this type of housing unit (*Gospodarka mieszkaniowa...*, 2019: 29). The

³ According to criteria employed by GUS, substandard housing is that in which “all apartments lack basic utilities, with inconveniences resulting from the absence of repair work, all apartments are excessively cramped, and all apartments have defects and inconveniences such as poor layout of rooms, insufficient natural light, or lack of elevators in multi-storied dwellings” (Muzioł-Węclawowicz, Nowak, 2018: 44).

lack of subsidised housing points to another issue related to housing policy in Poland, viz. the lack of rental units outside the commercial market. In Poland, as in cities in the Central European countries, the structure of the housing supply is dominated by private ownership (according to Eurostat data from 2018, 84% in Poland, compared to an EU average of 69.3%). Commercial renting, particularly in metropolitan cities, is, because of high costs, simply unavailable to many individuals from the urban middle and lower classes. This fact significantly contributes to the increase in spatial segregation and the growth in suburbanisation that is driven by lower real estate costs (also for rental properties) on the peripheries of metropolitan areas.

Gentrification is another key factor of spatial segregation. This has been particularly observed in North American cities, although it is also present in European cities. Gentrification is identified with the modernisation of housing structures and the accompanying increase in the cost of real estate in central, or other desirable, quarters of a city, which leads to the displacement of low-income urban inhabitants to other districts where housing costs and rents remain low. Thus, rapid increase in the cost of buying or renting a housing unit negatively impacts the household budgets of residents, throwing some of them into poverty and hardship, or forcing them to leave the area (cf. Gądecki 2012: 29-57; Drozda 2017: 79-90; Sagan 2017: 112-125; Florida, Adler, 2018; Nijman, Wei, 2020: 3). Sometimes it can even lead to protests, such as that in the summer of 2019 in the working-class Lyon neighbourhood of La Croix-Rousse, which had been invaded by developers.

Case studies of individual metropolises well describe the contemporary process of socio-spatial segregation. The spatial order composes of mosaics (Florida, Adler, 2018). In the European metropolises, most often the privileged districts are wealthy and gentrified central neighbourhoods of the cities and affluent suburbs. Deprived urban areas are problem central districts and depressed suburbia with a poor transport system, often distant from workplaces and urban amenities (Lelo, et al. 2018; Modai-Snir, van Ham, 2018; Haddad 2020). In such cases, it is easy to see the accumulation of urban inequalities. Access to some services by the internet does not reduce inequality, either. Thus, it is still the spatial distance, especially in the case of suburbs, that plays an important role in maintaining inequality. Rather, one can

agree with E. W. Soja (2009) that social processes create today the spatial forms of the city, just as the spatial arrangement creates social relations (Beauchamps 2012). It is worth mentioning that facing the challenge of contemporary socio-spatial segregation in urban areas refers to the aim of the 11th point of the UN's 2030 *Agenda for Sustainable Development*.

The question of housing inequality may also be looked at from the perspective of household cost of housing. This is how Eurostat presents this issue. The most important indicator used by this agenda to permit identification of housing problems impacting people's material situation is the percentage of people living in households in which net housing costs exceed 40% of disposable income. In 2018, for the entire EU this indicator stood at 9.9%⁴. A significantly higher percentage of households affected by excessive housing costs were observed in cities (12.4%), while for those living in smaller towns and suburbs (9.8%) and the rural areas (7.5%) the percentages were below average. In only four countries – Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania and Lithuania – the indicator was higher for rural than urban areas. Therefore, this problem concerns mainly cities, especially of Western Europe (Table 4).

Table 4. Housing cost overburden rate by degree of urbanisation, 2018 (%)

| Country | Cities | Towns and suburbs | Villages |
|----------------|--------|-------------------|----------|
| Greece | 43.9 | 41.3 | 31.7 |
| Denmark | 21.2 | 12.5 | 10.7 |
| Luxembourg | 18.0 | 7.9 | 7.6 |
| Germany | 17.6 | 13.3 | 10.4 |
| United Kingdom | 16.2 | 13.1 | 14.9 |
| Bulgaria | 16.1 | 15.6 | 22.0 |
| Belgium | 14.6 | 6.9 | 6.0 |
| Czechia | 12.9 | 7.0 | 4.4 |
| EU-28 | 12.4 | 9.8 | 7.5 |
| Netherlands | 12.1 | 6.4 | 4.6 |

⁴ Authors' estimate based on Eurostat data, 2020.

| | | | |
|-----------|------|-----|------|
| Italy | 11.7 | 7.2 | 5.0 |
| Austria | 11.6 | 5.6 | 4.0 |
| Hungary | 11.3 | 7.8 | 9.6 |
| Sweden | 10.1 | 7.5 | 6.2 |
| Spain | 10.0 | 9.6 | 6.0 |
| Poland | 8.3 | 6.0 | 4.8 |
| Slovenia | 7.6 | 4.8 | 3.7 |
| Romania | 7.0 | 8.7 | 13.2 |
| Latvia | 6.9 | 7.2 | 6.2 |
| France | 6.3 | 4.5 | 2.4 |
| Portugal | 6.0 | 6.0 | 5.1 |
| Slovakia | 5.6 | 4.9 | 2.7 |
| Finland | 5.4 | 4.4 | 2.7 |
| Estonia | 4.6 | 4.7 | 2.7 |
| Ireland | 4.5 | 3.9 | 2.2 |
| Croatia | 4.2 | 4.8 | 6.0 |
| Lithuania | 4.1 | 8.3 | 6.7 |
| Cyprus | 3.1 | 1.0 | 0.6 |
| Malta | 1.7 | 1.6 | - |

Source: Eurostat Data Explorer (2020)

It can be concluded that, except for Greece, which reflects the financial crisis overwhelmed that country, high (and indeed excessive) housing costs affect in particular the heartland of the European Union, which may be related, among other things, with the high cost of housing disbursements (rents or fees) and the high cost of real estate services. These costs are particularly burdensome for the lower-earning members of the urban middle and lower classes.

6. Risk of poverty

The analysis of urban inequality is worth ending with data relating to the risk of poverty. Factors of poverty include not only low, or a lack of, income but also ex-

cessively high costs of living, which is illustrated in, among other phenomena, the increase in the number of the working poor (cf. Muster 2012; Pobłocki 2017: 207).

The risk of poverty index has been used in analyses of Eurostat for several years. According to these calculations, 21.8% of the inhabitants of the European Union were at risk of poverty in 2018. In cities, this figure amounted to 22.0%, in small towns and suburbs to 19.9%, and in the rural areas to 23.5%. A detailed analysis of the data allows to find interesting contrasts between Central and Eastern European countries and the “old” EU’s countries. In the CEE countries, populations at risk of poverty and social exclusion live predominantly in rural areas or suburbs, and urban residence significantly reduces the statistical chance of impoverishment. However, in Western Europe, although the cities are marked by a decidedly higher level of affluence, the risk of poverty is more significant than in small towns, suburbs, and rural areas (Table 5). This constitutes the urban paradox, mentioned at the beginning of this article.

Table 5. Population at risk of poverty or social exclusion, 2018 (%)

| Country | Cities | Towns and suburbs | Villages |
|-----------|--------|-------------------|----------|
| Slovakia | 10.4 | 16.4 | 19.1 |
| Czechia | 12.0 | 12.9 | 11.6 |
| Poland | 13.4 | 16.0 | 25.3 |
| Hungary | 14.2 | 18.9 | 25.8 |
| Slovenia | 16.3 | 15.6 | 16.6 |
| Finland | 16.6 | 16.2 | 16.6 |
| Sweden | 16.9 | 17.0 | 20.4 |
| Ireland | 17.6 | 25.8 | 21.5 |
| Croatia | 18.3 | 23.5 | 30.9 |
| Romania | 18.6 | 24.9 | 45.5 |
| Lithuania | 19.4 | 28.7 | 35.4 |
| Malta | 19.5 | 15.0 | - |
| France | 19.7 | 19.2 | 13.7 |

| | | | |
|----------------|------|------|------|
| Netherlands | 19.8 | 12.4 | 12.8 |
| Portugal | 20.0 | 19.8 | 26.3 |
| Cyprus | 20.4 | 28.3 | 26.4 |
| Denmark | 20.8 | 15.1 | 15.1 |
| UE-28 | 22.0 | 19.9 | 23.5 |
| Estonia | 22.1 | 20.4 | 29.5 |
| Germany | 22.4 | 16.1 | 17.5 |
| Spain | 23.2 | 26.9 | 31.0 |
| Latvia | 24.2 | 30.2 | 32.3 |
| Luxembourg | 24.2 | 25.1 | 17.4 |
| Bulgaria | 24.3 | 29.1 | 47.4 |
| United Kingdom | 24.7 | 20.3 | 21.5 |
| Austria | 25.5 | 13.5 | 14.2 |
| Belgium | 29.2 | 15.6 | 18.8 |
| Italy | 29.2 | 26.1 | 26.7 |
| Greece | 30.5 | 30.1 | 35.2 |

Source: Eurostat Data Explorer (2020)

In the Polish statistics, the indicator for populations at risk of poverty is calculated differently than in European statistics⁵. The results of this analysis methods are similar, although not univocal, contrary to those arrived at by the Gini coefficient or the S80/20 index. On the one hand, the results clearly indicate that the larger the city, the lower the poverty risk, on the other hand, however, this correlation is not linear. Looking at the data for 2008, 2015 and 2018 (cf. Table 6), it can be noticed that the figure for poverty risk for cities, in general, slightly increased between 2008 and 2015, to decrease by 2018. Exceptions to this pattern are found in the figures for metropolitan cities and those sized 100,000 to 199,000. In these two categories of cities, the rate of poverty risk decreased between 2008 and 2015 and then increased again by 2018. It is difficult to find a clear explanation for this phenomenon. In the case of the largest

⁵ The percentage of people with an annual disposable income below the risk of poverty threshold, which equals to 60% of the national median of annual disposable income after social benefits payments (*Dochody i warunki...*, 2019: 240).

cities, it may reflect the influx of new inhabitants belonging to the urban middle and lower classes, attracted by an expanding labour market, but failed to succeed on the competitive labour and housing markets. For cities sized 100,000 to 199,000, in turn, the cause of this statistical pattern may lie in these cities' loss of their social-economic roles (cf. Śleszyński 2016), which influenced the situation of their inhabitants. By contrast, the significant drop in the percentage of at-risk populations in smallest cities and rural areas can plausibly be explained by the effect of social benefits payments and EU programmes. However, a precise analysis of the causes of such anomalies require more extensive research.

Table 6. At-risk-of poverty rate after social transfers by class of localities, 2008, 2015 and 2018

| Indicator | Year of survey | Class of locality | | | | | | |
|----------------------|----------------|-------------------|-------------|---------|---------|-------|------|-------|
| | | Urban size (,000) | | | | | | Rural |
| | | Total | 500 or over | 200-499 | 100-199 | 20-99 | < 20 | |
| Risk of poverty rate | 2008 | 11.9 | 7.2 | 8.8 | 11.9 | 13.0 | 16.8 | 24.7 |
| | 2015 | 12.5 | 6.4 | 11.5 | 9.4 | 13.9 | 17.2 | 25.2 |
| | 2018 | 10.8 | 7.0 | 9.1 | 11.9 | 13.6 | 13.5 | 20.8 |

Source: *Dochody i warunki...*, 2019: 95.

Therefore, residence in Polish cities is marked by a decreased risk of poverty, including extreme poverty. In this case, the data also indicate that the lowest incidence of extreme poverty is found in large and metropolitan cities, and the highest incidence in small towns and rural areas. This pattern is characteristic of the metropolises of the Central and Eastern European countries, in which inequalities are greater than in smaller urban centres and rural areas, but indicating a lower risk of extreme poverty (Table 7).

Table 7. Extent of extreme poverty, 2017 and 2018 by classes of locality

| Indicator | Year of survey | Class of locality | | | | | | |
|----------------------|----------------|-------------------|-------------|---------|---------|-------|------|-------|
| | | Urban size (,000) | | | | | | Rural |
| | | Total | 500 or over | 200-499 | 100-199 | 20-99 | < 20 | |
| Extreme poverty rate | 2017 | 2.4 | 1.5 | 1.1 | 1.8 | 2.8 | 4.1 | 7.3 |
| | 2018 | 2.8 | 0.9 | 1.2 | 2.7 | 3.1 | 5.1 | 9.4 |

Source: *Zasięg ubóstwa ekonomicznego...*, 2019: 5.

7. Discussion: the parasite syndrome or reduction in inequality

The question of inequality, despite concerns about the comparability of the international statistics by which it is measured, is comprehensively described on the global, continental and local scales. Available studies point to the key dimensions of inequality, from income inequality, through housing inequality and gender inequalities to that in access to public services (particularly health, education and transport). They also highlight the risks associated with the ever-increasing scale of inequality and raise the question of how to moderate degrees of inequality and restore equal opportunity.

Among the risks associated with the scale of inequality in the urban and metropolitan context, two are particularly significant: the commonness of inequality and its basic effect, viz. the creation of the modern *dual city* (Pobłocki 2017: 263). The question of inequality affects cities in every region of the globe. The analysis of available data shows that inequality most seriously affects cities located in the developing world (mostly in Africa), but it also appears in the US cities. However, the levels of wealth and poverty in these areas are decidedly different. This does not change the fact that in American cities, as in those of the developing world, a growing social polarisation may be noted (cf. Wnuk-Lipiński 2008: 59-60). Against this background, the situation of European cities concerning inequality is rather benign. This is the result of a different approach to the role of the state in the functioning of the market economy and the effect of socio-democratic doctrines that manifest as a drive to partially uncouple human life from market forces. This approach is not generally followed in other parts of the world. This does not mean, however, that European cities have

avoided inequality and its negative effects. The phenomenon of the *urban paradox*, referred to above and specifically applying to Western Europe, proof this best. Although cities accumulate wealth and growth multipliers, they also confront the most formidable challenges, including those relating to levels of social inequality. In this context, Central and Eastern European cities appear to be in a better position; this must be seen, however, in the context of their more difficult demographic situation, viz. the significant population decline that affects the majority of cities in the region.

The most striking symptom of urban inequality is the existence of slums (or, strictly, large areas of substandard housing). Approximately one billion current inhabitants of slums worldwide is affected by almost all forms of inequality and its negative effects: from insufficient income, through housing and sanitary conditions and access to public services, to various forms of criminality (especially organised crime, e.g. that associated with drug dealing or water distribution) – (cf. Davis 2009).

The existence of slums or impoverished districts is also the most obvious syndrome of the dual city, i.e. divided and polarised both spatially and socially. As indicated above, this condition is manifested in a mosaic of urban neighbourhoods, often in the form of cultural enclaves. In this context, the slums represent one side of cities and metropolises reality. The opposite side is formed by the wealthy communities, often guarded and gated, which only reinforces the existing spatial segregation. Social division, in turn, is expressed in the distinction between a metropolitan (transnational) class, the “people of the air”, and the urban middle and lower classes, the “people of the street” (Raben 1991). It is important to note that these groupings are becoming more and more closed off from each other; their social networks have undergone encapsulation within their status group (Hannerz 2006: 293). One result of this is a phenomenon of the *parasite syndrome*. This term is characteristic of the pressure between the metropolitan class, living in their own encapsulated world, and the urban middle and lower classes who aspire to achieve a higher status. Their aspirations, in fact, cannot be fulfilled, and this results in frustration that, in turn, underlies social conflicts in the city. These conflicts, portrayed on the micro scale in the film *Parasite*, have, in fact, a much greater range. The protests known as “Occupy Wall Street” was indicative of this process. The protesters who took over Zuccotti Park in

Manhattan in 2011, with their principal slogan “We are the 99%”, clearly expressed and stressed the destructive role of increasing social inequality in the contemporary world (cf. Harvey 2012: 211-216).

8. Conclusion

Edward Gleaser (2011a: 593) wrote that to “ensure that the world’s cities are going to be places of pleasure, as well as places of productivity, they need governments that can do a better job of providing the basics of city living: clean water, safe neighbourhoods, and fluid streets”. The degree of access to these resources, as is argued in this article, is a key indicator of social inequality. The question, however, is whether it is really possible to reduce social inequality in general, and urban inequality in particular. It certainly is, but the political will to do so and a change in the behaviour of global business players is crucial. A key for solving the problem of inequality is the issue of equal access to public services, which would require a change in the model of their means of financing. In this context, it might be advisable to consider the proposals of the authors of a report by Oxfam. According to them, public services should be financed by state institutions, receiving their resources from an increase in taxes on the highest incomes, including both individuals and corporations (*Public good...*, 2019). This idea, like the proposal to tax speculative transfers of funds by the finance markets, is not new. In order to implement such actions, a global political consensus is needed, only to appear. Without such political will, individual projects undertaken to reduce inequality in certain cities, e.g. the model of “half-houses” in Iquique (McGuirk 2015: 92-99), the building of cable-cars as a part of the public transit network in South American cities (McGuirk 2015: 167-176), or additional taxes on the residents of gated communities in Buenos Aires (World Cities Report 2016: 35), will have only limited scope and local effects. These are obviously important and will point out paths for further action, but they will not solve the problem of urban and metropolitan inequality, which is created in large part by the logic of the global market, i.e. beyond the scope of the individual city and the reach of its authorities. Therefore, in regard to the importance of political will in the process of diminishing inequality, it is worth recalling, in conclusion, that limiting inequality either within

countries or internationally consist of goal 10 of the UN's 2030 *Agenda for Sustainable Development*, and is closely related to goal 11 of that *Agenda*, which calls for making "cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable". These goals will not be attainable unless radical action is taken to reduce social inequality.

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