

## Urban Conceptions of Economic Inequalities

Wide economic disparities are the characterising features of contemporary urban economies. However, we still know very little regarding how economic inequality is perceived and experienced in urban contexts. Reflecting on the current empirical thinking about perceptions of inequality and guided by Antonio Gramsci's framing of "conceptions of the world", I transfer the broad meanings of attitudes and perceptions to an urban level, with a view to develop a framework of 'urban conceptions of economic inequalities', which will enable a broader understanding of how we conceptualise economic inequality and its ramifications for urban research and practice.

**Keywords:** inequality, urban, perceptions, social attitudes

### Meanings of economic inequalities

Inequality is a contemporary challenge, which is implicated in a wide range of problems, such as climate change and mental health. The accumulation of half of the global wealth within the hands of a few is an emerging trend that is altering the conventional forms of urban inequalities: it is no longer just the unequal access to land and services, but also increasingly wide economic disparities, which shape the residential and non-residential spaces of urban life. However, the political discourse around inequality tends to be descriptive, portrayed in terms of percentages and masses, such as "the top 1%" in the public discourse and the pictures of a double-

decker London bus carrying the richest people of the world as a charity advert.

While we have a good understanding of the actual measures of economic inequality, how it is experienced and perceived in everyday life in cities, and its broader political and social meanings, remain an unexplored dimension of the increasing economic inequality. This is an important lack, as conceptions around inequality tend to change political and social narratives and policy preferences by exerting dramatic and real impact on actions and prejudices.

The significance of perceived economic inequality, which simply denotes how individuals perceive the way economic resources are distributed, and its implications for policy is not news in the broader social science agenda. Spanning economics, political science, social psychology and economic sociology, segregation scholars have long been concerned with perceptions of inequality and have sought to understand their wider meanings (McCall, 2014). In particular, they have investigated the impacts of perceptions of inequality (i.e. tolerance for inequality) on political ideologies, social relations and policy preferences (Bartels, 2008; McCall and Kenworthy, 2009; McCall *et al.*, 2017; Schroder, 2017). In terms of their foci, most of these studies concern the differences between the actual and perceived income and wealth inequalities (e.g. McCall and Chin, 2013), and the implications of such differences for attitudes towards political processes (e.g. redistribution and health policies) (e.g. Binelli and Loveless, 2016; Wilkinson and Pickett, 2017). Others have

looked at the social implications of inequality for different social groups (Han *et al.*, 2012; Garcia-Castro, Willis and Rodríguez-Bailón, 2018).

The tenets of this body of research can be brought together into a statement such as the following: what people think of inequality depends on their socioeconomic positioning and eventually determines their tolerance of it (Alesina and Glaeser, 2004; Shariff et al, 2018). Having more knowledge of the issues that constrain society is significant in forming egalitarian norms in relation to those issues (Bartels, 2008; McCall and Chin, 2013). Disapproving of, or endorsing, inequality requires internalising norms that enable us to make judgements about the extent of redistribution policies with economic and political consequences (Lubker, 2008). Lay understandings of inequality entail moral as well as social values and are largely influenced by biographical and contextual characteristics of people's daily lives (Irwin, 2016; Garcia-Sanchez et al, 2018). Assertions about inequality go beyond the realm of domestic affairs and carry values regarding globalisation due to the differences between the perceived inequality in rich and poor countries (Lubker, 2008).

Translating these broad insights into what is happening in cities (in terms of experiencing economic inequality) is not straightforward. There is some recent evidence on whether where one lives (i.e. in an urban area) matters for changing perceptions of inequalities. Some have found that income shapes inequality perceptions only for urban residents (Binelli and Loveless, 2016), whilst others have

shown that the role of physical location was found to have an impact on the preferences for redistribution rather than perceptions (Haggard, Kaufman and Long, 2013). However, the treatment of urban space in such analyses remains territorially bounded and static, ignoring the dynamics of the process by which perceptions are formed, and their implications from a geographical perspective, as informed by the experience. Perhaps an exception to this trend is Walsh's (2012) study of the political behaviour of people with place-based identities. Associating place-based identities with perceptions of deprivation, she finds that the set of ideas that flourish in a place can determine the political behaviour of the people in that place (e.g. rural residents in this case had a certain perception of urban professionals). Walsh (2012) is not simply pointing to the urban/rural divide, she is also conceptualising place as a site, where similar ideas flourish and co-evolve with resource allocation and power inequities.

With this paper, I provide a theoretical background to address the following important questions: What is the everyday meaning of economic inequality in cities? How are different experiences of inequality changing the attitudes towards policies pertaining to cities? Most importantly, how do people conceptualise economic inequality in urban contexts? These questions call for a conceptual and methodological framework that informs the nature of perceptions of economic inequality in urban contexts, and their ramifications. I make no attempt to answer these questions in this paper. Instead, I propose a set of propositions to highlight

their importance and show avenues to tackle them. By doing so, I aim to provide a conceptual framework that will enable all-encompassing empirical analyses of perceptions of inequality. Centring the discussion on the experience and perception of inequality, I am mostly concerned with the following questions: (i) How can we conceptualise what we think of economic inequality in urban life? (ii) Does the current evidence support the key implications of this conceptualisation? (iii) What are the key aspects of the research agenda that is generated by this framework? We need this overarching conceptual approach to perceptions of inequalities in cities mainly because urban meanings of inequalities are not just reflections of the wider national perceptions in cities, but almost act as a device to increase the visibility of inequality to all. Theorising the perceptual implications of the production of urban space and varied implications of urban-related matters, such as mobility, housing and work, should provide a new narrative and set of theoretical principles for further research. Overall, this proposed framework of theorising perceptions of urban inequalities will elucidate the wider implications of urban economic inequalities.

The rest of the paper focuses on how our perceptions are formed, and under what conditions we can turn them into theoretical conceptions and understand their broader meanings in urban contexts. The framework I propose in this paper is generated by insights from the existing empirical evidence and the current thinking

about perceptions of inequalities and critical social theory. In particular, I have adapted concepts derived from Gramsci's "conceptions of the world", essentially the aspects of relationality, practicality, consciousness and convertibility. In addition to mobilising critical social theory as the theoretical basis of the concepts in the framework, I also incorporate some of the thinking underpinning the production of unequal urban living spaces, particularly in relation to the variety of ways in which space informs and is shaped by experience – and eventually perceptions and attitudes. I then illustrate the use of this framework by looking at the trends identified by the British Social Attitude Survey 2015-16, through which I show that belonging to different socio-spatial groups is associated with perceptions of (urban-related) inequalities. I end with further discussion on the methodological underpinnings of the proposed future research.

### **A generative approach to urban conceptions of inequalities**

#### Theoretical basis: Gramsci's "conceptions of the world"

The starting point for this paper is how we should conceptualise what we think of urban inequalities in order to enable human-led transformations to address the socioeconomic and spatial divide. This initial question is related to the key concern of Antonio Gramsci's questioning of how to conceptualise ourselves and the world,<sup>i</sup> in order to bring about a radical transformation. The notion of "conceptions of the world" appears frequently in Gramsci's Prison Notebooks (Gramsci, 2011). It

encapsulates how certain social groups, and individuals within them, understand the world and their place in it (Wainwright, 2010; Murray and Worth, 2012). These conceptions are both relational and practical approaches to “being-in-the-world”; they are therefore embodied and lived (Wainwright, 2010). The “practical” nature of the Gramscian conceptions of the world is what matters most. It extends David Harvey’s more recent definition of conceptions, which only focuses on mental conceptions of the world representing the expectations and beliefs that people act on and the wider cultural norms and beliefs (Harvey, 2009; Wainwright, 2010). The practical nature of conceptions of the world implies that conceptions are rooted and reflected in ordinary social activity and daily routines. Functioning in the political, mental and everyday life, they create new narratives that have the potential to transform the economy and society. The defining characteristics of conceptions of the world, which constitute key pillars of the proposed framework in this paper (i.e. practicality, relationality, consciousness and convertibility) are as follows.

- The primary way in which Gramsci describes conceptions of the world concerns *practicality*, which draws attention to the relationship between the reflection of existing thoughts and the actual world that produces them. At the heart of being in the world is the ordinary social activity that individuals engage on an everyday basis.
- The second aspect concerns *relationality* which points to the dynamic nature of conceptions that evolve by interacting with each other and defines the

existence of social groups and “socialisation” of ideas (Gramsci, 1971: 325).

Gramsci claims that one continuously evolves in relation with others, reflecting “living social relations” (Wainwright, 2010: 508). The relationality aspect becomes particularly important when considering its role in forming mental conceptions of the world, which are unstable, contested and subject to widely-held social beliefs that are often disseminated through everyday social relations (Harvey, 2009). However, it can also be directly linked with the practicality concept as belonging to a certain social group is part of being in the world and responding to challenges posed by everyday realities.

- For ideas to act as a material force, one needs to be able to criticise effectively, which is to work out consciously one’s own conception of the world. It is impossible to form ideas without knowing “what one really is” (Gramsci, 1971: 324). Consciousness is therefore a processual aspect that provides the means to form a belief that is rooted in ordinary everyday practical and relational activities.
- Finally, conceptions of the world do not carry any ideological connotations. Unlike ideologies, they should have the potential to create a unity (Wainwright, 2010). This unity entails *convertibility* between philosophy, politics and production that make up conceptions of the world (Murray and Worth, 2013). In other words, the activity spheres of philosophy, politics and production should be convertible within conceptions of the world: that is to say, the ideas, power relationships, forms of state and governance regimes



one lives and/or practices under, and material wellbeing, are necessarily interlinked. For instance, ideas are influenced by and materialised in different levels of material wellbeing and the production practices that one mobilises. Convertibility between these different activity spheres renders conceptions of the world integrative and consistent, enabling a cohesive view of the world.

### Translating 'conceptions' into the urban level

I now transfer perceptions of inequalities (as empirically evidenced in the current literature) and their wider meanings to an urban level through the lens of Gramsci's conceptions of the world. I draw on conceptions of the world as a descriptive, analytical concept, articulating its practical and relational aspects as well as its processual characteristics (i.e. convertibility and consciousness). Specifically, I base the urban translation of perceptions of inequality through a combination of *relationality, practicality and consciousness and convertibility* to devise a framework for studying "urban conceptions of inequalities". By focusing on these four elements, the framework of urban conceptions of inequalities is generative of conceptual pathways and questions that seek further exploration to understand the implications of perceptions of inequalities, rather than evaluating the impacts of inequalities. The main intended use of this framework is to mobilise the determinants and implications of perceived inequality and normative attitudes towards inequality to explain the process by which beliefs about inequality are formed through socio-spatial experiences. Doing so will add broader insights into the current empirical

knowledge on perceptions and will highlight how we can organise the evidence on the perceived and actual measures of inequality.

I approach the conceptual framing of urban conceptions of inequalities by breaking it down into two parts, namely definition and formation. *Practicality* denotes the socio-spatial aspects of perceptions of inequalities in everyday urban life. Urban conceptions of inequalities are further denoted by *relationality*, which points to the fact that these conceptions exist only in relation to others' conceptions. This implies that relative changes, depending on the socio-spatial position one holds across different spheres of everyday life, are crucial in order to define conceptions. By identifying the physical and social urban spaces, respectively, the practicality and the relationality of everyday urban space together define the urban conceptions of inequality. How urban conceptions of inequalities are formed can be explained by the process of turning experience, knowledge and perceptions into conceptions through critical thinking, which occurs in mental spaces (i.e. *consciousness*). The integrative impact of conceptions is determined by the *convertibility* between the physical, social and mental spaces of everyday life (i.e. practicality, relationality and consciousness).

Below, I unpack these arguments by addressing the two key questions that constitute the proposed framework:

1) What defines urban conceptions of inequalities?

*Practicality in, and the relationality of, everyday urban space.* Urbanising conceptions of the world to explicate the meanings of inequalities in urban life requires clarifying the unit of analysis, in terms of space and time, and what we mean by the components and specificities of the urban life. Here, I consider urban more than a set of physical, administrative and demographic characteristics of a fixed human settlement, in contrast with the existing research that simply refers to the non-urban (i.e. rural) – urban dichotomy in differentiating the urban perceptions (e.g. Binelli and Loveless, 2016). Relaxing the coverage and definitions of urban life and territory presumes that the effects of urbanisation go well beyond cities by pointing to the strong potential of urbanisation to reshape socio-spatial processes (Brenner and Schmid, 2005; Brenner and Schmid, 2011). Yet, not all social and relational aspects of urban life are absorbed by the process of urbanisation. One should also pay attention to the everyday, which is defined as the “realm associated with ordinary, routine and repetitive aspects of social life that are pervasive and yet frequently overlooked” (Gregory *et al.*, 2009: 223). There are unknown implications of the everyday conflicts and engagements that cannot be predicted by the urbanisation process, as “the everyday is the shifting terrain from which a new political imaginary might emerge.” (Ruddick *et al.*, 2017: 9).

The *practicality* notion of the conceptions of the world points to this actual doing and experience as part of the routine in everyday urban space, which determines experience through involvement in ordinary activities (where inequality is explicitly or implicitly contained). It is therefore not only the knowledge about the general trends about inequality (i.e. a macro and historical perspective) that determine the perceptions of and attitudes towards inequality but also the experience gained through everyday urban life activities that take place in people's immediate environments (Galesic et al., 2012). Although I refer to practicality as the physical space in which perceptions are formed, these activities cannot be fixated in physical and administrative terms, as the socio-spatial changes cannot be contained in absolute terms and are largely influenced how people use the information available to make sense of their social environments (Dawtry et al, 2015). I use 'physical space' as a spatial site, where relationships and engagement with the everyday occur.

The notion of *practicality* is inherently spatial through the role of the context on the everyday. The implications of area/neighbourhood effects and the social circles for one's perceptions clearly shows the significance of context in individual lives as well as the importance of the socio-spatial structure for the agency (Atkinson and Kintrea; 2001; Dawtry et al., 2015). However, context goes beyond residential exposure to disadvantage and includes non-residential exposure to inequalities in everyday life when traversing a city for work, leisure or other purposes (Kwan, 2012; Krivo *et al.*,

2013; Schuermans, 2016). Whilst urban spaces in the form of enclaves (e.g. gated communities, shopping malls) are influential in people's perceptions of social classes (e.g. Douglass et al., 2013), the encounters of different social classes through shared infrastructure and urban spaces in everyday life are equally important (Amin, 2003; Schuermans, 2016). Concentrated affluence and poverty manifest themselves in different forms in different parts of cities, rendering the visibility of inequality vastly variable across the urban space. The spatial distribution of inequality yields different forms of cues of inequality that cannot be revealed by just looking at the residential segregation. As an example, the juxtaposition of poverty and luxury in Latin America that occurs as a result of the opening of shopping malls, which are spaces of work and entertainment, next to informal settlements creates different forms of experiencing inequality and eventually determining perceptions (Dinzei-flores, 2017). Further evidence points to the differences in the spatial reach of the poor and the rich, which also determines the experiences of inequalities in urban contexts (Bos and Jaffe, 2015)<sup>1</sup>.

The relational nature of practicality (i.e. defined by the activities occurring in a place of everyday relations) already points to the helpful illustration provided by Gramsci's emphasis on *relationality* (of everyday urban space), which constitutes the

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<sup>1</sup> The immediate physical space might also entail digital spaces, which act as a significant platform for social interactions enabling physical encounters in city contexts. For the purposes of this paper, I leave the urban space defined by the practicality and relationality as broad as possible to enable a wide range of conceptual possibilities in studying urban conceptions of inequalities.

other aspect of how to define the urban conceptions of inequality. The precursor to relationality is relativism, which is in this case illustrated by how perceptions change depending on a socio-spatial position one holds in a society and how they affect different areas of everyday urban life (i.e. residential and non-residential) (Harvey, 2008). Relativeness leads not only to fluid geographies, but also to different forms of socialities, meaning that people from different social groups tend to interact in different ways in different places.

By recognising the intersectionality of different social groups (i.e. in terms of gender, age, sexuality and ethnicity) in considering who gets what (i.e. distribution), the multitude forms of injustices are taken into consideration (Valentine, 2007). The recognition of this intersectionality in shaping everyday urban experience necessitates considering the role of multi-faceted social traits in reproducing inequalities (Fincher and Iveson, 2011). For instance, considering the intersection of income, class and age in mobility and perceptions of inequalities has shown that the poor urban young are more mobile than their rich counterparts, as the rich young are less willing to visit neighbourhoods that are deemed poor (Bos and Jaffe, 2015). Urban perceptions therefore cannot exist independently of the relationships between different areas of urban matters (e.g. housing, transport) and urban social groups (e.g. income and class) and should be identified by clear social and spatial divisions across urban spaces.

The definition of urban conceptions of economic inequalities is therefore defined in terms of two interlinked concepts, namely practicality and relationality. The intersection of physical and social spaces these two concepts point to together define what one thinks of inequalities stemming from everyday social engagements and the immediate environment that they live in.

## 2) How are urban conceptions of inequalities formed?

*Consciousness.* To turn *practical* experience in a *relational* context into cognitive understandings of inequality, one needs to be *consciously* developing a perspective of the inequality experience at hand. This process can be defined as the mental space through which urban conceptions of economic inequalities are formed. The current political and sociological research on perceptions of inequality emphasises the role of knowledge about inequality in belief formation (i.e. norms about economic inequality) (Bartel, 2008; McCall and Chin, 2013). However, it is not only knowledge about the inequality, but also the beliefs about the economic system that determine the perception of inequality (Rodriguez-Balio et al, 2017). It has often been found in the social psychological research that reactions to socially evaluated outcomes (based on knowledge) are not necessarily linked with the objective disadvantages and that social comparison and attribution biases play a role in entitlements (Major, 1994). To what extent the process of the self-evaluation will be critical of the dogmatic world and will transform the experience and perceptions to an urban conception of

economic inequality will therefore depend on the knowledge about the inequality, beliefs about the economic system and people's immediate surroundings, as defined in the previous section.

Gramsci (1971: 324 ) asserts that "... one's conception of the world is a response to a certain specific problem posed by the reality." In urbanising the consciousness aspect of the conceptions of the world, the urban matters (mostly issues) emerging from rapid urbanisation, particularly in the areas of housing, work, mobility and infrastructure, (i.e. physical space matters) expose citizens to urban-specific realities that shapes their worldviews and perspectives. For instance, mobility inequality tends to be related to the socioeconomic characteristics of where one lives (Hernandez, 2018), which may eventually shape one's view of the transport matter at hand. The conscious evaluation of the urban outcomes with social ills is therefore based on knowledge and experience in urban spaces.

*Convertibility.* Experience and perceptions as formed by the relationality and practicality aspects (i.e. physical and social spaces) and attitudes, as formulated in the mental space, can be *convertible* to each other, forming an integrative urban conception of inequalities that explains the meanings of inequalities. The social psychology of how people perceive economic inequality shows that ideologies, individual perceptions and the social norms are defining characteristics of what people know about and judge income disparities (Shariff et al., 2016). The group and



spatial dynamics have a clear impact on the perceptions, which is in turn influenced by broad ideologies and the immediate societal factors (Garcia-Sanchez et al., 2018). Convertibility between physical, social and mental spaces of everyday urban life, and their implications for perceived inequality and its wider meanings, therefore, enables a generative framework (i.e. brings further questions and identifies solutions). In this vein, the role played by the inequality between urban professionals and rural residents in the USA context in igniting a sense of injustice, as demonstrated by Walsh (2012: 518), is a useful empirical example of how integrative approaches to “distribution of resources, decision-making authority and values [turn] into a coherent narrative that people use to make sense of the world”.

In sum, consciousness and convertibility aspects are process-related, through which the socio-spatial experiences form an awareness of the wider issues, which eventually enable individuals to form perspectives on inequalities. Practicality and relationality, on the other hand, focus on the defining features of urban conceptions of inequalities. According to the existing evidence on how people experience the urban economic inequality, there are three different ways in which urban inequalities and perceptions can be interlinked. The first concerns the role of urban space as a mediator for rendering increasing inequality an everyday concern. The second relates to perceptions of the juxtaposition of the rich and the poor (i.e. people, places) as mediated through experience. Finally, matters emerging from rapid urbanisation, particularly in the areas of housing, work, mobility and infrastructure,

expose citizens to urban-specific realities that shapes their worldviews and perspectives. The intersection of everyday engagements, visibility of inequality in the immediate environment and the matters emerging from urbanisation distinguish the 'urban' in understanding the conceptions of inequalities.

### **Empirically interrogating “urban conceptions of inequalities” in the UK**

Here, I investigate how the conceptual framework above might work out in practice by using it to explicate the trends regarding economic inequality in the UK, which is characterised as a highly unequal advanced economy. However, I will only focus on the partial elements of the framework, as further (qualitative) data is needed to illustrate the full framework. Indeed, the specific aim of this analysis is to identify whether urban conceptions of inequalities are identifiable/definable in a given empirical context. By doing so, we can also determine if further research that requires new datasets and a variety of research methodologies is worthwhile.

In 2017, the average income of the richest fifth of households in the UK was 12 times greater than that of the poorest fifth. Figure 2 shows the distribution of 2017 disposable incomes, clearly indicating the skewedness of the distribution (Office of National Statistics, 2018; The Equality Trust, 2018). Compared to other OECD countries, the UK ranks quite high: out of the 30 OECD countries, it is the seventh most unequal, and the fourth most unequal in Europe (The Equality Trust, 2018).

[Figure 1]

Inequality is not merely a signalling statistic; it also has striking implications for everyday life in the UK, which entails increasingly more visible cues of inequality. The country's experience with inequality is even quoted as "the best warning within Europe of what goes wrong when you allow inequality to rise and rise ever higher" (Dorling, 2017:1). Political participation, mental health, schools and education, the environment, and financial markets are only a few of the vital aspects of an economy for which economic inequality is increasingly becoming a menacing factor (Dorling, 2014). One of the key manifestations of inequality is the housing sector, from which 60% of London's wealth is generated (Dorling, 2014). Inequality is primarily an urban matter, as it becomes more visible and present in dense urban areas and big cities, as opposed to rural towns, dwellings and villages. The distress caused by housing unaffordability in London has put many families at risk of mental problems and domestic violence (Gong *et al.*, 2016).

In this empirical context, I will explore urban-related insights from the 2015 and 2016 British Social Attitudes (BSA) surveys. The BSA surveys have been conducted by the National Centre for Social Research since 1983. The last one to have been published was the BSA 2016 (as at December 2018). The BSA surveys include repeated questions, as well as subject-specific sets of questions that vary from year to year (e.g. on Brexit). Using the questions related to the physical location of the

respondents, perceived inequality, and attitudes towards (urban) inequality from the surveys conducted in 2015-16, here I investigate the correlations between perceived inequalities, attitudes towards (urban) inequality and belonging to a certain socio-spatial cluster. Investigating the relationship between perceived inequalities and the socio-spatial aspects illustrates the practicality and relationality aspects of the conceptual framework, while the attitudes represent the consciousness part. other.

Subjective perceptions of inequality are mostly measured by asking participants questions regarding the gap in income between the rich and the poor (Diego Garcia-Castro *et al.*, 2018). In accordance with the literature, I use the question “Is the gap between those with high and low incomes too large” in the survey to indicate the perceived inequality (Lubker, 2008). Perceived income inequality in relation to sociospatial characteristics here can be a product of physical and social spaces (i.e. practicality and relationality). To denote attitudes towards redistribution, which concerns the mental spaces in which conceptions occur, I use the statement “Government should redistribute income from the better-off to the less well-off.”

While the latter was included in the latest (2016) survey, the former was used in the 2015 survey. The question asking whether the respondents agree with the statement that “Government should provide financial assistance to people on low incomes, so that they are able to afford the costs of renting a home” was used in the 2016 survey only. Given that attitudes towards housing affordability particularly pertain to

urban matters, this statement can, to some extent, shed light on the perceptions and attitudes towards urban economic inequalities.

76% of 2,755 respondents in the BSA 2015 answered positively to the question “Is the gap between those with high and low incomes too large?” and 43% of the respondents agreed that government should redistribute income from the better off to the less well off. I use cluster analysis to create socio-spatial clusters within the respondents of the BSA 2015. Using clusters shows the emergence of socio-spatial clusters in a given context, whereby the social and spatial aspects of individuals are indicated in a more fluid way. As I aim to explore the possibility and need for further explanatory and exploratory analysis of urban conceptions of inequalities, this method provides an all-encompassing inductive method for the purposes of this paper (as opposed to a regression analysis, through which I could test the impact of each social and spatial aspect).

I conducted two rounds of cluster analysis using the BSA 2015. I used a two-step cluster analysis, due to the size of the sample and the need to include both categorical and scale variables. First, I created four socio-spatial clusters by clustering the variables ‘urbanity’, ‘social class’, ‘equivalised household income’ and ‘age’ in the BSA 2015<sup>2</sup>. Physical location is the major contributor to the clustering of

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<sup>2</sup> Please see the appendix for details of the variables, the final sample and the clusters.

the groups. One of the groups includes mostly people in a rural town and village, while others' urbanity levels are close to each other, and most seem to live in urban minor conurbations or cities that are less sparsely populated. The four groups can be labelled as "old urban poor", "middle-aged upper class living in cities", "urban skilled young on a very low income" and "rural dwellers on a low income".

A chi-square test was conducted to see whether there is a statistically significant correlation between belonging to a certain socio-spatial group, the perceived inequality and the attitudes towards distribution. The chi-square value for the association between the socio-spatial clusters and the perceived inequality was  $\chi^2(4) = 18.933$ ,  $p = 0.000$ , which indicates a highly significant result. There is therefore no doubt that there is an association between belonging to a certain socio-spatial cluster and perceived inequality. It could therefore be argued that the immediate physical environment is related to perceptions, which change according to the sociospatial position one holds that make up the practicality and relationality aspects. Looking at the standardised residuals, it is possible to see that two of the four groups contribute to a significant chi-square. More of the old urban poor thought the gap between those with high incomes and low incomes was too high. Amongst the urban skilled young on a very low income, more people agreed that the gap was not too high. There was no significant association between the socio-spatial groups and the attitudes towards redistribution.

Having proved the particular importance of social class and income, I conducted a second round of cluster analysis of the 2015 BSA on the low-income households only, in order to incorporate the role of other social characteristics and employment status. This new sample, consisting of those having less than equivalised household income of £2,135 per month, includes 1,969 respondents. I identified four socio-spatial clusters using the place of residence, whether the respondent is in paid work or not, gender and ethnicity. The groups' labels are: "non-working men living in a small city/town", "working women living in a big city", "working women living in a small city/town", and "non-working women living in small city/town"

The chi-square value for the association between the clusters and the perceived inequality was  $\chi^2(4) = 8.588$ ,  $p = 0.035$ , which indicates a significant result. We therefore assume that there is an association between belonging to a socio-spatial cluster and the perceived inequality of the low-income respondents. There was also a very significant association between these socio-spatial clusters and the attitudes towards redistribution, with chi-square value  $\chi^2(3) = 28.671$ ,  $p = 0.000$ . The standardised residuals show that the difference was owed to two clusters. More working women living in a big city agreed with the statement, while more of those living in a small city/town did not agree that the government should redistribute income from the better off to the worse off, and fewer people amongst this group thought otherwise.

Lastly, 73% of the 2,511 respondents in the 2016 BSA agreed with the statement that government should provide financial assistance to people on low incomes, so that they are able to afford the costs of renting a home. There was a very significant association between the physical location of the respondents and the attitudes towards this urban inequality, as indicated by this statement (chi-square value:  $\chi^2(4) = 14.084$ ,  $p = 0.007$ ). The standardised residuals show that the main difference was owed to living in a big city or in the outskirts of a big city. More people living in a big city agreed with the statement, and much fewer people disagreed, or were indecisive about it. By showing how people approach normative suggestions as such, it is possible to shed light on their mental spaces illustrating the consciousness aspect.

The results of this brief empirical analysis can be summarised as follows. There are differences in perceived economic inequality amongst different socio-spatial groups in the UK. Amongst the low income, where one lives (i.e. the physical location of residence), whether one is working and other social demographics, such as gender, do contribute to the differences in perceived inequality. More people amongst working women living in big cities agree that the government should redistribute income from the better off to the worse off, while fewer people amongst those in small cities/towns agreed with the statement. Finally, in terms of attitudes towards urban-related redistribution, we can conclude that living in a big city is positively



associated with whether one agrees with a redistribution policy aimed at helping those on a lower income to afford rents.

The immediate implication is that the physical location of residence is associated with differences in the perceptions of and attitudes towards inequality. To my knowledge, this is the first study to distil the role of physical location and living in dense areas in the UK context using these surveys. However, as discussed above, the conceptualisation of the urban as a form of physical location only is problematic when determining perceptions of inequalities. Indeed, the analysis provided evidence for the emergence of socio-spatial groups defined in terms of social class, income, employment status, gender, age and physical location in relation to their perspectives on inequalities. For the purposes of our framework, attitudes towards urban-specific issues and the role of socio-spatial differences do confirm the key aspects of the urban conceptions of inequalities: it is possible to conclude that the physical, social and mental urban spaces are related to each other in forming conceptions of inequalities. The combination of the visibility of inequality or being able to live in narrow social circles might increase people's willingness to support redistribution policies.

**Identifying a methodological and empirical terrain for urban conceptions of inequalities**

Perceptions of inequalities have ramifications for how one sees, thinks about and experiences inequality, which eventually leads to the forming of views about key political, social and economic matters. The role of physical location in forming these perceptions is important. Equally important is the process by which perceptions of inequalities change depending on where one lives and the things they are exposed to. Living in a city and being exposed to urban issues resulting from economic inequalities have inevitable implications for forming perceptions of economic inequalities. Theorising perceived inequalities in an urban context as set out above provides an all-encompassing approach that reveals the importance of looking at everyday life, the distinguishing trends amongst different socio-spatial groups and attitudes towards urban matters. Empirically confirming the significance of belonging to a certain socio-spatial cluster in defining perceptions of economic inequalities and urban-related economic matters, the UK case has demonstrated the need for further exploration of the key aspects of the proposed framework.

The urban conceptions of inequalities framework is primarily generative rather than evaluative. In other words, it is a framing device for identifying the possibilities for the formation and implications of perceptions taking into account social and spatial factors. The practicality element elucidates the kind of matters that pertain to urban dwellers, including the challenges they encounter in everyday life, while the relationality entails relative changes between socio-spatial groups. Consciousness, or in other words, making conscious decisions about how one thinks about inequality

based on evidence, sheds further light on the process of how experience in everyday urban life is materialised in the perspectives of inequality – and eventually the policy. Finally, convertibility enables us to predict the patterns of perceived inequality given the mental, physical and social spaces of urban life.

In terms of data availability, a key implication of the proposed framework and the empirical investigation is the need to add the socio-spatial dimension to existing social values surveys that ask questions about perceptions of and attitudes towards inequalities. Specifically, more questions on the role of physical location and urban-related matters (especially housing, mobility and work) should be added. The framework shows that relationality, which concerns the socio-spatial groups, can only be investigated by exploring interactions in the areas of housing and mobility. From a methodological perspective, the framework could work best through mixed method methodologies, including both longitudinal quantitative modelling to identify the trends at different scales (national/regional/city) and engaged, experiential qualitative research to explicate the processes, particularly that of convertibility.

There is significant evidence of the importance of understanding perceptions of inequality and their implications for forming attitudes towards social policy, redistribution and health policies. The urban dimension of the perceptions of economic inequality will particularly focus on urban matters arising from the

increasing economic divide in cities. It is important to delve deeper into urban contexts, given that a good part of the population will live in cities by 2050. Moreover, perceptions about urban projects, particularly transport and housing projects, are varied, as people's use and understandings differ significantly. By clarifying one's own perceptions about the distribution of the wider costs and benefits of these projects, the perceived benefits and costs of these projects will be more clearly determined.

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<sup>i</sup> In geographical thought, the 'world' refers to the sphere of human concerns, epistemologically entailing a particular mode of distanced abstraction and a sense of direct experience of the sphere of human concerns (McCormack, 2017). The concept

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of the world therefore entails both an objective totality, the entirety of human concerns and an experiential and personal sense of the same set of concerns. While this might be inherently contradictory at first sight, it indeed points to the transformative nature of defining the 'world' as a concept that stems from changing individuals, whereby changes are coherent and integrative, and create a unity. The search for alternative economies, such as the community and diverse economies framed by Cameron and Gibson (2005), is a good example of this: by providing alternatives to a market economy, their model entails changing the units of analysis at the individual level, which eventually make up an alternative totality. Drawing on a wide range of projects, they point to a range of possibilities that are alternatives to market-led economies (Roelvink *et al.*, 2015).