

Residential and school segregation of children in France



Educational policies research group

Marco OBERTI

Marco is Professor of sociology at Sciences Po and research Fellow at CRIS. His most recent work focuses on urban and educational inequalities approached from the angle of segregation. He is also studying inequalities in access to selective higher education curriculum, and the impact of affirmative action.

Quentin RAMOND

Quentin is an Assistant Professor at the Center for Economics and Social Policy (CEAS), Universidad Mayor, Chile. He specializes in studying neighborhood and school segregation processes and how they shape individuals' opportunities, behaviors, and outcomes. He is also interested in the relationship between spatial inequality and social cohesion.

Maela Le Gall

Maela is research assistant at LIEPP and Master student at Sciences Po and Ecole Polytechnique, she is interested in territorial and educational inequality.

We examine how changes in neighborhood and school segregation of children are related to each other in main French metropolitan areas and how the characteristics of the local educational markets shape the association between both forms of segregation. Drawing on census and administrative school data, we create a novel longitudinal dataset combining data on children, neighborhoods, and schools spanning from 2007 to 2019 covering the 15 largest French cities. Our analysis starts with segregation indices showing that residential segregation is higher than school segregation. Next, we use panel regression models with city and time-period fixed effects to examine whether spatial inequality in public and private school options and social selection in private schools predict gaps between residential and school segregation among children.

Motivation and research questions

Residential and school segregation are persistent features of large cities worldwide (Gutiérrez et al., 2020; van Ham et al., 2021). These trends raise serious concerns because segregation sort young people from different social and ethnic backgrounds into unequal neighborhoods and schools that affect their opportunities and outcomes (Galster & Sharkey, 2017).

Prior studies have shown that neighborhood and school segregation are highly correlated, however: (1) most studies employ a cross-sectional perspective to examine segregation at a single point in time; (2) they compare residential segregation of adults and school segregation of students, which are two groups with different residential segregation patterns (Owens, 2017; Ramond, 2024); and (3) little research has examined the mechanisms that affects the *relationship* between the segregation of neighborhood and schools.

This research examines the segregation of children at the secondary school level between neighborhoods and between schools within large French metropolitan areas and how the characteristics of the local educational markets shape the association between both phenomena.

1) Residential segregation of children is higher than school segregation

Residential segregation of children is higher than school segregation and this difference is statistically significant over the three time points (Figure 1). This result contrasts with those of previous studies that have focused on adult population to measure residential segregation, which have found higher school than residential segregation. It confirms that specific factors contribute to residential segregation among children.

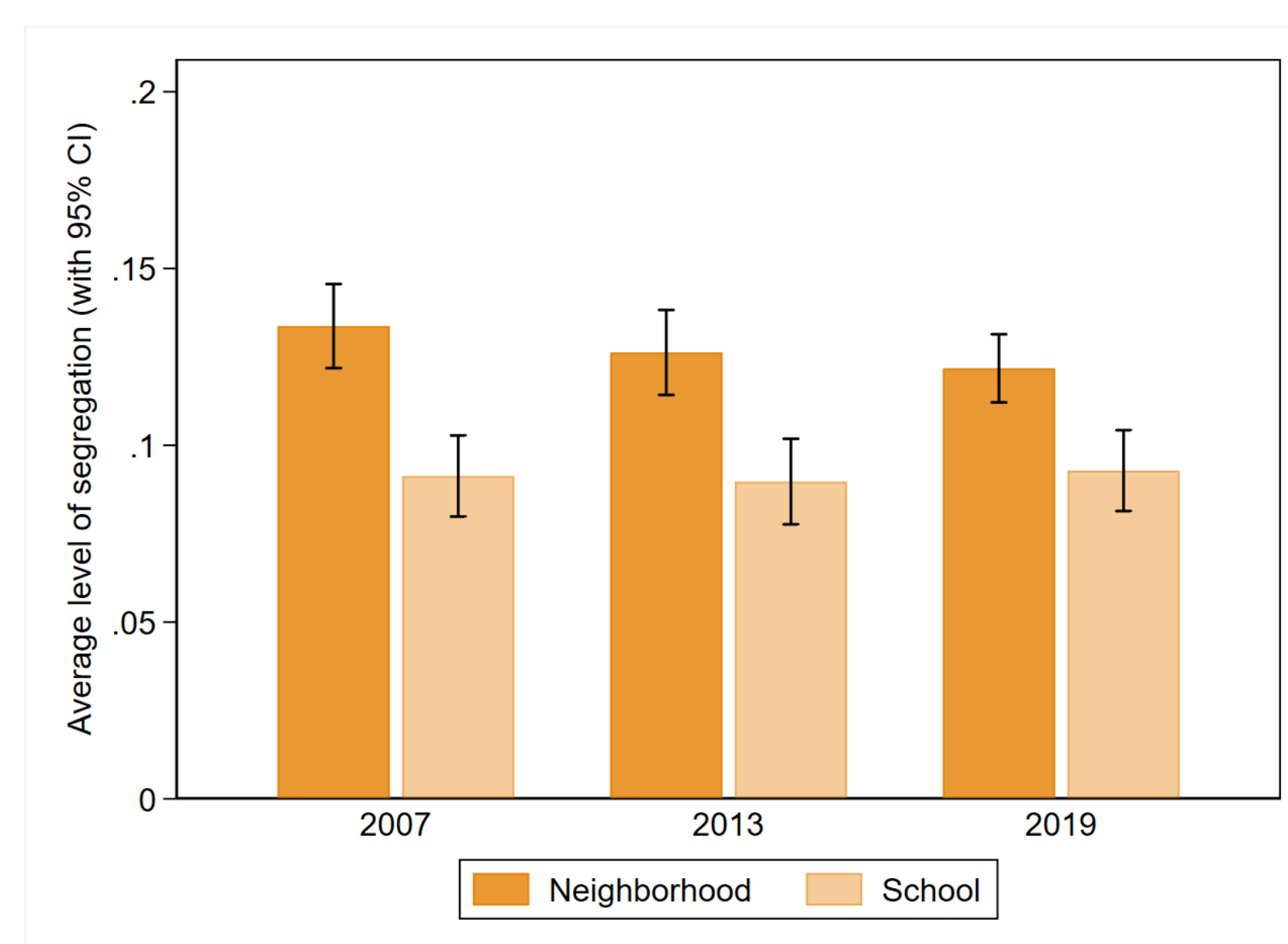


Figure 1: Average levels of children residential and school segregation

This trend is observed in all cities, although the gap between residential and school segregation varies in magnitude (Figure 2). While levels of residential segregation are quite homogeneous, school segregation varies more substantially across cities (points are vertically aligned).

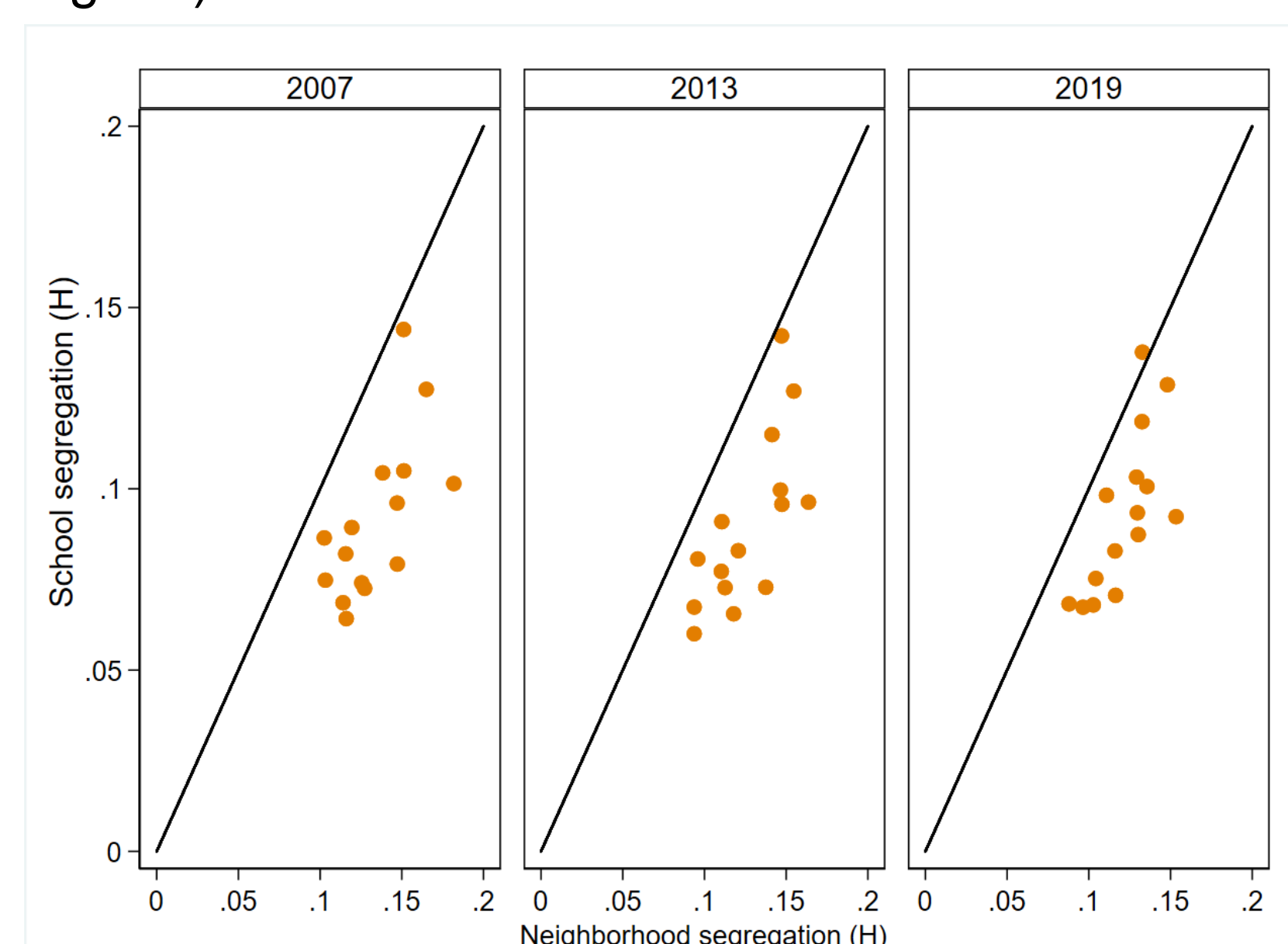


Figure 2: Neighborhood and school segregation in the 15 main French metropolitan areas

Data and methods

We use three waves of the French census that include information on children's age, socioeconomic background, and place of residence at the census tract level. Information about schools and students come from the dataset "Scolarité", that include all public and private schools in France.

Our analysis focuses on children at the secondary school level (aged 11-14 years old) who live in the 15 largest metropolitan areas (around 900,000 children). Our main variable of interest is socioeconomic background of children, based on household heads' occupation.

We measure segregation using the Information Theory Index H (evenness) as well as the interaction and isolation indices (exposure).

Our panel regression model explores how spatial inequality in school options and social selection in private schools predict gaps between residential and school segregation, with city and year fixed effects.

2) The ambivalent role of private schooling

Although average levels of school segregation have remained relatively stable across time, decomposition analyses indicate that there have been significant variations between and within public and private school sectors. Segregation has decreased within public schools (-.013) and within private schools (-.004), but it has increased between public and private schools (+.020): the structure of school segregation has changed as the social composition of public and private schools has become increasingly different over time.

How does this relate to changes in the gap between residential and school segregation? Figure 3 indicates a negative relationship: the gap between residential and school segregation has decreased in cities where the segregation between private and public schools has increased more strongly (e.g., Strasbourg, Marseille)

The availability of private schools might contribute to decreasing levels of residential segregation, but increasing level of school segregation, especially between sectors. Based on these descriptive findings, the next steps of the analysis will consist in assessing the exact role of private schooling in shaping the processes of residential and school sorting of children.

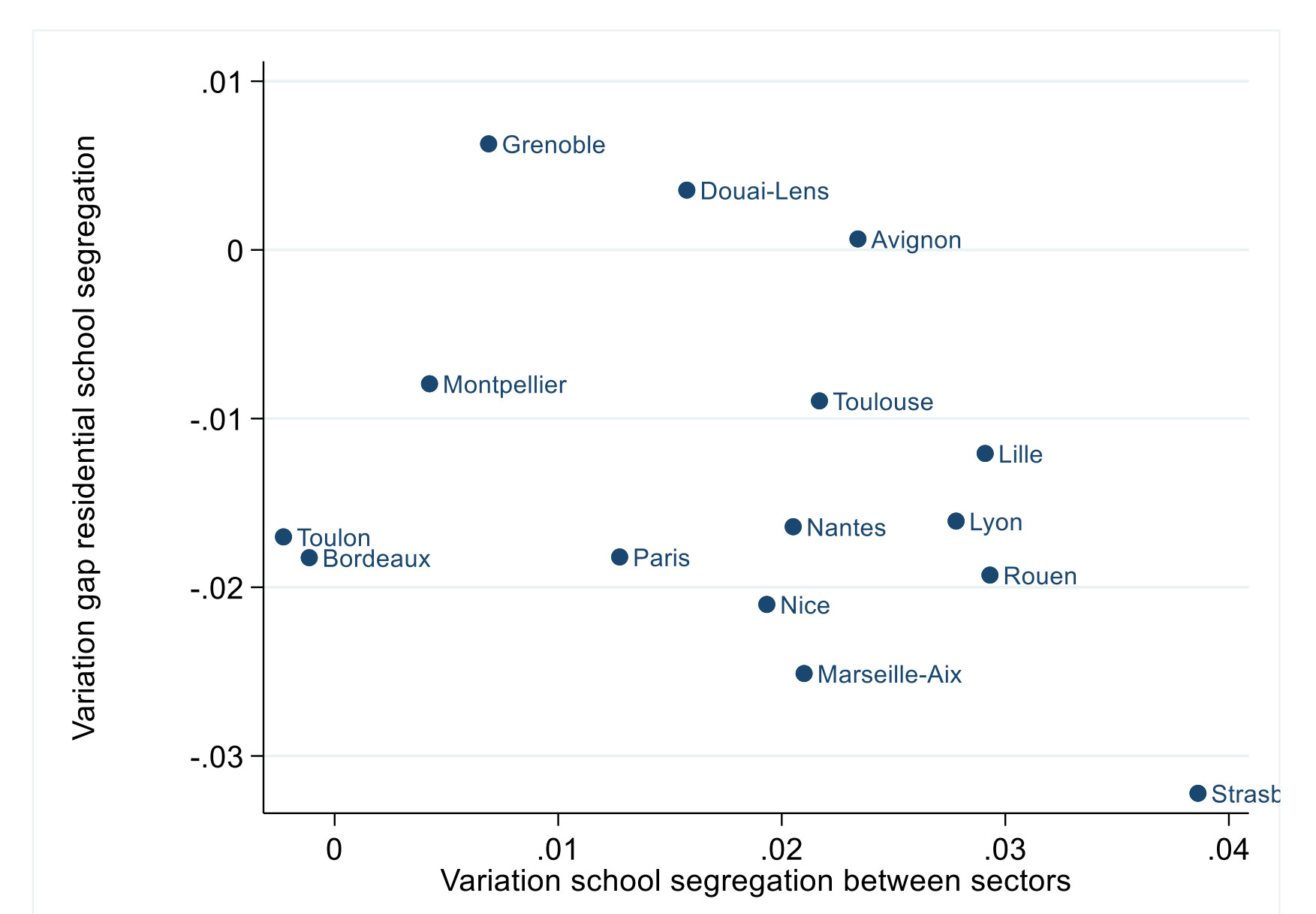


Figure 3: Gap between residential and school segregation and the segregation between school sectors