

## Some comments on C Hamnett's reading of the data on sociotenurial polarisation in South East England

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Received 4 January 1988

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**Abstract.** In this paper the author reanalyses the data on the sociotenurial development in South East England in the period 1966-1981, as presented by Hamnett in 1987. If one takes into account the changing composition both of the work force and of the housing market, the data would seem to suggest that there has been no sociotenurial polarisation process going on between 1966 and 1981. The changes seem to be best described as a segregation process where the low-status occupational groups are increasing their share of council-rented housing units, more so in Greater London than in the rest of the South East. The data also suggest that the segregation process operates almost exclusively through the housing market.

### **Introduction**

In a study of sociotenurial development from 1966 to 1981 in London and the South East, Hamnett (1987) concluded that the level of sociotenurial polarisation in the South East as a whole increased over the period (page 554). My reading of his data does not support this conclusion. One may debate whether the status in 1966 can be called polarised. But my own interpretation of the data presented by Hamnett reveals that a polarisation process was not operating during the period 1966 to 1981. Rather than to think in terms of polarisation, it would be more accurate to talk of segregation. A closer inspection of the data also reveals that the dividing line in housing behaviour is between the skilled and the semiskilled workers. The skilled workers behave like the professional, managerial, and intermediate workers (PMI workers), and the own-account workers. The segregation process appears to be working almost exclusively through the housing market.

### **Sociotenurial development in the South East**

It may be that my understanding of what polarisation means is different from Hamnett's. An increased level of polarisation would, I suppose, mean that various socioeconomic groups (SEGs) in increasing degree will be found to monopolise one position in the tenure system. At first glance this seems to be the case. Hamnett writes (page 550): "although the proportion of PMI and own-account workers increased both in the council and in the owner-occupied tenures, the increase of 10.8 percentage points in the proportion of owner occupiers among these two socioeconomic groups was more than double the 5.0 percentage point increase in the proportion of council tenants."

But social change cannot be inferred as easily as that. Both the system of tenurial positions and the system of socioeconomic groups have been changing.

At the same time as the PMI -group increased its share of owner-occupied housing units by 10.8%, they also increased their share of the economically active population of heads and households by 10.4% (Hamnett, 1987, tables 5 and 6). And these changes must be seen in conjunction with the growth of 28.6% in the stock of owner-occupied housing units, and of 5.1% in the stock of council-rented housing units. If the differential growth in the various tenure types is taken into account, it would seem that PMI and own-account workers lost ground in owner-occupied

housing units in relation to council rented; their numbers among the owner occupied did not grow as much as the increase in the total stock of owner-occupied housing units.

### Standardisation solves one problem

The problem for Hamnett is that there are two interdependent variables which are both changing. To compare the changes in the distribution of one variable one has to remove the effect of the changes in the distribution of the other. A commonly used technique is standardisation (for example, see Shryock and Siegel, 1971). If the population of the South East in 1966 had had the same distribution of skills as the population in 1981, the distribution of socioeconomic groups in the owner-occupied housing units (with unchanged propensity to choose owner occupation) would have been as shown in table 1 below. This distribution can be compared with the distribution in 1981 and one can judge more readily which group has come closer to a monopoly position in the owner-occupied tenure position. It appears that all but the PMI group and the other-group have increased their share. But the increases and their distribution cannot be said to support a conclusion of polarisation.

Similar computations for the council-rented housing units reveal a somewhat different picture. Council-rented housing seems to be getting an increased share of the lowest socioeconomic groups. While the distribution of socioeconomic groups in the owner-occupied housing became slightly less skewed, the distribution in the council-rented housing became more skewed. The disadvantaged became concentrated in council-rented housing. But this is better described as a process of segregation rather than of polarisation.

**Table 1.** Comparison of socioeconomic groups (SEGs) in owner-occupied and council-rented housing units in 1966 and 1981 (1966 data standardised according to group distribution in 1981) (source: Hamnett, 1987, table 5).

SEG	Owner occupied			Council rented		
	S1966 <sup>a</sup> (%)	1981(%)	Change	S1966 <sup>a</sup> (%)	1981(%)	Change
PMI	49.1	47.1	-2.0	14.2	12.1	-2.1
Own-account	6.4	6.6	+0.2	5.7	5.4	-0.3
Skilled	17.0	18.6	+1.6	35.9	31.8	-4.1
Semiskilled	23.5	24.1	+0.6	36.4	36.6	+0.2
Unskilled	2.0	2.2	+0.2	5.8	10.6	+4.8
Other	2.0	1.7	-0.3	2.1	3.5	+1.4

<sup>a</sup> Standardised to 1981 distributions.

### The index of overrepresentation or underrepresentation

Another method of investigating the pattern of change in a computationally simpler as well as, in this case, a more informative way is to compute an index of overrepresentation or underrepresentation for a socioeconomic group within a tenure position.

In table 2 this index is computed for all tenure positions. The index for a given socioeconomic group is found as its proportion among various socioeconomic groups living in housing units of one type of tenure divided by its proportion in the total group of economically active heads of households. An index value of 1 for a socioeconomic group indicates that its share of the tenure position is exactly the same as its share in the total population. By comparing index values from

1966 and 1981 one may determine if the overrepresentation or underrepresentation has increased or decreased.

It is seen that only the skilled workers increased their share of owner-occupied housing units relative to their share of the population. The unskilled held their share exactly while all other groups lost ground. Because the most overrepresented group, the PMI, got less overrepresented while the most underrepresented group, the unskilled, kept their representation unchanged, the data for owner-occupied housing units might be read as the opposite of increased polarisation.

If we examine the council and privately rented housing, we see that the distributions seem to be getting more skewed. For council-rented housing units, the lowest socioeconomic groups are increasing their share of the housing units relative to their share of the population, more than are the higher socioeconomic groups. Only the PMI-group does not increase its relative share. For privately rented housing units, the evidence is more mixed. The PMI, the semiskilled, and the other-group increase their relative share. The unskilled, the skilled, and the own-account groups decrease their relative share. Only the increased overrepresentation of the other-group suggests the situation in 1981 might be worse than in 1966.

The evidence here is, of course, the same as that presented in table 1. The lower socioeconomic groups are getting concentrated into council-rented housing units, whereas owner occupation is less a characteristic of the well-to-do than it used to be. But with owner occupation becoming the modal type of tenure, with more than 60% of the housing units, it really is no more than one might expect. As the proportion of owner-occupied housing units increases, it is to be expected that the distribution of socioeconomic groups in owner-occupied housing units will move towards the regional average for all housing units.

**Table 2.** Index of overrepresentation of socioeconomic groups (SEGs) in various tenurial positions in 1966 and 1981 (source: Hamnett, 1987, table 5).

SEG	1966	1981	% Change
<i>Owner occupied</i>			
PMI	1.46	1.30	-11
Own-account	1.10	1.06	-4
PMI + Own-account	1.41	1.27	-10
Skilled	0.85	0.87	+2
Semiskilled	0.87	0.82	-6
Unskilled	0.48	0.48	0
Other	0.75	0.61	-19
<i>Council rented</i>			
PMI	0.34	0.34	0
Own-account	0.79	0.87	+10
PMI + Own-account	0.41	0.41	0
Skilled	1.42	1.49	+5
Semiskilled	1.07	1.26	+18
Unskilled	1.78	2.30	+29
Other	0.61	1.25	+105
<i>Privately rented</i>			
PMI	0.78	0.83	+6
Own-account	0.98	0.90	-8
PMI + Own-account	0.81	0.84	+4
Skilled	0.90	0.78	-13
Semiskilled	1.15	1.27	+10
Unskilled	1.25	1.07	-14
Other	1.61	2.18	+35

### The regional dimension of sociotenurial development

Hamnett finds "a small but significant tendency towards increasing social polarisation between Greater London and the rest of the South East" (page 544). In table 3 the index of overrepresentation or underrepresentation shows that both in 1966 and in 1981 the groups of the PMI, the own-account, and the skilled workers were all underrepresented in Greater London but overrepresented in the rest of the South East. Both the semiskilled and the unskilled groups were in 1966 and in 1981 overrepresented in Greater London but underrepresented in the rest of the South East.

The development from 1966 to 1981 appears to be towards a more skewed distribution of socioeconomic groups in Greater London, and a less skewed distribution in the rest of the South East. The disadvantaged socioeconomic groups seem to become concentrated in Greater London.

An interesting and here easily seen feature not commented on by Hamnett is that skilled workers choose a region in the same way as the professional, managerial, intermediate, and own-account workers. The big divide between the well-off and the disadvantaged groups seems to be between skilled and semiskilled workers.

**Table 3.** Index of overrepresentation of socioeconomic groups (SEGs) in Greater London and the rest of the South East in 1966 and 1981 (source: Hamnett, 1987, table 1).

SEG	Greater London			Rest of the South East		
	1966	1981	% Change	1966	1981	% Change
PMI	0.93	0.91	-2	1.07	1.06	-1
Own-account	0.92	0.94	+2	1.08	1.03	-5
PMI + Own-account	0.92	0.92	0	1.07	1.05	-2
Skilled	0.99	0.95	-4	1.05	1.04	-1
Semiskilled	1.06	1.12	+6	0.94	0.92	-2
Unskilled	1.15	1.22	+6	0.86	0.85	-1
Other	0.79	1.00	+27	1.18	0.96	-19

Note: Hamnett's table 1 contains an error in the number of other-workers in the rest of the South East in 1981. Comparison with table 2 and a check of consistency of numbers suggest it should be 81050 rather than 131050.

### The effect of changes in the housing market

By computing the index of overrepresentation or underrepresentation, we may remove the effect of changes in the distribution of skills in the population. The causes of the segregation process observed may be several. One obvious contributor would be the regional development of the housing market. To investigate the possible effect of changes in the distribution of various tenure types, we may ask how the distribution of socioeconomic groups would have been in the two regions if in 1981 we had had the same regional distribution of tenure types as in 1966.

From table 4 it is seen that an unchanged distribution of tenure types would have led to an increase in the proportions of PMI, own-account, and skilled workers in Greater London and a corresponding decrease in the rest of the South East. The semiskilled and unskilled workers would have decreased their proportions in Greater London and increased them in the rest of the South East.

In table 5 standardised indices of overrepresentation or underrepresentation for Greater London and the rest of the South East are compared with the unstandardised indices. The standardised index reports on the regional overrepresentation or underrepresentation of socioeconomic groups in 1981 after removal of the effect of regional changes in the composition of housing units between 1966 and 1981.

By comparison of the standardised indices with the unstandardised indices (from table 3 above), it is seen that except for the other-group, the index values have moved so much towards 1.00 that it may be concluded that most of the segregation process operates through the housing market. The deviations from 1.00 (excepting the other group) do not exceed what one should expect from rounding errors.

**Table 4.** Distribution of socioeconomic groups (SEGs) in Greater London and the rest of the South East in 1981 and 1981 standardised according to the regional distribution of tenure types in 1966 (source: Hamnett, 1987, tables 1, 4, and 5).

SEG	Greater London			Rest of South East		
	S1981 <sup>a</sup> (%)	1981(%)	Change	S1981 <sup>a</sup> (%)	1981(%)	Change
PMI	34.7	32.9	+1.8	37.0	38.1	-1.1
Own-account	6.1	5.8	+0.3	6.2	6.4	-0.2
Skilled	21.5	20.3	+1.2	21.4	22.2	-0.8
Semiskilled	29.8	32.6	-2.8	28.3	26.6	+1.7
Unskilled	4.9	5.6	-0.7	4.4	3.9	+0.5
Other	3.1	2.8	+0.3	2.4	2.7	-0.3

<sup>a</sup>Standardised to 1966 distributions.

**Table 5.** Index of overrepresentation of socioeconomic groups (SEGs) in Greater London and the rest of the South East in 1981 and 1981 standardised according to the regional distribution of tenure types in 1966 (source: Hamnett, 1987, table 1; and tables 3 and 4 above).

SEG	Greater London		Rest of South East	
	S1981 <sup>a</sup>	1981	S1981 <sup>a</sup>	1981
PMI	0.96	0.91	1.03	1.06
Own-account	0.98	0.94	1.00	1.03
Skilled	1.00	0.95	1.00	1.04
Semi skill ed	1.03	1.12	0.98	0.92
Unskilled	1.07	1.22	0.96	0.85
Other	1.11	1.00	0.86	0.96

<sup>a</sup>Standardised to 1966 distributions.

**Acknowledgements.** The paper was prepared with the support of research grant 14.018.14 from the Agricultural Research Council of Norway while the author worked in the Department of Land Use Planning, The Agricultural University of Norway. Their support is gratefully acknowledged. I also want to thank Professor Howard Newby for his encouragement and comments.

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