Chapter 10

Migration and Socio-Economic Polarisation within British City Regions

Tony Champion
Newcastle University, UK

Mike Coombes
Newcastle University, UK

ABSTRACT

In recent years, census-based and other studies have documented a widening gap between better-off and more deprived residential areas in Britain. While much of this will have come about in situ, through increasing disparities in household wealth and incomes across the social scale, migration may also be contributing. The decennial population census is the only source that can provide robust statistical data on the social composition of residential movement between sub-regional and local areas. This chapter uses the 2001 Census Special Migration Statistics to examine whether migration is increasing the degree of socio-spatial polarisation within Britain’s larger city regions. Following an introduction to the study approach and the intricacies of the census data on migration, the results of data analysis are presented in three sections. The first looks at the social composition of the migration exchanges taking place between the 27 cities and the rest of their city regions, testing to see whether the cities’ migration balances are less favourable for people of higher occupational status. This identifies three types of city region, based on whether there is a positive, negative or no strong relationship between migration and socio-economic status. An example of each of these types of city region – London, Birmingham and Bristol respectively – is selected for a more detailed examination of the patterns of movement between their constituent residential zones. For these three cases, the second set of analyses compares the migration performance of each of the residential zones with its existing social status in order to see whether or not these within-city-region movements are reinforcing the existing socio-economic patterns. The third set of results seeks a better understanding of the dynamics of the migration through examining the residential movements between all pairings of the zones in each of the three city regions and identifying how consistently the balance of these migration exchanges favours the better-off of the two zones.

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INTRODUCTION

The context for the substantive research question addressed in this chapter is the debate about socio-spatial polarisation in British cities. In recent years census-based and other studies have documented a widening gap between better-off and more deprived residential areas in Britain (see, for instance, Gregory et al., 2000; Lupton, 2005; Dorling et al., 2007). While much of this will have come about in situ through increasing disparities in household wealth and incomes across the social scale (Barclay, 1995; Hills, 1995; Brewer et al., 2006), migration may also be contributing. Certainly, there has been extensive research on the socially selective nature of the suburbanisation process, dominated by middle-class white families (Champion, 2001; Champion and Fisher, 2004). More recently, the emergence of ‘low demand neighbourhoods’ has been attributed not just to the effects of social-housing allocation policies that direct problem families to so-called ‘sink estates’ but also to the more general process of residential sorting whereby people will tend to move to areas offering better schools, less crime and a generally higher quality of life if they can (Bramley et al., 2000; Palmer et al., 2006).

This chapter reports the results of work which has examined the latest available evidence on the degree to which migration is reinforcing existing socio-spatial differences in cities. While the results are of theoretical and policy significance in their own right, for the purposes of this book the primary aim of what follows is to emphasise new and/or unusual elements in the approach used in this study. As outlined in the next section, the research task (and consequently the chapter structure) is broken down into three separate operational questions that are each addressed in a distinctive way. This provides the opportunity for demonstrating the strengths and shortcomings of the decennial population census, which is the only source of robust statistical data on the social composition of residential movement between sub-regional and local areas. All the data are taken from the 2001 Census, where the way that the information on migration is presented differs in a number of important ways from that of previous censuses. This study also breaks new ground in adopting a broader than usual geographical scale for this form of urban analysis, covering the whole city region rather than just the main built-up area and examining its internal heterogeneity on the basis of zones that are larger than individual residential neighbourhoods.

STUDY APPROACH AND DATA

Before moving to the three sections that present the results of the empirical analyses, here we provide more detail about the study approach and the census data used in the quest to improve our understanding of migration’s role in altering the socio-economic patterning of city regions. In the first place, it is important to stress that these analyses concentrate entirely on the residential movements that are internal to the cities as we have defined them (see below), excluding migration between each city and the rest of the UK as well as international migration.

In terms of the three questions, the first concerns the migration exchanges between the continuously built-up core of each city and the rest of its city region.

- Is the balance of migration exchanges between the city’s core and the rest of its region less favourable for people of higher socio-economic status?

The other two are pitched towards the residential movement taking place between a more disaggregated set of zones than the simple core/rest dichotomy.

- Do the within-region moves reinforce the existing socio-economic geography?