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SOME COMMENTS ON C.HAMNETT'S READING OF THE DATA ON SOCIOTENURIAL POLARISATION IN SOUTH EAST ENGLAND

NOTAT
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Introduction.

In a study of socio-tenurial development from 1966 to 1981 in London and the South East C.Hamnett(1987) concludes that the level of socio-tenurial polarisation in the South East as a whole increased over the period (pp.554). My reading of his data do not support this conclusion. One may debate whether the status in 1966 can be called polarised. But according to the data presented by Hamnett any polarisation process was not operating during the period 1966 to 1981. Rather than thinking in terms of polarisation, it would seem to be a more accurate description to talk of segregation. A closer inspection of the data also reveals that the dividing line in housing behaviour goes 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.

Socio-tenurial development in the South East.

It may be that my understanding of what polarisation means is different from Hamnetts. An increased level of polarisation would, I suppose, mean that various socio-economic groups in increasing degree will be found to monopolize one position in the tenure system. At first blush this seems to be the case. Hamnett writes (pp.550): "although the proportion of PMI and

own-account workers increased both in the council and the owneroccupied tenures, the increase of 10.8 percentage points in the proportion of owner occupiers among these two socio-economic groups was more than double the 5.0 percentage point increase in the proportion of council tenants."

But social change can not be judged as simple as that. Both the system of tenurial positions and the system of socio-economic groups have been changing. At the same time as the PMI-group increased its share of owner occupied housing units by 10.8 percent (table 6, pp.551), they also increased their share of the economically active population of heads of households with 10.4 percent (table 5). And these changes must be seen in conjunction with the growth of 28.6 percent in the stock of owneroccupied housing units and of 5.1 percent 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 total stock of owner occupied housing units.

Standardization 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 to standardize (see e.g. 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 socio-economic 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 to the distribution in 1981 and one can more readily judge 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.

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

TABLE 1 COMPARISON OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC GROUPS IN OWNER-OCCUPIED AND COUNCIL RENTED HOUSING UNITS IN 1966 AND 1981 (1966 STANDARDIZED ACCORDING TO GROUP DISTRIBUTION IN 1981).

TENURE POSITION

OWNER OCCUPIED	1966	1981	CHANGE
SEG	STAN.		1966-81
PMI	49.1	47.1	- 2.0
Own-account	6.4	6.6	+ 0.2
Skilled	17.0	18.6	+ 1.6
Semiskilled	23.5	24.1	+ 0.6
Unskilled	2.0	2.2	+ 0.2
Other	2.0	1.7	- 0.3
COUNCIL RENTED	1966	1981	CHANGE
SEG	STAN.		1966-81
PMI	14.2	12.1	- 2.1
Own-account	5.7	5.4	- 0.3
Skilled	35.9	31.8	- 4.1
Semiskilled	36.4	36.6	+ 0.2
Unskilled	5.8	10.6	+ 4.8
Other	2.1	3.5	+ 1.4

(Source: Hamnett(1987),table 5)

The index of over- or underrepresentation.

Another, computationally simpler as well as, in this case, more informative, way of investigating the pattern of change, is to compute an index of over- or under-representation for a socio-economic group within a tenure position.

In Table 2 this index is computed for all tenure positions. The index is found as the proportion of various socio-eceonomic groups among those living in housing units of one type of tenure divided by their proportion in the total group of economically active heads of households. An index value of 1.00 for a

socio-economic 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 over- or under-representation 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. Since the most over-represented group, the PMI, got less over-represented while the most under-represented group, the unskilled, kept their representation unchanged, the data for owner occupied housing units might be read as the opposite of increased polarisation.

Looking at council and privately rented housing, the distributions seem to be getting more skewed. For council rented housing units the lowest socio-economic groups are increasing their share of the housing units relative to their share of the population more than the higher socio-economic groups. Only the PMI-group does not increase its relative share. For privately rented housing units the evidence is more mixed. Both 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 over-representation 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 socio-economic groups are getting concentrated into council rented housing units while 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 that the distribution of socio-economic groups in owner occupied housing units will move towards the regional average.

TABLE 2 INDEX OF OVER OR UNDER-REPRESENTATION OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC GROUPS IN VARIOUS TENURIAL POSITIONS IN 1966 AND 1981.

TENURE POSITION			
OWNER OCCUPIED			%CHANGE
SEG	1966	1981	1966-81
PMI	1.46	1.30	- 11
Own account	1.10	1.06	- 4
(PMI+Own acc.	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
COUNCIL RENTED			%CHANGE
SEG	1966	1981	1966-81
PMI	0.34	0.34	0
Own account	0.79	0.87	+ 10
(PMI+Own-acc	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
PRIVATELY RENTED			%CHANGE
SEG	1966	1981	1966-81
PMI	0.78	0.83	+ 6
Own account	0.98	0.90	- 8
(PMI+Own-acc	o.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

(Source: Hamnett(1987),table 5)

The regional dimension of socio-tenurial development

Hamnett finds "a small but significant tendency towards increasing social polatisation between Greater London and the rest of the South East" (pp.544). In table 3 the index of over- or

under-representation shows that both in 1966 and in 1981 the three groups: the PMI, the own-account and the skilled workers were all under-represented in Greater London and over-represented in the rest of the South East. The semiskilled and unskilled were both in 1966 and in 1981 over-repressented in Greater London and under-represented in the rest of the South East.

The development from 1966 to 1981 appears to be towards a more skewed distribution of socio-economic groups in Greater London and a less skewed distribution in the rest of the South East. The disadvantaged seems to become consentrated in Greater London.

An interesting and here easily seen feature not commented on by Hamnett, is that skilled workers choose 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 going between skilled and semiskilled workers.

TABLE 3 INDEX OF OVER OR UNDER-REPRESENTATION OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC GROUPS IN GREATER LONDON AND THE REST OF THE SOUTH EAST IN 1966 AND 1981.

REGION

GREATER LONDON

SEG	1966	1981	%CHANGE 1966-81
PMI	0.93	0.91	- 2
Own account	0.92	0.94	+ 2
(PMI+Own-acc.	0.92	0.92	0)
Skilled	0.99	0.95	- 4
Semiskilled	1.06	1.12	+ 6
Unskilled	1.15	1.22	+ 6
Other	0.79	1.00	+ 27

THE REST OF THE SOUTH EAST

SEG	1966	1981	%CHANGE 1966-81
PMI	1.07	1.06	- 1
Own account	1.08	1.03	- 5
(PMI+Own-acc.	1.07	1.05	- 2)
Skilled	1.05	1.04	- 1
Semiskilled	0.94	0.92	- 2
Unskilled	0.86	0.85	- 1
Other	1.18	0.96	- 19

(Source: Hamnett 1987, table 1.
Hamnetts table 1 contains an error in the number of other workers in the rest of the South East in 1981. Comparison of table 2 and 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 over- or under-representation the effect of changes in the distribution of skills in the population is removed. 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 socio-economic groups would have been in the two regions if we in 1981 had had the same regional distribution of tenure types as 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 Grater London and a corresponding decrase in the rest of the South East. The semiskilled and unskilled workers would hav decreased their proportions in Greater London and increased them in the rest of the South East.

TABLE 4 DISTRIBUTION OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC GROUPS IN GREATER LONDON AND THE REST OF THE SOUTH EAST IN 1981 AND 1981 STANDARDIZED ACCORDING TO REGIONAL DISTRIBUTION OF TENURE TYPES IN 1966.

REGION			
GREATER LONDON	1981	1981	% POINTS
SEG	STAND.		DIFFERENCE
PMI	34.7	32.9	+ 1.8
Own-account	6.1	5.8	+ 0.3
Skilled	21.5	20.3	+ 1.2
Semiskilled	29.8	32.6	- 2.8
Unskilled	4.9	5.6	- 0.7
Other	3.1	2.8	+ 0.3
THE REST OF THE SOUTH EAST	1981	1981	% POINTS
SEG	STAND.		DIFFERENCE
PMI	37.0	38.1	- 1.1
Own-account	6.2	6.4	- 0.2
Skilled	21.4	22.2	- 0.8
Semiskilled	28.3	26.6	+ 1.7
Unskilled	4.4	3.9	+ 0.5
Other	2.4	2.7	- 0.3

(Source: Hamnett(1987),table 1,4 and 5)

In table 5 the indexes of over- or under-representation for Greater London and the rest of the South East for the standardized distributions of 1981 are compared. Except for the group of inadequatly described workers 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 other deviations do not exceed what one should expect from rounding errors.

TABLE 5 INDEX OF OVER OR UNDER-REPRESENTATION OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC GROUPS IN GREATER LONDON AND THE REST OF THE SOUTH EAST IN 1981 STANDARDIZED ACCORDING TO THE REGIONAL DISTRIBUTION OF TENURE TYPES IN 1966.

SEG	GREATER LONDON		REST OF SOUTH EAST	
	1981S	1981	1981S	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
Semiskilled	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

(Source: Hamnett 1987, table 1 and table 3 and 4 above)

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