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SEMINAR SERIES



Residential segregation patterns in Northern Ireland through time: growing apart or growing together?

Dr. Ian Shuttleworth, Queen's University Belfast

i.shuttleworth@qub.ac.uk

1. Introduction

The public and academics are keenly awaiting the results of the 2011 Census. Detailed information on religion and religion brought up in will be available sometime in 2013. One topic that that will then come to forefront, if the experiences of the 1991 and 2001 Censuses are any guide, will be residential segregation where questions about whether Northern Ireland has become more or less segregated through time will loom large. The purpose of this briefing paper is to prepare for this debate by:

- Outlining trends in residential segregation 1971-2001
- Looking at how migration has moved people around Northern Ireland since 2001
- Making some predictions and suggestions about what the 2011 Census will show
- Commenting on the implications of the work

This briefing paper draws upon various research projects undertaken by Shuttleworth in collaboration with colleagues such as Lloyd¹, Gould and Barr² and summarises and brings together this work to give a wider perspective than would be possible if only one project is drawn upon.

2. Residential segregation 1971-2001

It has generally been assumed that Northern Ireland has become more residentially segregated since 1971 with the media, in particular, emphasising that segregation has continued to increase inexorably even in recent years after the signing of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement. Sensationalist analysis that grabbed the headlines at the time of the 2001 Census played a major part in creating this consensus. In fact, the assumption that a bad situation has got worse is partly true but also partly false, and is plain wrong in certain important respects.

Measures of residential segregation measure the geographical distribution of a population and its sub-groups. They assume that spatial differences are a proxy for social and/or political differences. This is, in itself, questionable as will be shown later. However, these measures have some intrinsic meaning as well as being important headline figures. That being so it is important that they are calculated as accurately as possible. Because they are geographical measures they are sensitive to differences in the spatial units used to release Census data. These can sometimes change between Censuses and this means that like is not compared with like. However, Northern Ireland is unique in the UK in having Census data released for a set of 1km grid squares that were consistent in 1971, 1981, 1991, 2001 and 2011.

Analysis of these data has been undertaken and it shows that segregation increased between 1971 and 2001. To this extent, the argument that segregation has got worse – with the implication that community relations have worsened too – is true. However, the analysis also shows that it is partly false. All of this increase occurred between 1971 and 1991, with segregation levels remaining constant or perhaps even falling between 1991 and 2001. This

¹ Shuttleworth, I. and Lloyd, C., (2009), Are Northern Ireland's communities dividing? Evidence from geographically consistent population data 1971-2001, *Environment and Planning A*, 41, 213-229

² Shuttleworth, I., Barr, P., and Gould, M., (2012), Does internal migration in Northern Ireland increase religious and social segregation? Perspectives from the Northern Ireland Longitudinal Study (NILS) 2001–2007, *Population, Space and Place*, in press

is not the inexorable increase that has often been portrayed but evidence that the two religious-national communities in Northern Ireland ceased to grow apart after 1991.

3. How has migration moved the population around Northern Ireland since 2001?

Population patterns can change through three factors – births, deaths and migration. Differences in births and deaths between places mean that neighbourhoods grow or decline at different rates whereas migration redistributes the population. In Northern Ireland little or nothing is known about how differences in births and deaths by religious affiliation alter the demographic balance of small areas, and formerly little was known about how people of differing national/religious backgrounds moved around. However, some of the gaps in knowledge have been filled by the Northern Ireland Longitudinal Study (NILS).

This is a resource for health and social policy research which links health card data for 28% of the Northern Ireland population to the 2001 Census as well as some other administrative data sources. The NILS will soon be linked to the 2011 and 1991 Censuses thereby increasing its value further. Analysis of the NILS has allowed migratory moves (eg people changing address) to be traced from 2001 onwards and has also permitted an assessment of the impacts of individuals' characteristics, (such as community background, health status, educational background, and age) on flows between origins and destinations.

Survey evidence from the Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey (NILT) shows that people express a desire to live in mixed areas. However, what they say is not what they do. The NILS shows that Roman Catholics in general are consistently more likely than Protestants to move to more Catholic areas, and Protestants are more likely than Catholics to move to Protestant areas. There are also clear differences in housing moves by socio-economic background; for instance, those with a limiting long-term illness, who have no educational qualifications, and who were renters from the Housing Executive in 2001, were more likely to move to socially-deprived areas and less likely to leave them than other people. These issues are a cause for concern as they indicate that migration sorts and sifts people. Socially-deprived areas tend to lose population through migration especially that of better-off people. Everything being equal, this would be expected to lead to greater religious and social segregation with Protestant areas becoming more Protestant, Catholic areas becoming more Catholic, and socially-deprived areas having a greater concentration of deprived people with falling population numbers.

Everything, however, is not equal. Further work using the NILS shows that the net effect of migration on redistributing the 2001 population up to 2007 is very small. It increases

segregation very slightly but the effect is so small that it really stays the same. The reasons for this are that most of the Northern Ireland population are immobile – 70% did not change address 2001-2007 – and most of those who moved only moved small distances – the average distance was 3.58km. Not enough people move to radically alter the geography of population especially since those who do move migrate only over short distances and often move between similar areas. The net effect of migration on altering the composition of places is small. This is not entirely unexpected since similar observations have been made in Scotland where the same types of differentials have been seen but with the same lack of impact on population patterns. Migration has not recently increased religion and social segregation. On the other hand, it also does little to mix the population, reducing residential segregation by religion and social background.

4. Predictions for 2011

Predictions are difficult and uncertain and have been rightly described as a ‘mug’s game’. Despite this, it is tempting in this case to look forward to comment on what the 2011 Census figures might show with regard to residential segregation. The expectations arising from the NILS analysis is that segregation will not have increased since 2001 through migration and that the period of relative stability since 1991 will be continued. If, when the analysis of the 2011 Census is complete, segregation levels are seen to have changed markedly since 2001 then it is highly likely that these changes have been driven by differentials in births and deaths between places rather than migration because observed levels of housing moves since 2001 are simply insufficient to do the job on their own.

5. Implications and conclusions

- The socio-economic experience of Northern Ireland with regard to internal migration (eg address changes within Northern Ireland) is very similar to other parts of the UK and indeed more widely. Socially-deprived areas on average are net losers of population through migration whereas more affluent areas are net gainers. The same social differentials in migration are also observed; those who with no limiting long-term illness and with *some* educational qualifications, for instance, are more likely to leave deprived areas than those with a limiting long-term illness and *no* qualifications. Conversely, those with no qualifications and limiting long-term illness are more likely to move down the deprivation hierarchy to more socially-deprived neighbourhoods.

- Everything else being equal, these moves will lead to the spatial concentration of disadvantaged people in places with already high levels of social deprivation.
- However, the Northern Ireland population differs in being relatively immobile compared to some other UK regions in the distance that people move when they change address. Only the North-East and North-West having a greater share of people who move less than 2km.
- Despite the ending of much violence since the late 1990s, and the growth of greater political stability, there is evidence of continued communal divisions in the housing market with Catholics and Protestants being more likely to move to areas where they are already in the majority – there is little sign of greater integration happening as a matter of course.
- In practice, however, there is little evidence that migration is increasing residential segregation by religion/community background and socio-economic background either. This is because the net effect of migration is limited because a relatively small number of people change address and those that do change address tend only to move short distances.
- Contemporary levels of migration are therefore not leading to a large-scale re-sorting of the population; rather they tend to maintain the *status quo* with regard to religious/community and socio-economic segregation. Similar findings have been observed in Scotland.
- Any political aspirations for greater neighbourhood communal and socio-economic integration are therefore unlikely to be achieved without policy interventions to alter migratory behaviour as ‘normal’ levels of migration as seen since 2001 are insufficient on their own to change the distribution of the population enough.
- However, migration can sometimes change the geographical distribution of the population enough to alter levels of segregation. One such period was that between 1971 and 1991 where exceptional events such as political violence, the loss of population from Belfast, and changes in the housing and labour markets underlay a large increase in residential segregation.