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Suburbanisation or White Flight? Assessing Population Redistribution Trends from Immigrant Settlement Areas after Unprecedented International Migration

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Abstract

After a decade of unprecedented international migration, ethnic residential segregation has become a new social and political issue high on the Spanish policy agenda. Nonetheless, little is known about the effects of significant international migration inflows to immigrant settlement areas and new destinations and the processes of population redistribution that shape sub-national geographies over time. This paper brings the concepts of suburbanisation and white flight into the debate of social integration and residential segregation in Spain by taking into consideration the causes and meanings of residential clustering and dispersal. Within a context of out-migration of nationals either as a consequence of suburbanisation or white-flight, residential segregation has generated disparities in public services and education thus confining immigrant groups to neighbourhoods with increasing levels of segregation and isolation. The objectives of this paper are two-fold. First, we provide an analysis of the emerging patterns of immigrant settlement in various locations by examining geographic diversity and population change in selected municipalities which have experienced significant streams of immigration, thus contributing to population growth *in situ* and, therefore, to a degree of segregation and isolation. Second, we analyse the level and direction of change in residential segregation and migration between 2001 and 2008 of immigrant groups compared to nationals as a way to assess whether recent population redistribution trends indicate continued suburbanisation or white flight. The paper builds on the demography body of work in this area internationally. For this purpose, analyses of in- and out- migration between small areas (municipalities) and residential segregation across neighbourhoods are carried out for selected municipalities in Catalonia using flow data (Residential Variation Statistics) and population data from the Municipal Register between 2001 and 2008.

Introduction

After the significant influx of international immigrants over the last decade in Spain, foreign citizens make up 16% of the total population in Catalonia, which represents nearly 21% of the total foreign-born population living in Spain. Within this context, residential segregation of immigrant groups appears to be an increasing feature of many localities across Spain. The urban-ness of immigrant origin groups is not surprising given the urban local of housing and work opportunities for the immigrants when they first arrive in Spain. Theories of immigrant settlement have traditionally proposed that immigrant-origin groups will disperse from the place of original settlement and that this spatial mixing will be accompanied by assimilation (Alba and Nee, 1997; Massey and Denton, 1988). However these predicted changes might be subjected to the intensity of departures by Spanish nationals from immigrant settlements. The idea that high levels of segregation can be problematic because imply that a subgroup of the population is isolated from different opportunities, resources and amenities have gained a position high on the agenda in both academic and policy circles over the last decade in Spain and elsewhere in Europe (Musterd, 2005). From this perspective demographic work has turned to understanding the processes of population change that underpin ethnic geographies in Spain. Although the patterns of residential segregation and isolation of recently immigrated groups are likely to be explained by the combined effects of natural change, immigration and internal migration evidence of residential relocation of Spanish nationals from cities to suburban areas could be, in part, a response to international in-migration.

Whilst the experience of residential segregation can be temporary and transitional and beneficial for recent arrivals in areas where kinship ties are strong with co-nationals providing support and assistance, the concentration of recent immigrants in areas of original settlement could also be associated with the ‘white flight’, a process by which white people flee urban neighbourhoods where minority populations increase. The correlation between arrivals from international migration and departures from Spanish nationals is nonetheless subjected to endogenous location factors such as better access to cheap housing or school segregation, the latter being regarded as an important catalyser of white flight from cities to mixed urban areas. In response there has been an interest in research on population change of immigrant groups and nationals to understand in greater depth the causes and meanings of residential clustering and dispersal.

Following previous research in the field of residential segregation (Peach, 1996), the proposed research will focus on the re-established idea of benign segregation –that which develops from population growth of clusters of immigrants- and dysfunctional segregation –that which results from social pressure such as discrimination in the housing market or self-segregation processes such as the white flight-. The specific objectives of this research are twofold:

- 1) To analyse the emerging patterns of immigrant settlement in various locations by examining geographic diversity and population change in selected municipalities which have experienced significant streams of immigration

- 2) To examine residential segregation and internal migration in conjunction as a way to assess whether recent population redistribution trends indicate continued suburbanisation or white flight.

The main research questions we address in this study are: 1) Are population growth and dispersal of Spanish nationals reinforcing residential segregation and isolation between groups? Is the out-migration process of Spanish nationals from cities to mixed urban areas an indication of suburbanisation or white flight?

Data and Methods

The availability of data from the Municipal Register for various time points at small area level after the 2001 Census of Population and Housing enables many users of demographic statistics to compare the geographical patterns of settlement of different population subgroups by nationality over time. This is seen as particularly relevant, especially when considering the initial stages of settlement of new migrants. In addition, data derived from the Residential Variation Statistics will be used to examine population movement in and out from each selected municipality. The value of these datasets is that all contain detailed and comparable information by age, sex, country of birth, nationality and are available on a yearly basis.

Since the behaviour of the indices of segregation are closely related to the demographic processes which lead to population growth and dispersal these will be used in conjunction with the analysis of arrivals (in-migration) and departures (out-migration) of international migrants and Spanish nationals. For the analysis of residential segregation two distinct measures are used here to review the level and direction of change in two dimensions of spatial variation: *evenness* and *exposure*. Evenness is measured with the traditional index of dissimilarity (Duncan and Duncan, 1955), which is used to indicate how evenly distributed one ethnic group is geographically compared to the rest of the population. Exposure is measured with the index of isolation (the P^* measure), and is used to indicate the average local concentration of a group (Lieberson, 1963). The index of isolation (P^*) is also conceived as a probability indicator that members of each group will meet with members of their own group.

Expected findings

- 1) Since immigration is almost invariably focused into particular cities by labour demand, cheap accommodation and transport facilities, the first wave of immigration followed by further immigration of friends and family to the same place is likely to increase residential segregation and isolation.
- 2) Although housing pressure is a major reason for movement out of areas where population is growing, it is considered that the climate of economic recession might increase the level of residential segregation and isolation of recently arrived migrants as a consequence of the current difficulties of access to banking and financial support and the advantages of living close to others who allow new immigrants into work, education and other activities.

- 3) Those who move out are likely to be those with more resources to do so. Within this subgroup the departure of Spanish nationals from cities to mixed urban areas is likely to suggest not only continued suburbanisation as a way to escape mounting urban problems but also white flight, thus reflecting the growing concentration of ethnic minorities in cities.

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