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About Fragmentation in the Urban Context

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1. What is fragmentation and does it matter?

I want to try sort out some distinct senses of the concept fragmentation and offer comments, for each sense, about whether it is a problem.

We can look in turn at social, functional and visual fragmentation.

1.2. Social fragmentation

Social fragmentation is not a phrase in normal use - at least in English - but it would surely have the sense of a tendency for society to splinter, for the peaces to loose coherence and adhesion. But this would not be entirely new. We have lived with antagonistic class societies for centuries and I'm not a sociologist who could chart the history of class divisions.

But there are some evident observations on which we might agree about the present period of unprecedentedly rapid change:

- the old simplicity of bourgeoisie and proletariat is no more, either in the conditions of material life and class relations nor in our consciousness of our class positions;
- there are certainly growing disparities - polarisations - when we try to measure incomes. In the UK this is the case when we look at recorded incomes nationally, or at regional disparities or disparities within London. Equally at the level of the EC the disparities between regions of higher and lower average incomes are widening. Dunford estimates that regional GDP per capita in the EC ranges from 40% to 200% of the EC mean level (Dunford,1991, Clout, 1986) and that this range has, since 1973, been widening. At the EC scale the momentum of change and of the Single European Act is to worsen this divergence: it is estimated that regional funds would have to redistribute 8% of EC's GDP just to keep regional inequalities at their present level. Or if we look at cities rather than regions we find that cities in the core parts of Europe are having an extra boost of prosperity through their centrality in Europe than one would otherwise expect and that peripherality in the EC is worsening the relative positions of many other cities (Cheshire & Hay, 1989).

Within cities, too, the long-standing fragmentation of social classes continues. We have always had rich sides of town and poor sides of town, reflecting histories of industrial development and the power of the rich to buy their way in to areas with good

landscape endowments, good transport, the best schools, better air quality and so on. The analysis of the markets for these scarce "positional goods" was developed by the late Fred Hirsch (1977).

What is perhaps important now (and this is a very tentative statement) is that we are getting a fine-grain fragmentation of social class in neighbourhoods (quartiers) as well as the familiar coarse grain.

The coarse segregation in London gives us the "inner city" as a euphemism for poverty because large amounts of working class housing are concentrated round the old port and in the inner boroughs whose long tradition of socialist government has generated massive amounts of social housing. This is in contrast to Paris where clearly the different political process has led to much social housing being in peripheries - grands ensembles and so on. We are familiar with the process and with some of its self-sustaining features like the tendency for fiscal divergence and for the quality of education and other services to diverge, further reinforcing differences between parts of the city.[1]

But in many of the maturer north-west European cities we are getting a re-entry of higher-income households to the core areas (Cheshire & Hay, 1989). And where those core areas were of working class occupation, the new settlement operates through the displacement process which Ruth Glass long ago named 'gentrification'. It is a process which inserts the rich among the poor and is fundamentally antagonistic - though not always producing overt antagonisms. The situation is complex. In the part of London where I work, round King's Cross, the population has a very great degree of income and professional diversity and there is much co-operation and trust. But alongside it is a strong sense of threat, experienced by many middle- and low-income households and by entrepreneurs: threat of displacement by rising de-controlled rents, by harassment, by separation from kin, by redevelopment and so on (Parkes *& al.*, 1991).

The question whether this fragmentation matters is a very difficult one and depends critically on the point of view. There used to be (rather static) sociological debates in Britain about "social mix" and whether it was functional or not for social order. There are issues here of the quality and character of services and of how class and cross-class solidarities are affected and I am not competent to comment on these. But my London experience certainly suggests that the speed and violence of displacement and the disruption of social networks can matter very much.

1.3. Functional fragmentation

A second dimension of fragmentation is functional. Again it is not simple or homogeneous. We still have the market tendencies for retailers to locate beside each other, for some tertiary office functions to cluster, for housing promoters to build unrelieved housing zones. And we still have vestiges of land use zoning functionalism - that purposeful segregation of the city in to zones of work, sleeping, buying, 'culture', 'leisure' and so on. It is described by Mr. Ripa de Meana's *EC Green Paper on the Urban Environment* as an aspect of modernism, and attacked roundly for its effects in generating excess travel and for the production of "dead" areas. The critique is a fairly superficial one, for functional clustering clearly predates modernist planning. But it is well that the challenge is revived since the segregating forces remain so strong. It is a

[1] These processes are most fully understood for Paris, thanks to Pretecelle & al. (1985).

challenge usually associated with Jane Jacobs (1961), and given its greatest subtlety in Richard Sennett's diatribe against planners' tidy minds as an instance of social psychopathology (1971).

But, although the segregation process goes on, there are counter-tendencies. Shops pop up in factory zones, speculative offices erupt in bourgeois villa quarters (in Frankfurt, for example), factories, laboratories and warehouses pepper the 'countryside', rural parishes in urban peripheries are sporadically developed for almost everything (even in regulated Switzerland - see the area just north of the Zürich city boundary). This is really a visible form of functional fragmentation (Hitz *& al.*, 1986).

Does it matter?

Under certain conditions it could, on balance be benign. This fragmentation and mixing of functions could, pace the Green Paper, reduce the need for travel. If it led to less uneven distributions of services it could do something to improve the access problems suffered by those without cars, by women more than men, by the elderly and children more than working-age people and by the poor more than the rich. Potentially these effects could be very positive, and as a by-product we would get more of the day-and-night liveliness beloved of Jane Jacobs and many urbanists.

But on the whole any such benefits from functional fragmentation are fortuitous. We are just as likely to get worse transport and inaccessibility problems (Owens, 1990, 1991).

In some of the areas of scattered industrialization in north Italy, sometimes heralded as the prosperous, flexible production, landscape of the future, fragmentation can have dire environmental effects. Paloscia (1991) examines the Prato area where textile, leather and other industries now constitute an elaborate sub-contracting network in a still-somewhat-agricultural basin. He finds severe problems of water and soil pollution, awful traffic problems and (for many) poor accessibility as the new economy struggles to operate with minimal infrastructure and minimal regulation.

A second example comes from London where we have been seeing a long process of dissolution of local shopping centres. The West End, Knightsbridge and Covent Garden survive as national and international shopping centres. But in much of the rest of London, especially poorer areas, the major firms have been closing and withdrawing, shifting their investment to motorway intersections and other car-accessible points, usually in the periphery. (This is a fragmentation process well-known in France.) The worrying negative effect in the London case is the regressive effect on accessibility. Those who can drive use the new facilities - though at the cost of time and travel - while the rest find the range and quality of their shopping gets worse, and the price often higher too.

So my provisional conclusion is that the present form of functional fragmentation is more bad than good from the point of view of social equality and energy efficiency.

1.4. Visual fragmentation

I must confess a deep suspicion of authoritarian tidy-mindedness in planning. The imposition of uniformity, visual as much as functional, suggests that the regulators are not quite grown up, not able to stomach the diversities of human life, keen to force life to conform to the crude model in their own little minds. This is the essence of

Sennett's (1971) view of authoritarian planning as a kind of anal-retentive behaviour. I can see no objection to visual variety as such, any more than to variety among individuals. *Au contraire.*

But there are two senses in which visual disorder of fragmentation do alarm and depress me. One is the spurious fragmentation of purely cosmetic vernacular or post-modernism. We have severe cases of this in England, but clearly we are not alone. It is the diversity of the architect confronting a rigid economic specification for a very standard building but driven either by the client or by his or her own frustrated creativity - to make the result 'distinctive'. Thus in London we find that almost any kind of building can be dressed up as a Georgian house, we have supermarkets dressed as barns, corporate offices (sometimes even within the same development) variously clad as gothic, 20s Chicago, 'modern' or art deco. I cannot be the only person to experience it as deeply alienating. This does matter because it is a mystification: a lie.

A second aspect of visual fragmentation is where it genuinely expresses the social and functional fragmentation and the often-violent chaos of the economic forces which are at work. This matters in the sense that the underlying problems matter.

2. The sources of fragmentation

2.1. De-regulation

The measures we call "de-regulation" in Britain have had a variety of effects, positive and negative. The loosening of the "use classes" - the categories of activity limiting what you can do on land and in buildings - has removed some authoritarian uniformity. But it has also provided conditions for the accelerated displacement of the remaining industrial activity of London by the pressure (some of it illusory) for office use. A second mechanism of de-regulation has been a central government principle, urged also on local governments, of the "presumption in favour of development", the effect of which has often been to make it hard for localities to sustain some of their more fragile protective policies - towards green space, towards family housing, towards industries.

Very similar effects can be seen from reductions in the security of tenure for households and firms and from the de-control of rents.

More generally the systematic weakening of the urban planning system through the 1980s has constituted a replacement of collective decisions in plans by individual and corporate decisions at the level of the project. This is a very powerful source of functional and visual fragmentation, for us particularly evident in the Docklands. It is also evident in the real crisis of over-production of office space in London in the late 80s: here the fragmentated decisions of investors, promoters and local councils has led to a surplus of 3m m^2 which has shocked almost everyone - both in its magnitude and in its incompatibility with transport capacity and with environmental objectives. Investors and employers are as shaken as their workers and the city's residents.

2.2. Market speculation

Periods of high risk-taking show us a lot of opportunist development - in a sense high creative interventions by those who see opportunities, but tending to fragmenta-

tion of functional patterns and established physical scales in building. Could one say that cautious investment is usually in locations and building types which confirm and reinforce established patterns and segregations, while the more adventurous and risk-oriented investors are the ones who break the functional and locational mould?

2.3. *Speed of change*

Some of the injurious forms of fragmentation I have referred to get their damaging quality partly from the speed of change. While long slow shifts in industrial structure, functional locations, housing costs are processes we can adjust to without too much pain, the same changes at high speed can constitute a crisis. This is partly why Londoners have felt so traumatized in recent years: we have lost most of our manufacturing jobs since 1965, see all our port activity depart and lost our metropolitan government as well. Large sections of active working class and middle-income populations became redundant quickly and then vulnerable to displacement from the housing stock, too. While the labour force is quite remarkably adaptable, there is always a proportion of people and of families for whom the jobs in growing sectors simply are not effectively available and therefore do not substitute for those which disappear. A similar trauma must now be affecting many Berliners now as the entire labouring system of the east dissolves.

Economists and geographers have written about the global process of capital accumulation and accelerated circulation of money which lie behind these urban phenomena. We can see them reflected in their simplest form in the high real rates of interest prevailing in financial markets which effectively say that only projects which repay their costs in a very few years are now worth doing. Much of our architecture can be seen as the architecture of rapid returns. Furthermore the same financial criteria, discounting the future very heavily, have come to be applied to decisions in the state sector - and even in the most contradictory way to the handling of environmental benefits in the new science of environmental economics. While we might have hoped to see a benign role for the state in taking care of the long term of the environment, compensating for the short-termism of private interests, we in fact get both regimes drawn in to the same short-term logic.

2.4. *Changed organization of production*

I think it is right to come only last to Fordism and whatever we call its successors. We are all indebted to French analysts for developing our understanding of the dominant form of mid-20th century industrial society - with mass-production and -consumption, redistributive policies, Keynesian regulation and some social solidarity based in stable employment. The breakdown of this paradigm is giving us complex mixtures of secure and insecure work, of organized large scale production and flexible sub-contracted production, of enrichment and impoverishment, of legal and illegal activity.

There is great controversy on what will be happening next. Flexibility of production organization seems to be coexisting with old forms. We see fragmentation of the firm, of the plant and of the great big office. What is the characteristic urban expression? That is the subject of much research and conjecture - and certainly too big for this paper.

3. What, if anything, can be done?

3.1. Back to modernist functional zoning?

Is a reversion to functionalist zoning an answer to any of the fragmentation problems discussed here?

On the whole not. The social and economic benefits of mixed use areas are probably strong. The containment of noise and pollution from factories, (and fields and farms) needs to be achieved by direct controls, irrespective of whether these activities are clustered or not. The best way of generating good functional mixtures should be the subject of more comparative research.

But the main objection to crude functionalism is that it is likely to be too inflexible to meet the needs of nimble producers in a fast-changing economy. Too authoritarian, as well.

But paradoxically we may be driven back to some measures of zoning as a way of getting some order and predictability back in to land markets and in to land-use / transport relationships. Some investors have been finding the added risks of de-regulation outweigh the added possibilities of profit. But the new zoning should perhaps try to regulate the intensity of activity and building, rather than precise function, especially where energy-saving through better travel patterns is a main aim. It could be called a 'performance standards' approach.

3.2. ...and collective control at the centre?

The UK is probably unique in having centralized its decision making in the 1980s. Elsewhere the principle of subsidiarity has operated to varying degrees. It is probably a good principle, providing that certain rights, standards and solidarities are guarantied at the national or European level. This must clearly include the protection of ethnic and other minorities from local oppression, the enforcement of some limits on how localities can compete for inbound investment and some guarantees of minimum levels of welfare (Lipletz, 1991). In such framework we should, in Europe, be able to take advantage of local initiatives and creativity in a loose and fruitful way. A benign fragmentation.

3.3. Attack on speculative production?

Should we be pressing for limits on land and property speculation? Politically it is very hard to deal with where huge gains stand to be made - in poor peripheries (as Irish and Greek people know) as much as in metropolitan centres. Even if there were a political will in a country to shift towards Netherlands model to reduce speculation and improve value-for-money, it would be politically very difficult.

Some combination of measures may be needed to contain the effects from speculation:

- predictable regimes of performance criteria and environmental standards which limit the bargaining power and discretion of officials and mayors; rights for third parties (objectors) to challenge exceptions;

- Mazza has discussed the contribution which might be made by auctioning specified development rights, while leaving the land itself in private hands. This could take some of the extremes out of land speculation and generate valuable fiscal flows;
- some taxation measures - already widespread - to capture some of the dynamic growth in rents and values, but only in boom periods and regions.

3.4. The speed of change

Could the green movement force the state back in to taking a long view?

3.5. Viable mixtures versus destructive fragmentation

I argued about that functional fragmentation has the potential to reduce the need for travel. It can clearly produce some Jane Jacobs benefits as well - some of which are thoroughly commercial, as we know from Covent Garden.

One small step for mankind would be better information at a very local level about jobs and houses available. The potentialities of good information technologies here are great and important. There is no reason on earth why your minitel and TV could not show you every available dwelling near your work, and every available job near your home. We would have to crush some vested interests in the estate agency sector but at least then people who wanted to minimize their trips would find it a bit easier.

The standard environmental economics device would be to raise the price or tax rate on travel. There are just two snags: it is probably bad from a distributional point of view - adding yet another thing which the rich can afford and the poor not. We would see, even more than today, high social strata free to make long work tips in comfort while poorer people, and a disproportionate number of women, would be trapped in local job markets.

Perhaps a very steep graduation of public transport prices, with short trips almost free.

Other measures to get more homes into at least some of what have been pure work zones, and to get more jobs into well-connected points in dormitory suburbs.

3.6. Cosmetic diversity

Hunch re Germany. Research to clarify user needs and heterogeneity / homogeneity of building stocks. Increase direct commissioning. Is it possible that a less "efficient" property market (in the sense of less standardized) could be more efficient for firms that operate in buildings, and for their labour elations, productivity and image?

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