

Social segregation and cultural diversity in contrasting urban areas

By Paul Warburton

Synopsis

Is social segregation in cities inevitable? Would it be more desirable to have fully integrated cities where social, religious and ethnic groups live in harmony? This **Geofile** addresses the question ‘what is social segregation?’ It looks at some of the causes and consequences of social segregation and cultural diversity in three contrasting cities: Manchester, Detroit and Mumbai.

Social and cultural segregation are related to economic causes like globalisation and deindustrialisation, and also to social causes like the caste system in India. Religion has a part to play, as have people’s attitudes and values. The case studies also bring out important contrasts between processes in less and more economically developed countries.

Interesting questions, to which there are only partial answers, are also raised by these examples of segregation.

Key terms

Social segregation, deindustrialisation, urbanisation, suburbanisation, globalisation, multiplier effect, ghetto

Learning objectives

After working through this **Geofile** you should:

- be able to understand the nature of social and cultural segregation and how this develops in different cities.
- have some idea why some cities are more segregated than others.

Although it is difficult to answer such questions, you should also have developed some opinions on whether or not social and cultural segregation is inevitable or desirable in urban areas.

Links

Exam board	Link to specification
AQA	Component 2: Human Geography; 3.2.2.2 Changing places, see page 22; 3.2.2.4 Place studies, see pages 23–24; 3.2.3.3. Social and economic issues associated with urbanisation, see page 24; 3.2.3.9 Case studies, see page 25 Click here
Edexcel AS	Area of study 2: Dynamic places, Topic 3 Globalisation; 3.4a The movement of the global economic centre of gravity, see page 30; Topic 4 Shaping places; 4A.2c Change can be measured, see page 34 Click here
A2	Area of study 2 Dynamic places Topic 4 Shaping places 4A.5c Conflicts can occur among contrasting groups, see page 31; 4A.10b Social progress can be measured, see page 33 Click here
OCR A2	Topic 2.1 Changing spaces, making places; 3c Social inequality – case study, see page 20 Click here
Eduqas	Component 1 Changing landscapes and changing places, Section B Changing places; 1.3.4 Economic change and social inequalities in de-industrialised urban places, see page 17; 1.3.10 Urban management and the challenges of continuity and change, see page 18 Click here
WJEC	N/A
IB	SL and HL Options Paper 1 Option G, Urban environments, Managing the impacts of urban social deprivation Click here

Social segregation and cultural diversity in contrasting urban areas

There has been massive growth in the world's urban population since the mid-20th century. Some regions like Europe and North America were already very urbanised, while others such as China and India were still predominantly rural. The pace of urban growth has been so rapid that already about half of the world's population lives in urban areas, and the OECD has predicted that the proportion will grow by about 2% per year until 2030.

Much of this growth has been the result of natural increase within urban areas, but significant growth has also been due to migration. Urbanisation has been intimately linked with globalisation. Cities are magnets for flows of people, capital, businesses and information. Tokyo, Mumbai, New York and Sao Paulo are some of those cities that have exceeded the 10 million threshold to be referred to as mega-cities (OECD).

This growth has put huge pressure on cities – on their infrastructure, environment and resources. Urban areas have also become increasingly multicultural and this has led to strains between different groups of people. Although some cities have embraced social and cultural diversity, in many instances social and ethnic groups have become segregated, and tensions between groups has become a major issue.

What is social segregation?

Social segregation has been defined as 'the separation or isolation of a race, class, or ethnic group by enforced or voluntary residence in a restricted area, by barriers to social intercourse, by separate educational

facilities, or by other discriminatory means' (Merriam-Webster dictionary). It follows from this that segregation can be based upon or be related to cultural differences.

Social segregation then can have different forms and underlying causes. We will look at three contrasting urban areas – Manchester in the UK, Detroit in the USA and Mumbai in India.

Manchester, UK

Manchester seemed to be a place of racial harmony in the latter part of the 20th century. Asian and white children mixed well in primary and secondary schools. There were some schools that were about half Jewish and half Asian; racial or religious tension was unheard of in either. Mancunians of all creeds and colours mingled without conflict in the city-centre pubs and nightclubs.

In 2001 unexpected events dramatically changed this picture. In May the town of Oldham experienced riots over three successive nights, and 86 police officers were injured. The next area to see violence was Burnley, where there were clashes between hundreds of white and Asian youths, and widespread damage to property and businesses.

The government of the time commissioned a report into the violence by Ted Cante, a local government official. The report concluded that although the racist far right had helped to stir up tension, the underlying cause of the riots was Asian and White residents living 'parallel lives'. Cante suggested that the two communities were socially

segregated and that the places involved were like 'a sea of petrol' waiting to be set alight. Another leading politician at the time, Lord Ouseley, said in another report that what had occurred was 'self-segregation'. He argued that Asians had chosen to live apart from the white community.

Diversity

The right responded to this and the discussion of race and religion took on a more intolerant tone. Racial and cultural diversity were no longer seen as adding to the quality of British life; they were now a 'problem' and British Muslims were considered the biggest problem of all. Support for the British National Party (BNP) grew in segregated northern English towns. The lowest moment came when it transpired that three of the suicide bombings in London on 7 July 2005 had been committed by British Asians from Leeds. A few months after these attacks, Trevor Phillips, the then head of the Commission for Racial Equality, depicted Britain 'sleepwalking to segregation'. The multicultural dream was declared over.

Since then there has been a response from academics who have questioned the findings of these early reports. Ludi Simpson and Nissa Finney from Manchester University argued that places like Oldham and Burnley were more ethnically mixed than had been suggested, and they dismissed the idea of 'self-segregation'. A 2009 Gallup poll found that the Muslim community is much more likely to identify strongly with Britain than the rest of the population. It also showed that they are collectively more in favour than of mixed ethnic communities than white Britons.

Those who know these towns well have clearly identified ethnically segregated areas, but many have argued over whether this matters. The suggestion is that people from a particular cultural background might be expected to live with and near to others of the same background, with similar religious beliefs, and shops that sell the things they want. There are many accounts of people of different ages interacting socially. College and school heads, for example, point to young people who grow up mixing harmoniously with people from different ethnic and social groups.

Social tensions

There is plenty of evidence for social and ethnic mixing, but also of tensions that exist. A key issue is deprivation. Towns like Oldham, Burnley and Rochdale have some of the poorest wards in the UK. Many tensions arise over poor-quality housing, difficulties of finding work, and youth unemployment. It has been argued that if people can get the economics right, the segregation will naturally erode.

A further point is concern that the news media exacerbate problems. The way issues are reported is often exaggerated. Residents complain that the media stir things up to tell a simplistic story of segregation and interracial disharmony.

Recent terrorist events in the UK have also stirred up hate crime, which also adds to the problem of segregation and hinders cultural mixing.

Detroit, USA

Detroit provides another interesting example of social, racial and cultural segregation. Again, it is a complex story with many causal factors that deserve wider research.

Detroit grew to become of America’s major industrial cities;

its growth was largely based on car manufacturing. In the early 20th century, thousands of black Americans migrated to Detroit for work, largely from the south. Even in these early years there were tensions, as whites viewed black workers as a threat to their jobs and communities, and neighbourhoods became racially segregated.

Racist policies

Black families were frequently charged much higher rents than white families, and couldn’t live in some neighbourhoods at all. Factories hired many black workers but kept their employees segregated. Using race to determine home loan eligibility, the Federal Housing Administration deliberately segregated the Detroit area over the course of the mid-20th century.

The racist policies took physical form in a wall (Figure 1) nearly 1 km long built in 1941 along Eight Mile Road to separate black and white neighbourhoods. This wall remains today and is still a reminder of racial division, even though it has been painted with colourful murals intended to send a brighter message of unity.

Suburbanisation

Gradually managers and white-collar workers moved to Detroit’s suburbs, and this became another factor that has continued to the present. In the 1940s and 1950s the city authorities undertook some urban renewal initiatives, which led to blacks being moved to previously white neighbourhoods, a pattern common in US cities as migrants from all sources improved their economic situation and moved up-market. Nevertheless, this added to tensions and led to a pattern of unrest culminating in three days of riots in 1967.

The process of suburbanisation continued with companies moving production, and the flow of whites followed the movement of jobs and the promise of a better quality of life.

Deindustrialisation

In the second half of the 20th century deindustrialisation seriously affected Detroit as the car industry declined. The multiplier effect went into reverse, as companies that supplied parts and other support for the car industry also went out of business.

Many suburbs aggressively prevented black families from



Figure 1 Detroit’s Segregation Wall
Source: Jim West/Alamy Stock Photo

moving to white areas. Blacks were confined to the inner city where there was a shrinking job base, and many fell into poverty and crime.

Detroit remains the most racially unequal metropolis in the USA; it has a largely black inner city, with whites living predominantly in the surrounding suburbs. Viewed together, Figures 2 and 3 illustrate the high degree of correlation between economic and racial segregation in Detroit.

Mumbai, India

Urbanisation was intended to lead to a more homogenous society in India's towns and cities, but this has not happened. India is a rapidly developing country with an economy ranked seventh (World Bank 2017). Mumbai acts as the driving engine of this economic growth, but this growth has fallen far short of helping all sectors of society equally. Mumbai is now the most socially segregated city in India. There is segregation between rich and poor, and also between cultural and religious groups. The old Indian caste system still has consequences for people's social and economic positions.

Rural-urban migration

Extreme polarities between rural and urban areas in nations has led to the rural-urban migration phenomenon. This encourages rural people to migrate into more developed cities, in search of a better standard of living and employment opportunities. This migration trend eventually leads to overpopulation in cities; it also contributes to pressure on services like housing and health, elevated levels of poverty, illiteracy and crime.

The vast majority of migrants to Mumbai and other cities are forced to take up jobs in the informal sector because of a lack of skills and education. This leads to low wages, a poor standard of living and contributes to the spread of slums where housing is very cheap. Dharavi (Figure 4) is the best example, gradually constructed by its citizens through the accumulation of waste and debris that effectively operated as in-fill on top of a swamp.

Transport network

Mumbai's sprawling railway network has had a part to play. Many migrants live in informal settlements that have sprung up along the lines entering the city,

providing access to jobs in the centre.

Religion

Mumbai also has residential areas or ghettos dominated by particular religious groups, notably Muslims. Severe clashes occurred between Muslim and Hindu groups in the 1990s. There were riots and bomb blasts in Mumbai, and many were killed. Vicious riots also occurred in Gujarat in 2002. Thousands of Muslim families in Mumbai were uprooted, and sought safety in Mumbra, on the city's outskirts. Today, Mumbra is India's largest Muslim ghetto.

Social structure and the caste system

India's caste system defines social classes among Hindus and although it is banned by the Indian constitution, discrimination between social groups continues. The Dalits are the lowest caste Hindus formerly known as 'untouchables'. Muslims, who, although not part of the traditional Hindu caste system, used to be regarded as having a middle status, are now considered to be at this lowest level. Although much has been achieved to break down the barriers between castes, a great

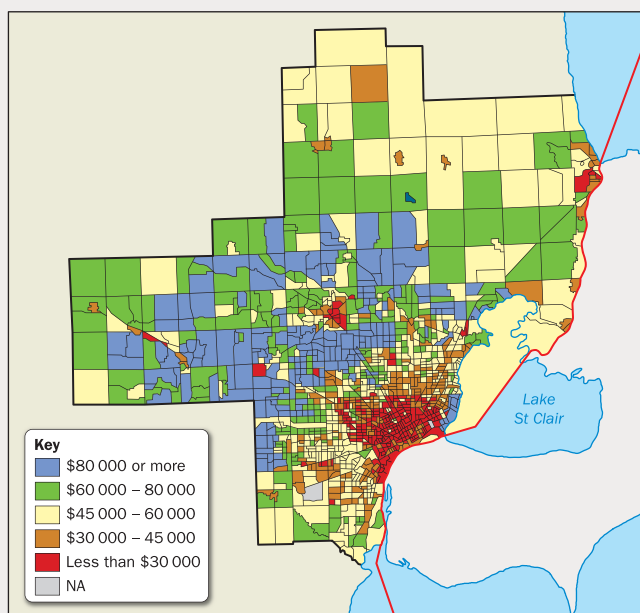


Figure 2 Economic disparity in Detroit

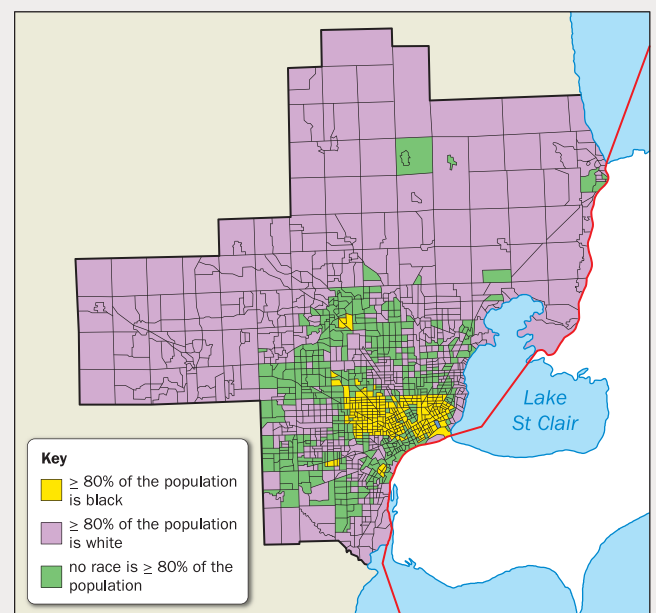


Figure 3 Racial segregation in Detroit



Figure 4 Part of Dharavi, Mumbai
Source: Keith J Smith/Alamy Stock Photo

deal of discrimination still remains. This affects access to jobs and higher wages that can lift the poorest members of Indian society out of poverty.

Globalisation and social mobility

Globalisation was referred to at the beginning of this **Geofile** and its important links with urbanisation and urban change. Globalised cities are typified by the growth of a well-paid and educated elite and low paid, less well educated and insecure workers. Large numbers of these poorer workers are rural immigrants, this has been an important factor behind segregation.

Despite the inequalities in globalising cities, some poorer people have been able to work their way up the social ladder and improve their incomes and have been able to move to the equivalent of 'leafy suburbs' or more prosperous areas. This has to a certain extent mitigated the effects of segregation.

Conclusion

Interesting questions are raised by these examples of segregation that you may wish to explore. For example – is social segregation in cities inevitable? Is it desirable to have fully integrated cities where social, religious and ethnic groups live in harmony?



Figure 5 Peace line and wall in Belfast
Source: NurPhoto.com/Alamy Stock Photo

There are interesting examples around of the world where segregation is even greater than the examples we have studied. Figure 5 strikingly shows segregation between Protestant and Catholic groups in Northern Ireland today. Almost two decades after the signing of the Good Friday Agreement that was intended to bring peace, more than 90 per cent of social housing in Northern Ireland remains segregated on grounds of religious background.

There are also though cities like Los Angeles (Figure 6) where, according to various measures, segregation has actually decreased during the last two decades; although this doesn't apply equally to all groups. Two key factors seem to be a reduction in discrimination, for example in the housing market, and upward mobility of blacks in particular which has led to movement to more prosperous and suburban areas.

Some recent research identified four main factors behind the rise

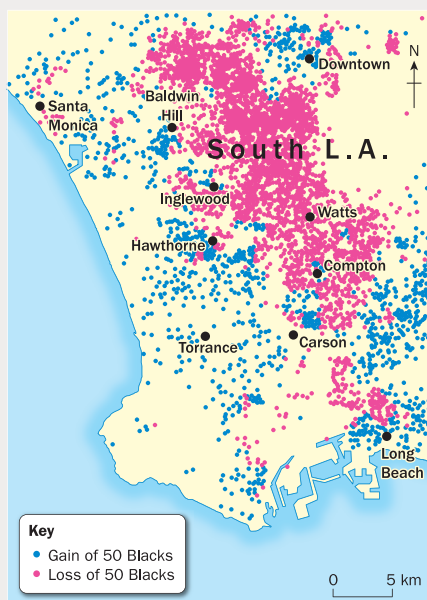


Figure 6 Change in distribution of black population in Los Angeles 1990–2010

in segregation in Europe’s cities: globalisation; economic restructuring; the withdrawal of the state; and investment (or lack of) in social housing. There is no doubt that much segregation is connected with money and the economic crisis of 2007–08 has made matters worse. However, as we have seen other economic and social factors are involved often related to people’s attitudes and beliefs.

Living in harmony in urban areas requires settings in which people meet as equals, without regard to race, class, or national origins. If cities are to become less segregated it will take a great deal of effort

on the part of many groups and individuals including governments and other policy makers, community organisations and public and private businesses. It will also involve fundamental changes in people’s attitudes and values.

Focus questions

- 1 Study Figure 6 and describe and explain the changing distribution of blacks between 1990 and 2010 in Los Angeles.
- 2 How can socially and culturally segregated areas in urban areas be identified?
- 3 Referring to specific examples, outline the consequences of social and cultural segregation
- 4 Essay question: Is social and cultural segregation in urban areas inevitable?

Learning checkpoint

1. What is social and cultural segregation?
2. How can social and cultural diversity be identified in urban areas?
3. Identify the causes and consequences of social and cultural segregation. Use case studies from this Geofile, and others you have researched yourself, to illustrate your points.

Useful websites

General

[Click here](#)

[Click here](#)

[Click here](#)

Manchester

[Click here](#)

Detroit

[Click here](#)

Mumbai

[Click here](#)

[Click here](#)

Los Angeles

[Click here](#)