

Scale Extent Gentrification London Implications

Definition - Gentrification refers to the physical, social, economic and cultural phenomenon where by working class and / or inner-city neighbourhoods are converted into more affluent middle class communities by remodeling building, resulting in increased property values and in the displacement of the poor. (Absolute Astronomy, 2005)

It was Ruth Glass (1964) who was first believed to have brought the issue of gentrification to the fore with definitions such as the one outlined below.

One by one, many of the working class quarters of London have been invaded by the middle-classes – upper and lower.

Shabby, modest mews and cottages - two rooms up and two down - have been taken over, when their leases have expired, and have become elegant, expensive residences. Once this process of 'gentrification' starts in a district it goes on rapidly until all or most of the original working-class occupiers are displaced and the whole social character of the district is changed. (Hamnett, 2000)

This displacement of the working class and the rehabilitation of poorer and derelict housing has led to the transformation of an area into a middle - class neighbourhood. (Smith, 1996)

Gentrification has been described by Slater, (2002) as a fascinating, powerful and often frighteningly rapid process which plays an important role in fashioning the physical and social form of cities. Like the more widespread process of suburbanization, it is a process which has had a profound impact on the lives of urban residents in hundreds of cities.

Scale of Gentrification in London

According to Butler and Robson (2003a) there are four social 'fields of human activity' these are: housing, employment, education and consumption. It will therefore be these factors which are discussed here in identifying the scale of gentrification in the London area.

Ruth Glass' (1964) statement shows the effect that gentrification has had on the housing market: it is the process by which the original, poor and working-class residents, are displaced from neighbourhoods by rising costs and other forces directly related to an influx of new, wealthier residents. The Housing market is therefore an excellent indication of the change in an area, based on the contention that working class people can no longer afford to live in these areas with rising rents and house prices.

Atkinson (2000) has tried to measure the gentrification of an area through measuring this displacement of certain types of people.

London has experienced massive de-industrialisation, but has also seen rapid expansion of business and financial services such as banking, legal services and management consultancies as well as the continued growth of a number of creative industries such as advertising, film and videos creation, music, fashion and design. (Hamnett,1999)

Cities such as London have been characterised by the transformation of their industrial occupational, income and residential structure. The rise of cities such as this with their cultural interests and housing market demands has, in large part, been responsible for the growth of gentrification in post-industrial inner cities.

Also of importance in discussing the scale of gentrification is the on going social processes through which formerly deprived or undesirable areas are transformed and made congenial to the requirements of middle - class life. (Butler and Robson,2001) such as employment, education and capital.

Schools and education are major issues in gentrification. Butler and Robson (2003b) highlight this problem.

Inner London is different from the rest of the country in that it is only relatively recently that it has acquired middle -class households with children being left with what is widely seen as an education system which is seen as amongst the worst performing, particularly at secondary level, in the United Kingdom.

Middle - class households have the assets to be able to find non - local schools or use the private education system. Working - class families do not have these same resources available and therefore these children are not being given the same opportunities as their middle - class peers to obtain a higher standard of education, and therefore the education infrastructures of the areas are being transformed.

Employment patterns have also undergone notable changes. In Inner London, a decline has taken place amongst the skilled, manual and routine, non-manual groups whilst the growth in recent years, has occurred amongst the professional middle class. (Butler and Robson,2003b)

However it has been noted by Sassen (1991) who suggested that changes in the labour market of 'global cities' results in social polarisation. Socialpolarisation is the various ways in which many areas are becoming more socially distinct over time. In this case we are seeing areas with an originally small middle - class population, becoming 'richer' as the middle - class population increases and the working - class population decreases.

Hamnett, (1999) states many residents work in business or creative industries in the central city or its environs, and have long or irregular hours and therefore want to live close to work and the cultural and entertainment facilities offered by the central city. He goes on to note that traditional central areas are expensive and in short supply. Consequently, the new middle class have sought out new living opportunities in the inner city.

There has also been a noted increase in feminisation of the professional work force and the formation of dual career families. (Butler and Robson, 2003b) Over the last few decades more women have chosen to continue their careers as well as become mothers. This has led to the need to relocate to the inner city to avoid travelling long distances and consequently saving time. This factor can therefore contribute to the gentrification of an area and has been noted by Butler and Robson (2001) there is a large concentration of mothers or nanny's pushing buggies as well as evidence of traditional family arrangements being present in Battersea.

Localised patterns of gentrification by differing middle - class groups are characterised by differing relations of forms of capital. This has involved examining different strategies of capital deployment in the attempt of a given group to transform the locality in which can be seen positive changes in both the material infrastructure and symbolic values of places. (Butler and Robson , 2003a) Atkinson (2000a) noted the benefits this capital has had on a community through increasing the status of an area, its capital wealth leading to a decrease in social problems.

Extent of Gentrification in London

The gentrification of parts of inner London which began as early as the 1960s are now taking on an increasingly diverse pattern as different areas develop an identity of their own and expand the choice for the middle classes. Gentrification appears to be occurring mainly in the South and East of the city; this can be seen in areas as different as Docklands, Brixton, London Fields, Battersea, Barnsbury, Southwark and parts of New Cross. Many studies undertaken by Hamnett (2003) Butler and Robson,(2003a, 2003b) and Atkinson (2000) highlight these areas and inner London and show the scale of the gentrification in the London area.

All of these areas have been gentrified, but the process has occurred for a range of different reasons. Gentrification does not appear to occur as a geographical phenomena but occurs as a result of social factors influencing the extent of gentrification.

Research undertaken by Butler for the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) has given evidence to suggest that fact.

The Docklands areas represent the sharpest differences with other middle - class settlements. In this area people want convenient urban living which makes minimum

demands on them. It is convenient for work in the City, has minimum maintenance and low social obligations and these appear to be what matters to the inhabitants.

London Fields has a relatively minority middle - class presence but the inhabitants of this area are drawn here by the strong social networks the 'new' residents here have created.

Brixton is busy and far more ethnically diverse. This area has long been thought of as the centre of Britain's Afro - Caribbean community. It is now more culturally and socially heterogeneous than it was, but social groups still live alongside each other here and there is also a lot of entertainment and services for the younger professional.

The single, childless household's of the early gentrifies of these areas have given way to the new dominant dual learner households. Nearly forty per cent of these households have children living at home. Butler and Robson (2001) noted an abundance of mothers with young children in their research area. They suggested that the main reasons for middle - class people living in Battersea was, firstly its location, as it is only ten minutes for Victoria. Secondly it has one of the biggest night time economies south of the Thames. There are a large number of wine bars, bistros and restaurants all doing an apparently healthy trade, which increases the appeal of this area for young professionals and those with young children.

Implications of gentrification in London

Gentrification is best explained as the social and spatial manifestation of the transition from an industrial to a post-industrial economy based on financial, business and creative services, with associated changes in the nature and location of work, in the occupational class structure, earnings and incomes as well as the structure of the housing market. (Hamnett, 2003).

As has already been discussed house prices in the London area have significantly increased. The same increase in rent costs has also occurred due to landlord's realisation that increased income could be made from houses, flats and apartments in run down, inner city areas providing they met an acceptable standard for the middle classes. As the inner city areas fell in to decay and there was a fall in the price of inner city land relative to rising land prices in the suburbs forming the basis of the Rent Cap theory formed by Smith, 1981. Cited on Tom Slater's Website. Low income families have therefore been forced out of the area as they cannot afford this increase in rent and cannot afford to purchase their own property in these areas.

Slater also noted a change in local amenities, services and shops. If you walk past a gourmet delicatessen, a novated Georgian house, a Starbucks Coffee outlet, rows of expensive cars, or a flash new estate agency, the chances are that you are in an area which is experiencing or has just experienced gentrification. The shops and

conveniences that were once needed for the working - class community are not suitable for those with a more expendable income and less of a community spirit.

London is a cultural and economic diverse city. In the late 1990s twenty two per cent of Inner London's population were not UK nationals (Buck et al.2002) However, London's middle – classes share a common relationship to each other which is largely exclusive of those who are not 'people like us.' (Butler, 2003)

Butler and Robson (2003b) noticed this increasing segregation between the classes and cultures of London. With settlements attracting certain individuals and where the community integration is of people who do the same, act the same, look the same, so families have no contact with the families of different class or ethnicity.

The claim that London is a 'city going global' has become a cliché but never the less reflects many of the major trends such as finance, labour markets and producer services, but wider ones such as multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism appear to be being lost.

Education standard decline has also been assessed as an implication of gentrification but parents' solution to this problem in gentrified areas appears to be pretty standard. Children are educated generally outside their catchment areas and often in other boroughs.

The social structures of many gentrified areas have been changed and some have argued for the better, with the removal of some social problems which can occur in working - class areas. The implications that this has had for London, has been the redefining of areas and the perceived improvements that these areas have benefited from. However, the down side to gentrification cannot be ignored.

The original working class residents of these areas have been displaced, unable to keep up with rising living costs and are unable to compete with others willing and able to pay more to get in to an area. Local community spirit has already begun to suffer and will continue to decline in the long term as original residents have become segregated from the new middle - class inhabitants.

Conclusion

Gentrification is a complex phenomenon with its exact causes relatively unknown due to the fact that no one theory seems to suit all cities where this process has occurred. For London the causes appear to be massive de-industrialisation combined with an increase in white collar employment in the area. House prices have risen as have rents on properties in the areas which have been gentrified could well be classed as a cause of gentrification as it displaces the original working – class inhabitants, but it can also be viewed as an indication that gentrification is occurring or has already occurred.

In London gentrification is widespread affecting many inner city areas the most notable have been referred to in this study. Through studies of these areas, the reasons for gentrification have been shown to be diverse depending on the needs of the new inhabitants. This has led to extensive areas of London being gentrified to suit all 'new comers' needs. The scale and impact of gentrification has been seen through looking at property prices, education impacts, social changes and the flow of capital in to these deprived areas. Increased property prices and flows of capitalism in to areas leads to an overall improvement of the economic structure of the area. Social problems become less significant and areas left to decay and become derelict are redeveloped and 'improved'.

However, although gentrification has had such a positive impact on so many people and areas, the faults of the process must also be noted. Areas traditionally used for working – class housing have been lost. Individual characters of neighbourhoods are being slowly eroded as the needs of the residents have change with chains of stores 'colonising' high streets. The original working - class residents have been displaced and forced to move to areas outside of London where property values and rents are more realistic for their incomes, and the ones who have managed to stay are some what segregated from the new residents who prefer to have their own network of friends. The community will then suffer due to a lack of diversity and a lack of resident collectively identifying problems and dealing with issues such as poor school standards.

Some have argued and noted (Hartman 1979 and Marcus, 1986) that gentrification has been both prevalent and socially harmful to areas, while others view as it bringing benefits to communities, increasing their status, capital wealth and improvement of social problems. As gentrification is widespread and in the case of London comprehensive, this essay will therefore evaluate the extent and scale of gentrification in London as well as the implications it has had on the city both negatively and positively.