URBAN DYNAMICS

Sydney: A Tale of Two Cities?

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Urban Dynamics

- a case study of the results of the urban dynamics in a large city selected from the developed world including its
  - social structure and spatial patterns of advantage and disadvantage, wealth and poverty, ethnicity

Introduction

It must be understood that while Sydney is viewed as a whole entity, there are clear differences within it. When the differences are being made between the east and west, it becomes a clear case of exactly what makes the east the 'east' and what makes the west the 'west'. There are a number of differences however, and these differences also make it difficult to explain the question of Sydney's division, as they not only show cleavages, but they also show cohesion. This paper will attempt to determine the case for east and west Sydney with particular emphasis on what the differences are, and how they help to create the idea of 'Sydney' within the sphere of the Higher School Certificate Geography unit of 'Urban Places'. More specifically, this paper will act as a case study for the results of urban dynamics and highlight the social structure and spatial patterns of advantage and disadvantage, wealth and poverty, and ethnicity within Sydney.

What is 'Sydney'?

Sydney is the most populous city in Australia, with the latest Bureau of Statistics Australian Census (2013) data indicating that 4,391,674 people reside within it (with 6,917,658 in NSW). While the suburbs seem to flow into one another with a gradual change in infrastructure and other economic and social facilities, it is evident that a very distinct division within the city exists. The east may be said to include anything east of the Sydney City/Botany Bay border, moving north and south. Moving west from there to the border of Parramatta can be said to be classified as the inner west. The greater west can then be said to include anything west of Parramatta. However, the west, for the purposes of this paper will include both the inner west and the greater west. Figure 1 below shows these approximate divisions.

Figure 1: Sydney Councils (adapted from Aucitypops 2007)
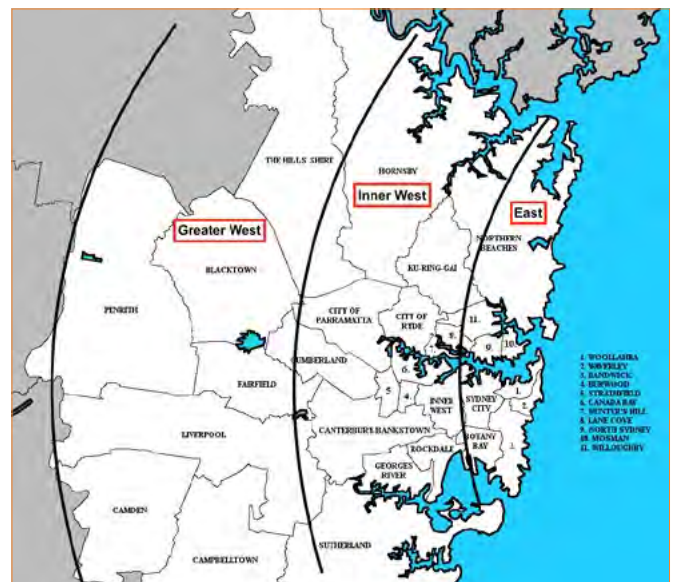
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sydney_councils.png

Collins (2000) makes mention of the differences which occur within Sydney, however, many people have a perceived image of what 'east' and 'west' Sydney is. This perception is flawed and works on false generalisations. Waitt et al (2000) notes that there is a clear 'us' and 'them' view of Sydney, where the west is riddled with crime, unemployment and a generally depressing environment while the east is seen as being a more sophisticated, enjoyable and profitable place to live. These generalisations only help to perpetuate the view that people have, and while for a minority, the generalisations may be true on both sides of the divide, there is also an opposite trend that occurs. The view that east Sydney is wealthier than the west may be the product of globalisation. Sydney and its people are shaped by the increasing internationalisation of culture, economics and finance (Collins 2000), and this, invariably has led to a number of global institutions

basing themselves either in the city centre, or in the general vicinity of the eastern suburbs. However, due to a rise in land-values in the east, and in order to be closer to the populace, many businesses and government agencies are now moving into the western suburbs.

With over 40% of all immigrants to Australia coming to Sydney, it is inevitable that Sydney will eventually succumb to a cultural change. The most dominant immigrants come from the United Kingdom, however, with this immigration the aspect of integration is plausible, as they tend to 'blend' into the cultural surrounds. It is other forms of immigration which show the true face of Sydney. The five largest groups of immigrants come from: China, New Zealand, India, Vietnam and Italy (ABS 2016). The spatial differentiation of these groups shows a clear 'cultural grouping' throughout the city (however, this is not to say that these groups do not exist outside these boundaries). While New Zealanders are more associated with the eastern suburbs, they have the advantage of having a somewhat higher level of understanding of the English language. The immigrant makeup of Sydney cannot be used solely to determine the differences between the east and west, as the widespread nature of immigration means that it is difficult to determine the clear-cut nature of the division. Immigrants appear throughout the entire city, meaning the east and west are blurred, and not divided.

The linguistic diversity, according to Collins (2000) is a sign to the differences, however, it is as not as striking. While it is obvious that the LGAs with the highest proportion of youth (15–24 years old) who speak languages other than English (LOTE) reside within the west region, there is a remarkably high number of those who speak LOTE in the inner west, and even moving into the east (Sydney: 46.8%). There is also a clear contradiction in saying that non-English speakers are only in the west, as there are a number of LGAs in the west who have a surprisingly low proportion of people who speak LOTE (Camden: 9.4%, Blue Mountains: 9.7%). In this case, it is quite difficult to claim that there is a true difference between east and west Sydney. While there is a difference, it is not as stark as it is perceived; however, linguistic differences may also play a role in socio-economic conditions.

It is much easier to determine the difference between the east and west by looking at the socio-economic conditions of residents. According to Collins (2000), there is a clear cleavage within Sydney. Simply put, the north shore (north of the harbour bridge and north of the Parramatta river) and the eastern suburbs have the highest incomes (and are both generally home to the white, Anglo-Celtic and highly skilled). Collins (2000) also makes it explicitly clear that the western and south-western suburbs have the highest concentration of non-English speaking immigrants and the highest rates of unemployment. Fairfield-Liverpool and Canterbury-Bankstown have the highest rates of unemployment and also where the highest numbers of NESB minorities live. Again, you cannot make a conclusion that all people with a NESB are doomed to be unemployed, but, it is a clear sign to the differences within Sydney.

Many immigrants, living in western Sydney lack the skills necessary to hold a position in any field of work other than manufacturing or labour. The manufacturing sectors incidentally are located within western Sydney, meaning that the question becomes more of a case of whether immigrants flock to western Sydney for low-skilled work or whether the manufacturers are established in ethnic areas to capitalise on the low-skilled workforce. This can be the case for the east of Sydney, especially the CBD, as financial institutions, transnational corporations and other high-skilled occupations are located there. Collins (2000) states however, that many NESB migrants are emerging as highly-skilled and highly-educated workers, making

the difference between east and west Sydney even more blurred than originally portrayed. This has been accelerated do to globalisation, which has proved to be the major force behind the erosion of the manufacturing sector (Collins 2000), meaning that the NESB migrants from the west must either commit themselves to education and skills upgrading, or relegate themselves to the statistics of unemployment within the region.

Pros and Cons of a Cosmopolitan Cityscape

There are obvious advantages and disadvantages to having such a cosmopolitan cityscape. The cultural mix allows for a growth in cultural acceptance in many respects, and also a growth in interest in language, religious and social diversity. It also allows for Government and community projects aimed at assisting migrant and non-migrant residents of Sydney. Major artery road and transport links not only benefit spatial differences, it allows for a change in economic circumstances. The perfect example of this can be the M7 road built in western Sydney. Whilst it links major areas of the city, either in the west and east, it has boosted the local economies of the west, allowing for growth in education, business and population.

It can be claimed that the disadvantages may include a clear difference between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots'. This mentality is the single-handed cause of all areas of conflict within the city, as it encompasses socio-economic circumstances. The high crime rates in the west which correlate with the high rates of unemployment means that the 'haves' and 'have-nots' mentality is exacerbated. Ethnic differences have also fuelled issues within Sydney, namely racial animosity and even riots. This mentality has led to a growth in the way people perceive the west and the differences it has with the east. Figure 2 shows that regardless of where people live, either in the east or west; there is a deep seeded tolerance and intolerance within the city.
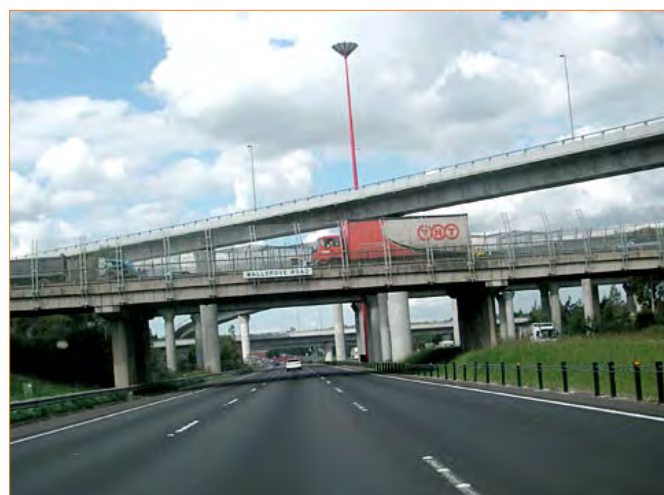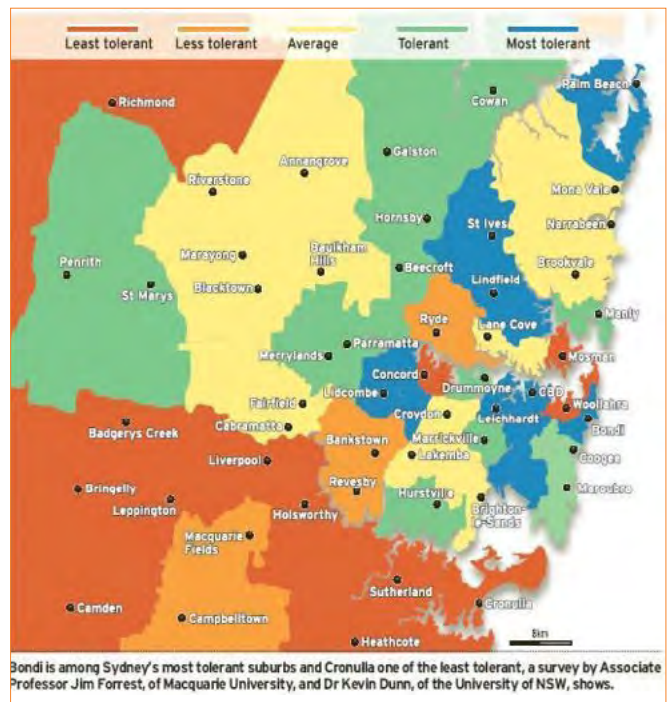
Figure 2: Racism in Greater Sydney (Tony Stephens 2005)

Bondi is among Sydney's most tolerant suburbs and Cronulla one of the least tolerant, a survey by Associate Professor Jim Forrest, of Macquarie University, and Dr Kevin Dunn, of the University of NSW, shows.

http://www.smh.com.au/news/national/after-the-riots-citys-map-of-racism/2005/12/25/1135445486548.html

Conclusion

Collins (2000) makes it clear that while averages and statistics point to a clear difference in the level of disadvantage of the west compared to the east, you must not be deceived by them. Western Sydney is not a ghetto of any sort, and it is imperative that people break the fibro house and checked flannel shirt view that they have of the west. After all, like the east, the west is a complex and diverse social, economic, religious and cultural mix which will develop and grow. Having said this, it can be said that, yes there are two Sydney's, one of high income and high skilled workers, and one of high unemployment and language, education and economic barriers; and no, there is one Sydney, one of an easily blended mix of migrants that are developing within an ever changing global city to better their opportunities like every resident of Sydney, regardless of ethnicity, language, religion, education or economic circumstances.

Bibliography

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Left: M4 & M7 Lighthorse Interchange Minchinburyy. Source:https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:MinchinburyNSWlighthorse.jpg