

POOR PEOPLE OR POOR PLACE? URBAN DEPRIVATION IN SOUTHILL EAST, LIMERICK CITY

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INTRODUCTION

In its overview statement on *Poverty, Social Exclusion and Inequality in Ireland*, the Inter-Departmental Policy Committee on the National Anti-Poverty Strategy identifies concentrations of socio-economic disadvantage in two general types of urban setting (Government of Ireland, 1995). These are: (a) inner-city areas that have experienced economic and physical decline and restructuring; and (b) large local authority housing estates on the outskirts of urban centres. While the distinction between these two types may be overstated, in particular in terms of the causal factors and processes involved, both types of area are found in Limerick, the third largest urban centre in the country. Research based on the 1991 census of population has demonstrated the existence of a large number of areas characterised by relative deprivation within the County Borough of Limerick. Using a composite index of deprivation derived from thirteen surrogate measures of poverty, sixteen of the 37 wards of Limerick CB have been classified into the most disadvantaged decile (10 per cent) of census districts in national terms (GAMMA, 1995). These sixteen wards account for some 48 per cent of the population of the County Borough. At the other end of the spectrum, six wards, containing 20 per cent of the population, rank in the least disadvantaged decile in national terms. Limerick is clearly a highly polarised city in socio-economic terms. Moreover this polarisation has a strong geographical di-

mension, with wards in the most deprived quintile (i.e. with decile scores of 9 or 10 — see Figure 10.1) located in a classical sectoral pattern running north-west to south-east through the city centre. Despite recent strong growth in investment in the local economy, disparities in levels of socio-economic well-being have not diminished; indeed they may have increased (PAUL, 1994).

This paper focuses on social, economic and physical (environmental) aspects of poverty in part of the Southhill area of Limerick, an area of public housing located on the southern edge of the city. Southhill falls within the most disadvantaged decile referred to above, and was one of the four communities in Limerick city targeted under the EU Poverty 3 programme which ran from 1989 until 1994. The area was developed at a time of major housing shortage in the late 1960s and early 1970s in what was then the largest housing development ever undertaken by Limerick Corporation. While most of the initial tenants were established residents of older areas of the city, who were either living in overcrowded accommodation or displaced by redevelopment, a significant proportion consisted of recent migrants from rural areas who were drawn to the city by the expansion of job opportunities, especially in the manufacturing sector. Southhill, which is usually defined at parish level, comprises the four housing estates of Carew Park, Keyes Park, Kincora Park and O'Malley Park, which together contain approximately 1150 households (Figure 10.2).

Because the Southhill estates are all broadly similar in socio-economic character and were built at about the same time¹, the area has a strong identity within the city. This identity is reinforced by the fact that Southhill is delimited by clearly defined boundaries on all sides: to the south and west by undeveloped land or land zoned for recreational use, and to the north and east by industrial land uses and major regional roads. For the purposes of this paper, attention is confined to the eastern part of Southhill comprising O'Malley Park and Keyes Park which together constitute the Galvone B census ward. These two areas, and in particular O'Malley Park which is by far the largest of the four estates, constitute the core of the Southhill area, containing roughly 66 per cent of its total population. While the sub-area accounts for just 5 per cent of the population of the County Borough

Figure 10.1: Ward Deprivation Scores, 1991, Limerick County Borough

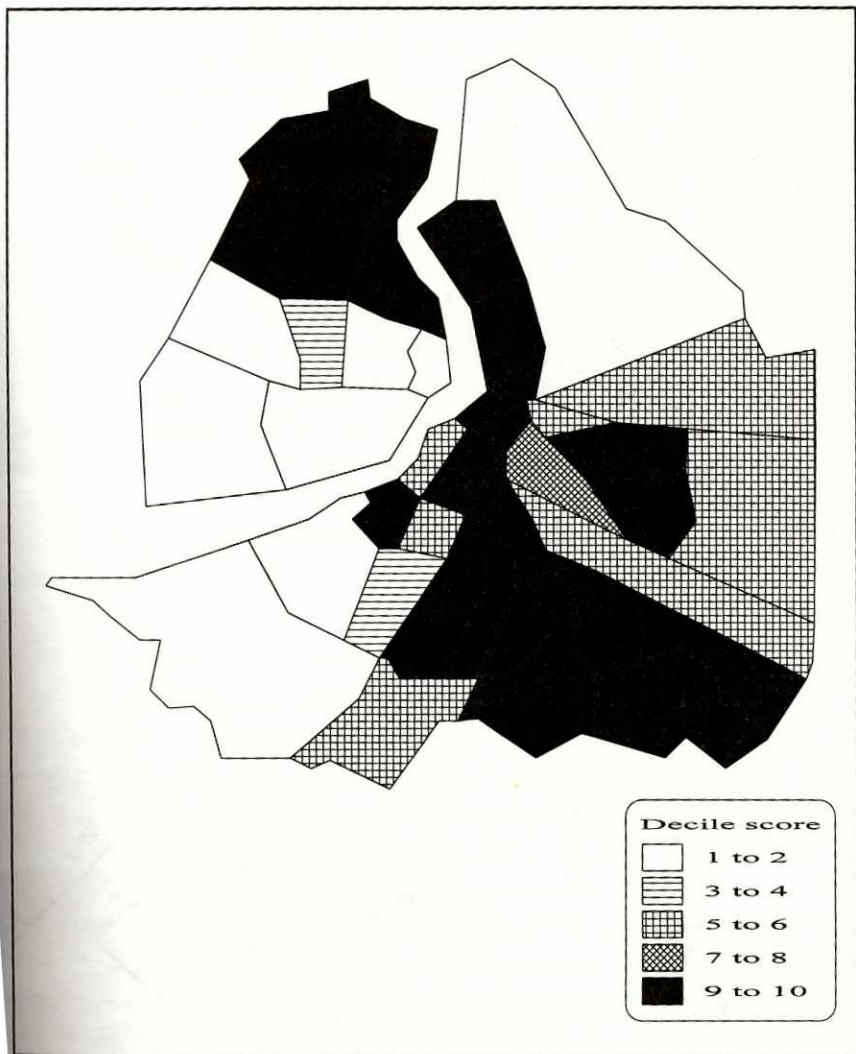
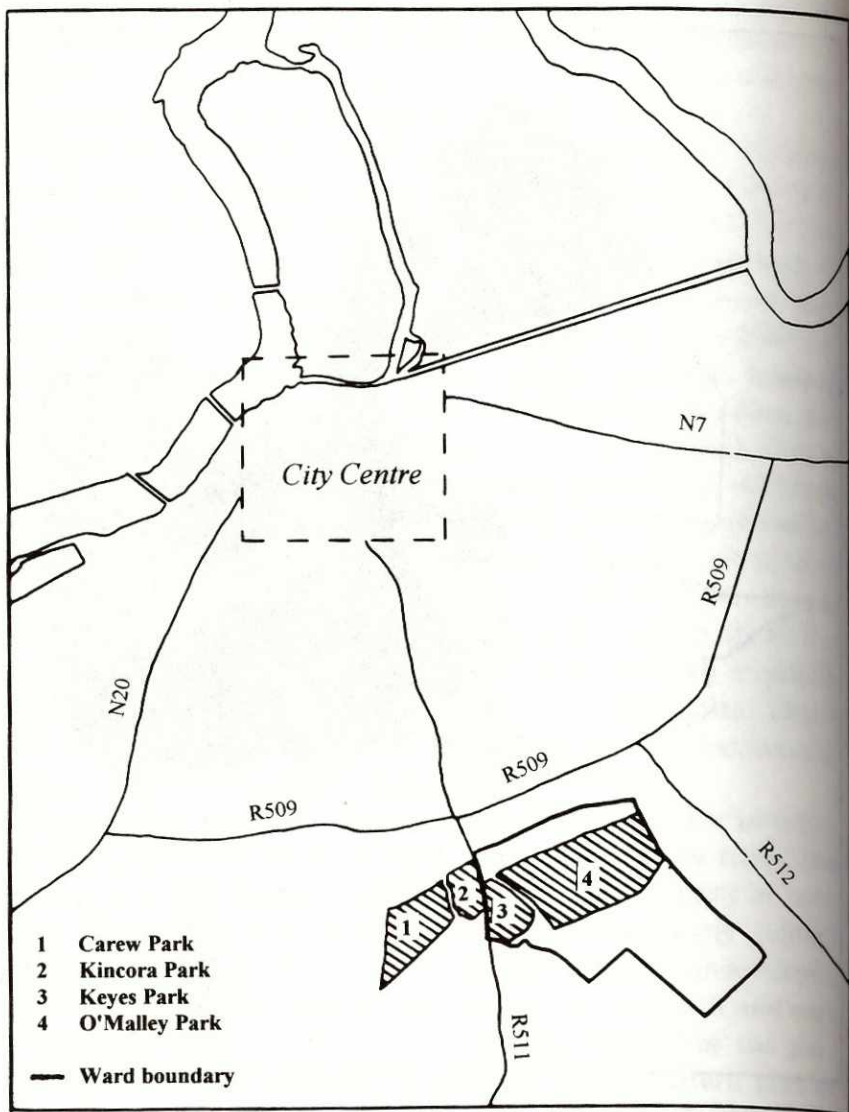


Figure 10.2: Location Map



as a whole, it exemplifies many of the social, economic and environmental problems that are common to deprived communities in Limerick and other Irish towns and cities, in particular those in large peripheral public housing estates. The sub-area will be referred to throughout the paper as Southill East.

The remainder of the paper is divided into three sections as follows. The first section looks at a number of aspects of the demographic, social and economic structure of the area, focusing in particular on those attributes which have been shown in national studies to characterise households which are at a high risk of poverty. The next section switches the focus to what Smith (1977) refers to as "place poverty". It examines key aspects of environmental quality in the area (including housing), and argues that deficiencies in respect of the physical environment have played a central role in the social and economic deterioration of the area. The final section concludes the paper with a brief discussion of the need for policy initiatives, under the rubric of area-based initiatives in particular, to address the problems of deprived peripheral housing estates.

ASPECTS OF THE DEMOGRAPHIC, SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC STRUCTURE OF SOUTHILL EAST

This section of the paper provides a profile of the population of Southill East based on the small area population statistics from the 1991 census of population, which furnishes information on a wide range of demographic, social and economic variables². The focus is on characteristics which are specially relevant to an understanding of the nature of disadvantage in the area, in particular on those attributes which have been shown in national studies based on the 1987 ESRI survey of income distribution to be associated with income poverty, or with income poverty and material deprivation (see for example Callan and Nolan, 1988; Callan *et. al.* 1989 and 1993). While the significance of particular attributes depends to some extent on the measure of poverty used, certain household types have been consistently identified as being at a high risk of poverty in the sense that relatively high proportions of such types fall below the various threshold income levels used to establish poverty lines. Among the subset of these for which

small area enumerations are available from the census of population are: households with more than four children; households with young female heads; single adult households with children and households headed by an unemployed person. By looking at the rate of occurrence of these household types in the area, and more generally at the attributes on which they are based (large family sizes, lone parenthood, unemployment), it is possible to get a preliminary picture of the extent of poverty in Southill East.

Population, Household and Family Structures

In 1991 the population of Southill East stood at 2,748 persons. The age structure of the population is illustrated in Table 10.1, which shows that, relative to the city as a whole,³ the area has a youthful population profile with a preponderance of those aged under 25 years of age, and relatively few aged over 55 years. The cohort aged under 15 years accounted for over one thousand persons — more than one-third of the entire population — and this is reflected in a young dependency ratio⁴ of 61.6, over one and a half times that for the city as a whole (38.8). While some maturing of the age profile has occurred in the 25 years since the development of the area — the young dependency ratio in 1971 stood at 106.7 — this has been less marked than might have been expected, especially in view of the general decrease in fertility rates. The persistence of the youthful population profile is related to the pattern of population movements from the area. These movements are central to the problems of the Southill East area and are explored in more detail in the next section.

Table 10.1: Population Distribution by Age Group

<i>Age Group</i>	Southill East		Limerick City
	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>
0–14 years	1,030	37.5	25.4
15–24 years	647	23.5	20.7
25–39 years	509	18.5	21.4
40–54 years	416	15.1	15.9
55 years and over	146	5.3	16.6

The average household size and average family size in Southill East are above the respective city averages, and 21 per cent of families have four or more children as compared to 14 per cent in Limerick city. In keeping with the relatively youthful population structure, families tend to be at the earlier stages in the family cycle (Table 10.2). One-third of all families are at the pre-school or early school stages of the cycle while in over half of all families with children the eldest child is aged under 15 years of age.

Table 10.2: Stage in Family Cycle

Stage in Family Cycle	Percentage of Families	
	Southill East	Limerick City
Pre-family	3.6	6.3
Pre-school	17.4	11.3
Early school	15.9	12.0
Pre-adolescent	15.4	13.3
Adolescent	19.8	18.6
Adult	24.4	26.9
Empty nest or retired	3.4	11.7

A further aspect of the youthful demographic character of the area is the fact that a large proportion of households are headed by young people. Some 29 per cent of heads of households are aged under 30 years of age as compared to 16 per cent in the city as a whole. Significantly, 66 per cent of young heads of household, so defined, are female, and households with female heads aged under 35 years constitute 19 per cent of all households in Southill East, as compared to 8 per cent in Limerick city as a whole. The age and sex profile of heads of households suggests a high rate of household formation in the area driven by a relatively high rate of lone parent families. In fact, lone parent families account for 33 per cent of all families, and for 36 per cent of families with children in Southill East, levels which are roughly twice the respective rates for the city as a whole (16 per cent and 20 per cent). More significantly, lone parent young families, defined as those with all children aged under 15 years, constitute 45 per cent of all young families in the

area, roughly three times the city rate (15 per cent)⁵. Overwhelmingly, these families have female heads (Table 10.3).

Table 10.3: Lone Parent Young Families (all children under 15 years)

	Percentage of All Young Families	
	<i>Southill East</i>	<i>Limerick City</i>
Lone father	3.03	1.40
Lone mother	41.75	13.18
Total	44.78	14.58

Labour Force Characteristics

The socio-demographic patterns noted above have implications for the functioning of the labour market in Southill East, most obviously through their effects on the labour supply. Recent research has shown a link between family structures and educational achievement (Gordon, 1996), while educational achievement in turn is widely recognised as a key factor in determining the individual's labour market prospects (see, for example, Breen, 1991; Nolan *et. al.*, 1994). Both the male and female labour force participation rates are above the respective city norms, but this is largely a function of the age structure of the labour force, which is heavily weighted towards the younger age groups. When the age-specific rates are examined it is clear that below average participation rates obtain in all age groups other than the cohort aged 15 to 24 years (Table 10.4). Lower than average rates amongst the population aged 25 years and over are due mainly to relatively high proportions of females engaged in home duties, especially in the age group 25 to 34. This results in a female participation rate for that age group which is just 57 per cent of the city average. The relatively high activity rates in the 15 to 24 years age group are related to a low level of participation in education: 24 per cent of 15 to 24 year olds locally are engaged in full-time study, as compared to a city rate of 50 per cent. This is consistent with generally low levels of educational attainment in the area, as reflected in the fact that 57 per cent of the population aged over 15

years ceased education aged 15 or younger, a rate of early school leaving that is almost twice that of the city (30 per cent).

Table 10.4: Age- and Sex-Specific Rates of Labour Force Participation

<i>Age group</i>	Southill East		Limerick City	
	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>
15-24	73.3	55.8	46.2	45.5
25-34	92.9	36.3	94.3	63.7
35-44	87.2	28.0	93.5	43.2
45-54	78.4	31.2	86.1	36.1
55-64	48.9	16.7	57.9	19.7
65 +	5.0	0.0	8.3	2.6
Total	77.5	39.2	67.2	38.7

Given the low levels of educational attainment in the area, it is not surprising that unemployment is particularly acute in Southill East. In fact, unemployment levels are significantly above city-wide levels for all age groups, and the aggregate unemployment rate is almost two and a half times the overall city rate (Table 10.5). In general, the highest unemployment rates are found amongst the younger age groups, and this together with the higher participation rates of these age groups results in a concentration of unemployment among the younger population: 71 per cent of the unemployed in the area are aged under 35 years. Of these, 35 per cent have never been in employment. In line with the overall trend, the rate of unemployment among heads of household (31 per cent) is close to two and a half times the corresponding city rate.

Table 10.5: Age-Specific Unemployment Rates

<i>Age group</i>	<i>Southill East</i>	<i>Limerick City</i>
15-24	53.3	30.9
25-34	53.7	17.3
35-44	49.4	18.2
45-54	30.2	16.3
55-64	34.4	16.5
65 +	0.0	9.7
Total	48.8	20.5

Limitations of Surrogate Measures of Poverty

The above discussion has highlighted a number of characteristics of households and individuals in Southill East which are relevant to any attempt to assess the level of poverty in the area. In summary, the area has a very youthful population structure, larger and younger families than average, a significant proportion of households with young female heads, a high rate of single parent families, low levels of post-primary educational attainment, and high levels of unemployment, especially youth unemployment. All of these are characteristics known to be associated with higher than average risks of poverty, so that the data presented can be interpreted as evidence that poverty is more concentrated in the area than in the city as a whole. Among the household/family categories considered here, those which are known to have the highest relative risks of poverty are households / families headed by single parents, and those with an unemployed head. Significantly, these are also the categories which show the highest levels of relative concentration in Southill East. The general thrust of these findings is supported by other indicators of poverty such as measures of consumption. For example, car ownership is considerably below the city average with 23.8 persons per car in Southill East as compared to a level of 4.7 in the city (based on 1991 census data). Similarly, 85 per cent of households in the area are without a car, almost twice the corresponding city rate (44 per cent).

However, a number of caveats need also to be borne in mind. First, given that the 1996 census small area statistics are not available at the time of writing, the data presented are obviously somewhat dated, which is quite a serious problem in the light of the high level of population turnover in the area (see next section). Second, there is the problem of the ecological fallacy: it must be remembered that the co-incidence of socio-economic problems at the census ward level tells us nothing about their possible co-incidence at household level, and it is the latter factor which affects both the intensity and pervasiveness of poverty within the area. Third, the approach adopted so far has essentially been a probabilistic rather than a deterministic one: it indicates the *likelihood* of a higher than average proportion of the population living in poverty but does not constitute proof that this is the case. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, a number of those interviewed as part of the present research, including local community representatives and activists, were strongly of the opinion that income poverty and material deprivation were *not* widespread throughout the area, due in large part to the operation of such factors as the black economy in augmenting both income and consumption opportunities for households.

In the light of these considerations it is necessary to adopt an alternative perspective in order to explore the nature and extent of poverty in Southill East. This involves an examination of the characteristics of the physical environment such as housing and estate design. In other words, we can look at characteristics of the place rather than characteristics of the people.

HOUSING AND ENVIRONMENT IN SOUTHILL EAST

While not everyone in Southill East is affected by problems such as unemployment, the bundle of externalities which together constitute the quality of the environment impinges on all residents. For groups such as the unemployed and single parents, whose activity patterns are less likely to include extended periods outside the neighbourhood, the quality of the residential environment is particularly important. However, environmental quality is notoriously difficult to measure as there are many different aspects to it, and those which are considered important by outsiders may not

be so regarded by residents (Knox, 1995, pp. 30-36). Even among residents, views on the relative importance of various components of environmental quality are likely to differ according to such personal factors as age, family circumstances and employment status.

Poor access to services has been widely identified as central to the problems of peripheral housing estates in Irish cities (e.g., Department of the Environment, 1996), and in Southill East groups such as the elderly and single parents face considerable constraints on activity patterns as a result of the relative peripherality of the estate. Elsewhere, Robertson (1984) has suggested that such constraints may be especially severe for lone parents in employment. However, accessibility does not appear to be a critical problem in the area in general, and services such as shops (including a sub-post office), health services, a crèche and pre-schools, primary schools, a community college, a community centre and recreational facilities are located either in, or within walking distance of, the estates. Moreover, while levels of car ownership are low, a reasonably frequent bus service operates between the estates and the city centre. Some indication of residents' priorities in relation to environmental issues is provided by a recent study commissioned by an estate management group in the area which was designed to elicit residents' views on various aspects of the local environment (McCafferty, 1994). When asked to indicate which issue (from a pre-determined list) they felt should receive priority in an action programme for their estate, the majority (60 per cent) of respondents said that the condition of housing was the most important issue, with the second highest proportion (21 per cent) prioritising the design and layout of the estate itself. This section begins with an examination of these two aspects of environmental quality, based in part on the results of the 1994 survey, and on the action plan subsequently prepared by Limerick Corporation (Limerick Corporation, 1995).

Housing Design and Maintenance

The estates in Southill East were built by the National Building Agency to a standard design. The housing consists predominantly of two-bedroom dwellings in terraces, with a small number of one-bedroom bungalows. While the small size of housing together with

the larger than average household size gives rise to a relatively high level of persons per room — 0.88 as compared to 0.63 in the CB — this does not appear from the 1994 survey to be a critical issue for most householders (McCafferty, 1994). In contrast however, the situation with regard to the heating of houses was considered to be unsatisfactory or very unsatisfactory by 68 per cent of respondents. In the case of Southill East these problems arise not so much from poor housing design, but from inadequate maintenance. Indeed, general maintenance appears to be the least satisfactory aspect of housing conditions, with 81 per cent of tenants describing the situation as very unsatisfactory. Increasingly too there have been complaints about the condition of houses at the point of re-letting, with some houses reportedly lacking basic fixtures and fittings. A city-wide maintenance survey conducted by Limerick Corporation in 1994 showed that in a large part of the area scores on such items as windows and external doors, fireplaces and roof insulation were significantly below the overall CB average for public rented housing (Limerick Corporation, 1995). While some households have been able to compensate for the inadequacies of the maintenance system by undertaking repairs themselves, this is obviously more difficult for groups such as the elderly and single parents.

Estate Design

The design of the estates in Southill East suffers from a number of flaws, in functional as well as in aesthetic terms. Both O'Malley Park and Keyes Park are based on the Radburn layout whereby the traditional relationship between houses and access roads is inverted: houses face onto open green areas, and vehicular access is via cul-de-sacs or "back courts" at the rear of houses. The central principle of the Radburn design is the separation of vehicular and pedestrian traffic, but while this may have been an important consideration in cities where the growing level of vehicular traffic was a major problem (Relph, 1987, p. 65), the advantages have been less significant in Southill East given that levels of car ownership are relatively low.

The inversion of the usual relationship between houses and the street has had a number of negative consequences. The provision of vehicular access at the rear of houses creates problems of access

for visitors to houses, for taxis and for emergency services. Secure parking is also a problem as there is no provision for this within the curtilage of houses. From the outset, the back courts created problems of security and privacy, but the replacement of the original wooden fences which demarcated the back yards of houses with six foot high walls means that the courts cannot be supervised from the houses. This has led to the marked deterioration of the condition of the back courts in a number of areas. Along much of the boundary of O'Malley Park the houses face away from the rest of the estate, a design feature which from the outset was not conducive to community development in an area newly settled by families drawn from diverse areas within and beyond the city. The large size of the latter estate — 601 houses were constructed initially — has had a similar effect, and efforts subsequently to develop individual housing areas and neighbourhood identities have been compromised by the fact that both the houses and housing areas have few distinguishing features, and by the retention of the original 1-601 numbering system.

Apart from these basic design problems the area suffers from too much large-scale open space which is poorly landscaped. The streetscape quality is poor along the loop road which provides the only access to O'Malley Park. The latter is abutted by gable ends of terraces which are not overlooked and lack protection in the form of side gardens or walls. These and other spaces throughout the estate which are deficient in defensible space terms have been subjected to littering, graffiti and vandalism (Limerick Corporation, 1995). The poor condition of the back courts, a lack of planting on the green areas and the poor streetscape all combine to present a rather bleak landscape.

These weaknesses in the estate design were exacerbated from the outset by the imbalanced demography of the area and in particular the extremely high concentration of children noted earlier. Blackwell (1988, p. 157) notes that high child densities especially under conditions of relative poverty cause the local environment to "wear out" more quickly. Page (1996) suggests that high child densities are central not just to problems of environmental deterioration in residential areas, but also to problems of vandalism and minor incivilities, which in turn can serve as catalytic factors in the spiral of neighbourhood decline.

Population Flows and Estate Management

The result, and in many respects the most telling indication, of the problems noted above has been manifested in a high level of out-migration from Southill East which has led to a marked decline of population. After the initial growth of the 1970s, which produced a population peak of 3,704 persons in 1981, the population decreased by some 26 per cent up to 1991. This decrease, which in proportionate terms considerably exceeded that pertaining both to the CB and the city, accelerated in the latter part of the decade (Table 10.6).

Table 10.6: Annual Percentage Rates of Population Change, 1971-1991

	Southill East	Limerick CB	Limerick city
1971-81	2.43	0.61	1.83
1981-86	-2.08	-1.51	0.27
1986-91	-3.80	-1.54	-0.29

A large part of the movement out of the area was due to the very high levels of emigration which were endemic throughout Ireland in the mid- to late 1980s, as well as the trend towards decentralisation of population experienced by all the major cities in this period (see Cawley, 1996). Some of the movement could also have been expected as a result of the maturing of the area in the 1980s. However, while these national and local processes would suggest an out-flow concentrated among the young adult population, migration from the area was in fact more widely spread across the age groups. This is revealed by projecting the 1981 population — disaggregated by age and sex — forward to 1991 and then comparing this with the actual 1991 population. The projected 1991 population is found by allowing for (a) the number of deaths in each age-sex group that would be expected over the period if national age- and sex-specific mortality rates applied, and (b) the amount of net migration that would be expected if the age- and sex-specific net migration rates of the CB as a whole over the same period had applied⁶. The difference between the projected and actual population of each age group reflects what can be termed differential migration i.e., population movements beyond

those in line with city wide trends (by focusing on the population aged 10 years and over we can ignore changes due to births during the period).

The results of this exercise (Figure 10.3 and Table 10.7) indicate that the 1991 population of the ward aged 10 years and over was some 858 below what would have been expected on the basis of the 1981 population, if the migration rates of the CB as a whole had applied. While the population aged 30 to 39 years in 1991 was slightly higher than expected, the group aged 40 to 54 experienced a differential out-flow of some 245 persons, and those aged 10 to 19 years contributed 422 persons to the differential out-flow. What this suggests is that there was a considerable movement out of the ward of those in early middle-age — the age group which contains many of the original householders of the area (i.e., those aged 20 to 34 in 1971).

Figure 10.3: Differential Migration, 1981–91

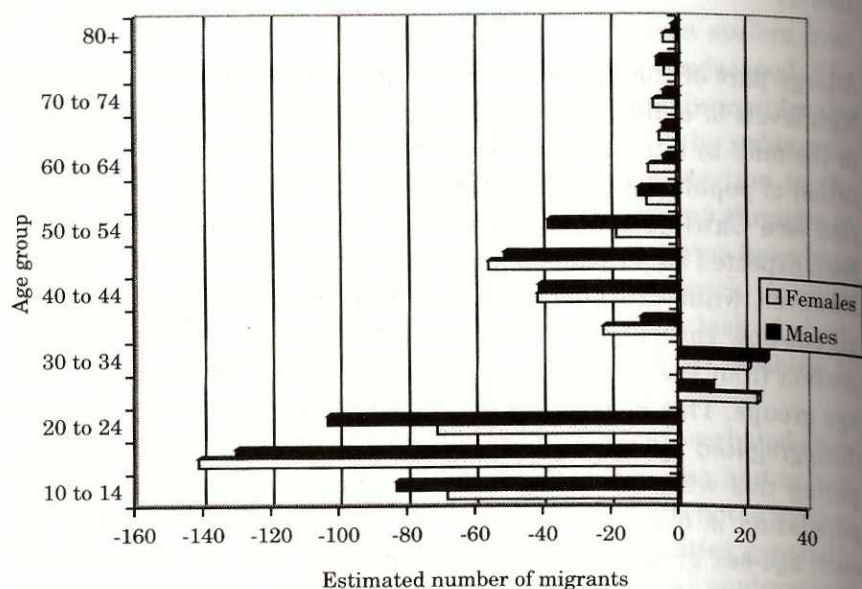


Table 10.7: Age-and Sex-specific Levels of Differential Migration, 1981-91

Age Group, 1991	Males	Females	Total
10 to 19 years	-213.30	-209.17	-422.47
20 to 29 years	-93.36	-46.74	-140.11
30 to 39 years	16.09	-0.81	15.28
40 to 54 years	-129.86	-114.89	-244.75
55 + years	-29.92	-36.47	-66.40
Total	-450.36	-408.09	-858.45

This out-migration of householders was facilitated by a number of factors. Among these is the low level of uptake of the tenant purchase scheme in the area, a facility which has been recognised as "a key factor in the stabilisation of housing estates, in the upkeep of the houses and in promoting community development" (Department of the Environment, 1996, p. 102). Twenty-five years after the building of the estates in Southill East, 63 per cent of the housing stock is still on rent, as compared to just 42 per cent in Limerick CB as a whole.⁷ A more important factor however was the surrender grant scheme in operation between 1984 and 1987 which encouraged local authority tenants to purchase private sector housing. The scheme is generally regarded as having had detrimental social consequences for poorer estates where the differential out-flow of higher income households and households in employment served to depress income levels further and increase area unemployment rates (Blackwell, 1988, pp. 188-189). The impact of the scheme in Southill East was particularly severe. In addition to the economic effects noted by Blackwell, the scheme decimated voluntary activity in the area, creating a major crisis for such activities as the local scouts group, the local community games association and the youth club, all of which barely survived.⁸

The differential migration pattern from the area has had a number of adverse consequences. It has served to arrest the normal maturing of the age profile by maintaining relatively high child densities/young dependency ratios. More generally, the exodus of householders has created major difficulties for housing management, by creating a high level of turnover of tenancies

and, more seriously, delays between lettings which result in houses remaining vacant for some time. Between 1990 and 1993 inclusive there were 560 official re-lettings in a part of the area which contains 418 houses on rent (Limerick Corporation, 1995). In addition to this there was a considerable (but unknown) number of informal re-lettings not notified to the Corporation. Vacant houses have created major problems for residents as they are subjected to extensive vandalism and are often used for anti-social activities. The fact that these vacancies exist at a time when there are over 600 on the Corporation waiting list for housing is indicative of the low level of demand for housing in the area. In this situation, housing in the area tends to be allocated to those who have relatively low priority on the housing list (single parents living at home are often so classified) or who are most desperate for housing. The result is the increasing concentration in the area of those who are most marginalised in the local society.

In conclusion, there is some evidence to suggest that parts of Southill East are caught in a downward spiral, where movement out of the area has either exacerbated existing problems or created a range of new problems that together have the effect of further undermining demand for housing in the area, and increasing the out-flow of residents. While there are many components of this spiral, there seems little doubt that environmental quality is a central factor. This conclusion is supported, for example, by Pacione's (1982) research, in a markedly similar context in Glasgow, which showed that the poor general environment was the most important single reason for movement from a deprived local authority estate.

CONCLUSIONS: PERIPHERAL POVERTY AND PUBLIC POLICY

This paper has examined a number of aspects of urban deprivation in the Southill East area of Limerick city. While it is obvious that the difficulties of the area cannot be solved simply by pouring concrete or indeed planting trees, it should also be clear that action on the environmental front is essential if the problems of the area are to be tackled successfully. McGregor and McConnachie (1995) identify some of the potential benefits from exploiting the complementarities between the physical and economic regenera-

tion of socially excluded neighbourhoods, especially where physical regeneration is based on housing refurbishment and environmental upgrading. These include the provision of highly visible local jobs for which local residents are likely to possess the requisite skills. The limitation of using physical regeneration as a means of economic revival is, as always, that there can be no guarantee that jobs created will go to local residents. It is for this reason that the benefits of environmental improvement should be seen not so much in terms of economic spin-offs but as a means of breaking the vicious cycle of out-migration and deprivation described above. Moreover, while the economic aspects of deprivation require actions (at least those on the demand side) to be taken at the level of the local labour market area, or at regional or national level, solutions to the environmental problems of the area are most appropriately sought at local level. In fact, the case for an area-based local action programme in Southill East has, arguably, a stronger basis in environmental considerations than in considerations such as the local incidence of the city's unemployment problem.

Issues of estate design and layout (including landscaping) as well as estate and housing management are central to any such programme. On the question of estate management there is some cause for optimism, in particular following the publication of the 1991 Plan for Social Housing (Department of the Environment, 1991) and the subsequent Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act of 1992 which introduced measures to improve the management of local authority housing. An active estate management group in O'Malley Park has successfully sponsored a number of environmental initiatives, and while realistically it will be some time before the group is able to assume the degree of responsibility for estate management which is envisaged in the 1991 plan, a start has been made.

On the question of estate design, the picture is more mixed at present. Following an extensive round of consultations with residents, a comprehensive redesign plan for O'Malley Park costed at £4.65m (net of VAT and professional fees) was drawn up by Limerick Corporation in 1995. However, the plan failed to gain the approval of the Department of the Environment, apparently because it did not include housing measures. A renewed application

to the Department in November 1996, which placed the emphasis on housing refurbishment, was more successful, and £680,000 has been allocated for this purpose in 1997, with the possibility of further funding in future years.⁹ Limerick Corporation has applied these funds to refurbishment in targeted areas of O'Malley Park, where there would appear to have been a drop in the turnover of tenancies.

Notwithstanding these developments, it remains the case that there is a low priority accorded to general environmental improvements in residential areas at central government level, and a lack of discretionary funding for same at local government level. In this context it is worth noting that the total budget for the original O'Malley Park redesign plan is comparable to that which has been allocated to Limerick Corporation for environmental improvement in the city centre under the Urban and Village Renewal sub-programme of the Local Urban and Rural Development Programme. The latter sub-programme (and indeed the earlier urban renewal initiative introduced in 1986) was introduced in large part because of the perceived need to refurbish highly visible city centre areas in order to generate tourism and economic investment. The danger is that peripheral and therefore less-visible housing estates like those in Southill East, which were built as part of the process of inner-city re-development, might now be neglected as the emphasis in development policy swings back towards the city centres.

NOTES

1. Keyes Park which was begun in 1966 is the oldest, and O'Malley Park which was begun in 1969 is the most recent development.
2. Small area statistics (phase II) from the 1996 census were not available at the time of writing. However, subsequent analysis of these data indicates no significant change with respect to the relative position of the study area on the indicators considered here.
3. Throughout the paper comparisons are made with either the County Borough, or the city as a whole (i.e., County Borough plus environs as defined by the census authorities).
4. The young dependency ratio is defined as the number of persons aged under 15 years per hundred persons aged between 15 and 65.

5. Limerick city itself has a significantly higher rate of occurrence of such families than the national average — 10.7 per cent.
6. Five-year survivorship and net migration rates were used to project first from 1981 to 1986 and then from 1986 to 1991.
7. It should be noted however that there are marked contrasts within the area in the level of tenant purchase, which in Keyes Park is over 62 per cent.
8. Ironically, the recent increase in the level of public housing construction is having similar negative consequences, inducing those on the housing waiting list to “hold out” for the prospect of being allocated a newly built house rather than accept an older house in areas such as Southill East.
9. The Corporation’s 1996 submission included as supporting documentation an earlier draft of this paper.

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