

1. Divided City

The social geography of Post-Celtic Tiger Limerick

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As the country's third-largest urban centre, and the industrial and commercial capital of the Mid-West region, Limerick has grown rapidly in terms of population, labour force and economic activity in recent years. Between 1996 and 2006 the population of the urban area expanded by 14 per cent, the labour force by 32 per cent and the total number at work by 40 per cent.¹ In the six years from 2000 to 2006, disposable income per head of population in the wider City and County area grew at a rate of almost 7 per cent per annum, with the result that, by 2006, the combined area had the fourth-highest standard of living in the country.² However, the impressive economic performance of the urban hinterland was not matched by that of the core City, which continued to experience acute levels of poverty and deprivation. In 2000–1, the rate (or risk) of both income poverty and consistent poverty in Limerick City was 50 per cent above the national average, and the highest (on both measures) amongst the country's five cities.³ Since 2002, the City has been ranked as the second most disadvantaged of the country's thirty-four local authority areas in socio-economic terms, and the gap between the City and the rest of the state widened substantially between 1996 and 2006.⁴ In 2006, the City contained the single most disadvantaged of over 3,400 electoral districts in the Irish state.

As this data suggests, Limerick emerged from the economic boom of the Celtic Tiger period as an urban area characterised by sharp spatial contrasts in levels of socio-economic well-being. These contrasts have historical roots in a radical restructuring of the local economy which took place from the 1960s onwards, when traditional sources of employment in the food and clothing sectors were gradually replaced by new enterprises in high-technology sectors such as electronics and computers.⁵ The effects of industrial restructuring have been socially and spatially uneven, imparting to the city a distinctive, and highly differentiated, social

geography. This geography has also been shaped by a strong and accelerating trend towards suburbanisation of both population and economic activity. In 1971, just 9 per cent of the population in Limerick urban area resided outside the City boundary; by 1996 this proportion had increased to 38 per cent, and by 2006 it stood at 42 per cent. Between 1996 and 2006, almost the entire net gain in the population of the urban area took place in the suburbs.⁶ As in other cities where it has occurred, suburbanisation has been strongly selective in terms of attributes such as age, marital status, family status and income level. By and large, it is younger, family-based, middle-class households that have been most attracted to the suburbs, and as a result, significant socio-demographic contrasts have now developed between the new estates on the outskirts and the older residential parts of the City.

Given the strength of suburbanisation, it is not surprising that population growth in the City has been sluggish in recent years, with an increase between 1996 and 2006 of under 1 per cent, contrasting with a growth rate of over 14 per cent in the urban area as a whole. In fact, the population of the City would undoubtedly have decreased were it not for the influx of immigrants, a trend that was particularly notable following the accession to the EU of ten new member states in 2004. Between 2002 and 2006 the number of non-Irish nationals in Limerick urban area almost doubled (from 5,330 to 10,072), and by the end of the period they constituted nearly 11 per cent of the population. Foreign nationals are as highly suburbanised as the indigenous population, in fact slightly more so in 2006, but within the City they have shown a much stronger concentration in the city centre, as opposed to the inner suburban areas. The result is that the impact and visibility of immigration is much greater in the centre. Thus, foreign nationals constituted over one-half of the population in the area located along the quays from Sarsfield Bridge to the docks, and over one-third of the population in four other parts of the city centre. While refugees and asylum seekers represented a significant element of immigration in the earlier part of the period, more recent arrivals have been mainly labour market migrants. No less than the foreign-owned companies located on the city's industrial estates and business parks, and the international retail chains in its shopping centres, the new immigrants attest to the ongoing globalisation of the local economy.

This chapter examines the way in which these economic, social and demographic transformations have played out in terms of the social geography of the city. In particular, I focus on the extent of socio-economic disparities between areas within the city, and the influence of public policy

in shaping those disparities. The chapter begins with a broad overview of some of the key dimensions of contemporary social differentiation in Limerick, and the way in which these define a number of distinct types of social area. This analysis points to a relatively high level of social segregation in the city, the nature, causes and consequences of which, in terms of spatial inequality, are examined in more detail in the next section. The penultimate section develops the discussion of outcomes further, by focusing on the problems of poverty and deprivation in City Council housing estates. The chapter then concludes with a look at some emerging trends in Limerick's social geography, and an assessment of their implications for the multi-billion-euro Regeneration programme launched in October 2008.

The Urban Mosaic: contemporary socio-spatial variation in Limerick

As a form of social organisation, cities are characterised by a high degree of diversity and heterogeneity. This social diversity tends not to be expressed in a random mixing of different types of individuals, households or groups in urban space. Instead, an array of processes, some market-related, others having their origins in the urban governance and planning systems, results in the filtering of different social types to different areas, and hence the emergence of a structured social geography in which clear patterns of social variation across space can be identified. Limerick's social geography, like that of all large urban settlements, is a complex and ever-changing mosaic formed by the cross-cutting patterns of demographic, economic and social differentiation. Areas within the city differ from each other in terms of the age profile of their populations, the sizes and types of families and households present, the educational attainment levels, occupations, and social class of residents, their income and levels of consumption, and, increasingly, their cultural and ethnic backgrounds. These myriad differences between areas have important implications for everyday activity patterns and lifestyles, for the socialisation processes of residents, their access to social and economic opportunities, and the demand for, and supply of, both private and public services (e.g. shops, personal services, childcare, health facilities, day-care facilities for the elderly).

As a first step in the exploration of the city's multifaceted social geography, the technique of factorial ecology can be applied to data from the census of population, to identify common patterns in socio-spatial variation, from which, in turn, a typology of social area types can be derived. Though less extensively applied in urban social geography nowadays as

compared to its heyday in the 1970s (when it tended to be used within the theoretical framework of social area analysis), factorial ecology remains a useful descriptive tool. It is used here not as an end in itself, nor to advance a particular theory of urban social structure, but to provide a general spatial framework for the analysis to follow. In interpreting the results of the factorial ecology, a number of caveats need to be borne in mind. First, the technique is based on the measurement of socio-economic variables for discrete small areas within the city. While these variables represent the aggregate conditions for each area, it must not be assumed that all individuals or households in a given area share these aggregate characteristics.⁷ It should also be clear that the output from the factorial ecology is strongly influenced by the geographical framework on which it is based, which, in the present case, is provided by the city's electoral districts (EDs). In most cases, these units are larger than neighbourhoods or 'natural communities', so the output inevitably over-generalises the spatial pattern, obscuring what in some instances might be significant local variations. Later we will see that some of the large-scale patterns of socio-economic variation in Limerick are beginning to break down, with immigration and increased mobility between areas producing a more complex and fine-grained geography. This trend has been widely reported in international studies which have characterised the social geographies of cities in the post-Fordist era as increasingly 'splintered' or 'fractured'.⁸

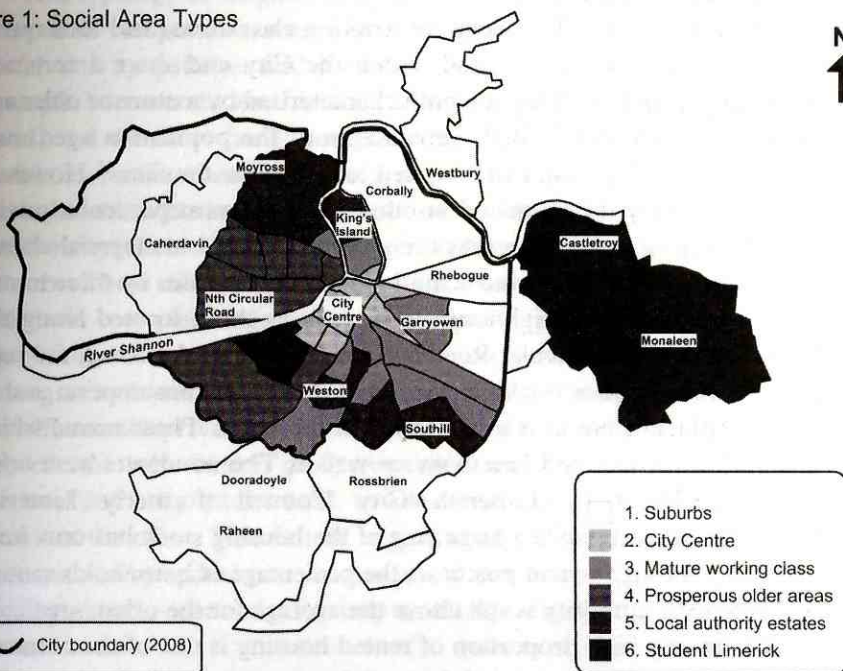
The application of factorial ecology to the Limerick urban area results in the identification of four key ways in which areas in the city differ from each other with regard to their social characteristics.⁹ We can refer to these as the four fundamental dimensions or axes of socio-spatial differentiation in the city. The four dimensions, and the key indicator variables associated with them, are outlined in Table 1.

TABLE 1: DIMENSIONS OF SOCIAL VARIATION IN LIMERICK

AXIS OF SOCIAL DIFFERENTIATION	INDICATOR VARIABLES
Family Status/Urbanism	Percentage of family-based households; percentage of non-Irish nationals; residential mobility; housing tenure
Socio-Economic Status	Educational attainment; unemployment rate; percentage in higher/lower social classes; car ownership; Internet access
Labour Market Status	Labour force participation rate; female activity rate; part-time working
Age profile	Percentage of older persons; older housing; elderly living alone

Taking these fundamental dimensions of social variation into account simultaneously, Limerick (i.e. the City and suburbs) can be divided into six different social area types (Figure 1). These differ from each other with regard to one or more of the four dimensions of social variation, and also with regard to their geographical location in the city.¹⁰ Social area type one is the suburbs, and takes in all of the major residential areas outside the City, including Westbury and Shannon Banks (County Clare), and Castletroy, Dooradoyle and Raheen (all in County Limerick). In addition, it includes a number of more recently developed private housing areas within the City boundary, such as Rhebogoue and Singland. These areas are characterised by above-average rates of population growth and relatively high percentages of children. Family households predominate, and, compared to the average, a high proportion is at the pre-school stage of the family cycle. Housing tends to be of recent construction and owner-occupied. The social class profile is very much weighted towards the higher (professional and managerial) social classes. Unemployment is relatively low, while levels of car ownership are the highest of all six social area types. The areas in question score above average in terms of overall affluence.¹¹

Figure 1: Social Area Types



Social area type two is found at the centre of the city, in an area corresponding to the central business district. The defining characteristic of this area is the predominance of private rented accommodation, mainly in the form of apartments, and the high proportion of young adults. Recent population growth is the highest across the six social area types, but this is partly due to the relatively low initial population base that resulted from decades of decline. Population growth has been fuelled almost entirely by in-migration, and the result is that the area now shows the highest percentage of foreign nationals. There is a low level of car ownership. Rather than being indicative of lower levels of affluence and consumption, this reflects the centrality of the area, and its consequentially high levels of accessibility to services and employment. This interpretation is supported by the fact that levels of educational attainment are high, as is labour force participation. These are the new urban neighbourhoods that have emerged in the last decade or so as the city centre has been extensively rebuilt. In many respects, this social area type corresponds to what might be termed 'big city' or cosmopolitan Limerick. However, the area is not solely the preserve of cosmopolites: an interesting characteristic is that the rate of lone-parent families is the second highest among the social area types, a feature that links the area to social area type five and that will be commented on again later.

Social area types three (mature working class areas) and four (prosperous older areas) are located within the City and share a common demographic profile. They are both characterised by mature or older age profiles, with relatively high percentages of the population aged over sixty-five, and high rates of so-called 'empty-nest' families.¹² However, they are sharply differentiated in other respects, most particularly with regard to social class. Whereas the professional and managerial classes outnumber the unskilled and semi-skilled manual classes by three to one in prosperous older neighbourhoods, such as those located along the Ennis Road/North Circular Road and the South Circular Road, the ratio is reversed in mature working class areas. Levels of consumption and of overall affluence are also much lower in the latter. These areas, which include Garryowen and Janesboro, as well as Thomondgate, were originally developed by Limerick City Council (formerly Limerick Corporation) and, while a large part of the housing stock has now been privatised through tenant purchase, the percentage of households renting from the local authority is still above the average for the urban area.

A relatively high proportion of rented housing is one of the common characteristics of the two remaining social area types: public-sector renting

in the case of the local authority estates (social area type five) and private renting in the case of 'student Limerick' (social area type six). The emergence of the latter reflects recent 'studentification' of a number of areas. This has been brought about by the growth in the number of students in the city's third-level institutions, and the increased provision of purpose-built student accommodation which has had the effect of spatially concentrating this population more than in the past. Studentified areas are characterised by low levels of labour force participation, high levels of part-time working and, of course, high levels of educational attainment. In contrast, the local authority estates of social area type five are characterised by the lowest standards of educational attainment among all six social area types. This category, which includes the estates of Moyross, Ballynanty, Kileely and St Mary's Park on the north-side of the City, as well as Southill and Ballinacurra Weston on the south-side, is in fact exceptional in a wide range of attributes. As well as having the highest percentage of public rented housing, it has the highest unemployment rate and the highest percentages of unskilled and semi-skilled manual social classes, children under fifteen years of age and lone-parent families. Consumption levels and the affluence score are the lowest of all six social area types.

This typology of neighbourhoods in Limerick is based primarily on their social composition, which, as noted earlier, gives rise to contrasts in social activity patterns and lifestyles. Such contrasts are evident, for example, between student Limerick and the redeveloped areas on the one hand, and the more family-oriented areas on the other. Related to the social differences, there are important contrasts in respect of factors like environmental character, as exemplified, for example, by differences in the density of development between redeveloped areas and the new suburbs. These differences are important from the point of view of physical (land use) planning. From a social policy point of view, the most significant feature of the social area typology is the marked variation among areas in socio-economic well-being, as indicated, for example, by the affluence/deprivation index. Such variation is most pronounced as between the suburbs and prosperous older areas on the one hand, and the local authority estates (and, to a lesser extent, mature working class areas) on the other. This feature suggests that the social area typology is underpinned by spatial patterns not just of difference but, more problematically, of socio-economic disparity and inequality. It is to this issue that we turn next.

Social Segregation, Spatial Inequality and Marginalisation

Differences in standards of living between social groups are a feature of all urban areas, and indeed of market-oriented economies in general, though the extent of these differences varies between countries, depending on factors such as the degree of redistribution of income through the social welfare system. The mechanism that translates social inequality into disparities between areas is the spatial separation, or segregation, of social groups on the basis of residence. In Limerick, the pronounced spatial differences in socio-economic well-being noted above are the outcome of a comparatively high degree of residential segregation. Using small area data from the 2006 census of population, levels of segregation of various social groups in the city can be compared with those in the other medium-sized Irish cities of Cork, Galway and Waterford. Segregation is assessed here using the well-known Dissimilarity Index (also known as the Displacement Index) which measures the extent to which the distributions of two population groups differ from each other across a series of spatial units.¹³ While segregation is a complex and multifaceted concept, and its measurement presents difficult methodological challenges, the Dissimilarity Index (DI) is one of the most widely used and robust measures. The Index ranges from zero, when both groups have the exact same spatial distribution (hence zero segregation), to 100, when the two groups live in entirely separate areas (complete segregation). The Index value can be interpreted as the percentage of either group that would need to move between areas (or be displaced) in order for the two distributions to match exactly. In the analysis reported here the spatial units are census enumeration areas (EAs) which are smaller in terms of both area and population than the EDs, and therefore permit a more detailed investigation.¹⁴

Table 2 presents the Dissimilarity Index for selected groups in the four cities. In each case, DI is measured by comparing the distribution of the group in question with a reference group, e.g. unemployed persons are compared to those at work. For each of the social classes, the reference group is all other social classes, i.e. the Index measures the spatial separation of each class from the rest of the population. The results indicate that, in terms of social class, Limerick is, on average, the most segregated of the four cities, with an average DI of 22.0 compared to 17.0 for the city with the lowest level of segregation, Galway.¹⁵ Although average levels of social class segregation are comparatively low for all four cities, there are considerable variations across the social classes. In general, residential

segregation is highest for the groups at either end of the class spectrum, i.e. the professional social class and the unskilled social class, and it is the latter which contributes most in comparative terms to the higher average level of social class segregation in Limerick. When the geographical distributions of these two social groups are directly compared, Limerick shows a level of segregation ($DI = 63.7$) that is 10 per cent higher than the next most segregated city, Waterford ($DI = 57.9$), and almost 40 per cent higher than the city in which the two groups show the highest level of residential integration, Galway ($DI = 45.8$).

TABLE 2: DISSIMILARITY INDEX BY CITY FOR SELECTED GROUPS

GROUP	CORK	LIMERICK	GALWAY	WATERFORD
Professional social class	31.4	36.0	25.1	37.7
Managerial and technical social class	22.2	25.2	16.8	25.1
Non-manual social class	9.0	8.0	6.4	7.4
Manual social class	18.8	18.9	16.5	16.2
Semi-skilled social class	22.3	25.0	22.5	19.8
Unskilled manual social class	33.2	39.7	26.6	30.7
Average social class segregation	20.3	22.0	17.0	19.8
Unemployed persons	20.8	32.3	19.1	25.7
Children in lone-parent families	27.4	33.1	21.8	27.8
Persons in local authority rentals	61.5	66.4	59.6	48.6

Higher levels of segregation in Limerick as compared to the other cities are evident with respect to variables other than social class. Thus, Limerick also displays the highest segregation of children in lone-parent families (compared to children in families consisting of couples with children) and of the unemployed (*vis-à-vis* those at work), both of which groups are particularly significant in terms of the geography of poverty and social exclusion (see next section). For the range of social groups examined here, the highest levels of segregation in all four cities are for households renting their living accommodation from the local authority (compared to owner-occupier households), and again, it is in Limerick that this group is most segregated. The results indicate that if, say, public policy-makers were to set out to bring the geographical distribution of local authority tenant households into line with that of owner-occupiers, two-thirds of households in either category would have to be relocated between areas. The corresponding figure for the city with the lowest level of segregation between local authority tenant households and owner-occupier households, Waterford, is 49 per cent.

Social segregation in Limerick is the result of a range of factors and processes that have operated over several decades. The particularly high level of segregation according to tenure suggests that one of the most crucial influences has been the city's housing system. This influence is exerted in the first instance through the filtering effect whereby those on lower incomes who cannot afford to meet their accommodation needs through the private housing market are channelled into areas of public housing. While this filtering process operates in all cities with mixed public/private housing systems, particular features of Limerick have contributed to relatively high levels of segregation. The first of these is the sheer size of the public (local authority) housing sector in the City. According to the Fitzgerald Report, Limerick is 'unique' (in the Irish context) in its high proportion of social housing, which accounts for approximately 8,000 of the 18,900 housing units in the City (i.e. 42 per cent).¹⁶ Secondly, individual housing schemes are also relatively large, with over 1,160 houses in total in the Southill scheme which was built between 1966 and 1972, and a similar number in the Moyross development built between 1974 and 1987. In addition, both estates were located adjacent to older public housing estates (Janesboro/Kennedy Park in the case of Southill, and Ballynanty/Kileely in the case of Moyross), thereby increasing the spatial concentration of public housing. Finally, in sharp contrast with the City, the volume of public housing provided in the suburbs by Limerick and Clare County Councils has been very low. According to the 2006 census, only 3.5 per cent of the inhabited housing stock in the suburbs was rented from the local authority.¹⁷ This means that just 15 per cent of households renting from the local authorities in Limerick urban area are located in the suburbs, as compared to 40 per cent of all households. While suburbanisation has proceeded apace over recent years, therefore, the section of the population depending on local authority housing provision has remained substantially confined to the City. Clearly, the City boundary has been a significant divide in terms of housing, and more generally in terms of the city's social geography.

The high degree of residential segregation of households according to tenure and social class has had long-term negative consequences for social cohesion in Limerick, and has contributed in recent years to the increasing marginalisation of certain areas, in particular the local authority estates. One reason for this is that segregation has meant that the negative effects of industrial restructuring have been spatially focused and uneven. The loss of jobs in both indigenous and foreign-owned industries impacted disproportionately on areas with high proportions of

lower-skilled workers, for whom these sectors were traditionally among the main sources of employment. The closure of Ferenka in 1977 during the course of an economic recession had a particularly severe impact on the Southill area of the city, from which many of the workers were drawn and which was still in the early stages of its settlement. The 1998 closure of Krups, following a series of rationalisations, impacted negatively on the same area, and in particular on female employment, though the effects were somewhat mitigated by the general growth of employment opportunities during the boom years of the Celtic Tiger economy. The social-geographical effects of the recent Dell downsizing, which represents the largest ever loss of jobs in the city, have been widely felt throughout the city and region, but, given the relatively low skills profile of the jobs lost, it is likely that these effects too will be particularly focused on areas of lower socio-economic status.

Economic change, in a context where there was an already high degree of social segregation, has contributed strongly to widening the gap in standards of living between public and private estates. However, other factors have also been implicated in this process, including certain features of public housing policy and management that have changed the profile of households renting in the public sector.¹⁸ Among these is the differential rents scheme, under which the weekly rent payable by a household renting from the City Council is based on the combined income of all persons in the household. The scheme is based on the socially equitable and progressive principle of households paying according to their means. However, it has had the unintended consequence of incentivising higher-income households to move from local authority tenancies into the private sector. This transfer has been facilitated by other housing policy measures, including the long-established tenant purchase scheme, and the more short-lived tenancy surrender scheme introduced in the mid 1980s. The latter initiative used the mechanism of a monetary grant towards the cost of house purchase to incentivise households in the public sector to move into private housing. As with tenant purchase arrangements, the scheme was most accessible to higher-income (and, typically, employed) households, but in this instance, the result was the movement of such individuals not just between tenure categories but between areas. Rather than helping to settle local authority estates, as has been claimed to be the effect of the tenant purchase scheme,¹⁹ the tenancy surrender scheme destabilised estates. Moreover, evidence from Dublin suggests that the scheme affected more marginalised, less desirable, and hence lower-demand, estates more than others, due to the fact that tenant purchase on

these estates was seen as a less desirable option than on more popular, high-demand estates.²⁰ In Limerick, it appears that the already severely disadvantaged Southill and Moyross areas were among those most severely affected by the differential outflow of better-off tenant households.

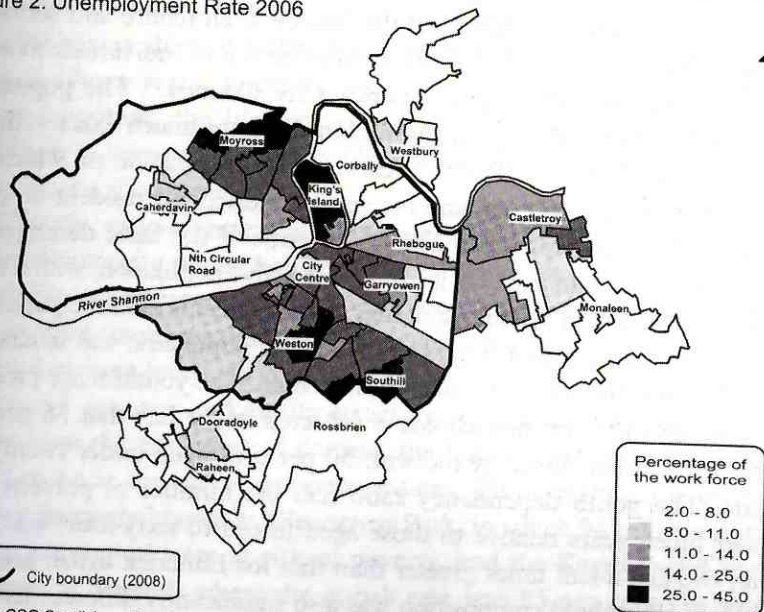
The tenancy surrender initiative was introduced during an economic recession, when constraints on public capital spending, and a consequential reduction in the house-building programme, had led to growing waiting lists for public housing. This reduction in housing output has itself been adduced as a cause of growing income disparities according to tenure, in that it meant available public housing was more likely to be allocated to the very lowest-income groups. The reduction in average income in the public sector, at least in relative terms, as a result of these various aspects of housing policy is a trend that has been identified in a number of countries with mixed public/private housing systems. It has been interpreted as a process of marginalisation or 'residualisation' of public housing estates.²¹ Once established, residualisation tends to be self-reinforcing in its effects, creating a downwards spiral in the socio-economic profile of the area. This arises because of the link between residualisation and so-called 'neighbourhood effects' or 'area effects', whereby the well-being of residents is impacted upon by factors, above and beyond their own personal attributes, that are related to the social composition of the area in which they live. In principle, area effects or 'externalities' can be either positive or negative. However, where the local area is characterised by an accumulation of social problems such as unemployment, elevated rates of lone parenthood, and poverty, area effects are invariably negative. Problems that have been linked to area effects include high rates of physical and mental ill-health, 'anomie' and alienation from mainstream society, deficiencies in child development, behavioural problems in children, lower levels of school attendance, increased exposure to crime and antisocial behaviour, and deficiencies in both the quality and quantity of public and private services. Evidence from Limerick suggests that neighbourhood effects contribute significantly to problems in local authority estates.²² These problems are examined in more detail in the next section.

Poverty and Disadvantage in City Council Estates

The outcomes of segregation and marginalisation for those living in the major City Council housing estates are revealed by small area data from the most recent (2006) census of population. These data show a strong correlation between tenure and a number of variables that, evidence suggests, are closely linked to affluence or, its opposite, poverty and

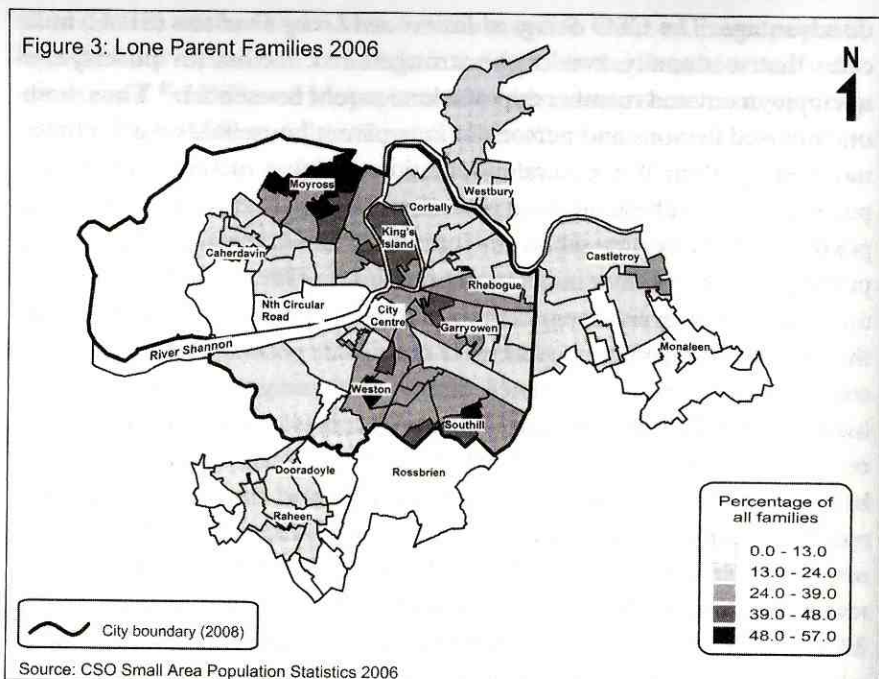
disadvantage. The CSO *Survey on Incomes and Living Conditions (SILC)* indicates that, nationally, two of the strongest risk factors for poverty are unemployment and membership of a lone-parent household.²³ Thus, both unemployed persons and persons in lone-parent households are 2.3 times more likely than the general population to have incomes below the poverty line.²⁴ These groups also show elevated rates of consistent poverty, which occurs when an individual has an income below the poverty line and suffers material deprivation.²⁵ The unemployed are 3.4 times, and persons in lone-parent households 3.9 times, more likely than the general population to experience consistent poverty. In the previous section, we have seen evidence that both these groups are relatively highly segregated in Limerick. The geographies of the two groups are represented in Figures 2 and 3, which reveal a strong spatial association between them, as well as between them both and the relative predominance of renting from the local authority.²⁶ Thus, the 2006 rate of unemployment for Limerick City and suburbs was 11.6 per cent, but rates in excess of 30 per cent occurred in the City Council estates of Moyross, St Mary's Park, Ballinacurra Weston and Southill. Similarly, while the rate of lone-parent families for Limerick urban area as a whole (i.e. City and suburbs) was 21 per cent (itself high relative to the national average), rates in excess of 50 per cent prevailed throughout Moyross and

Figure 2: Unemployment Rate 2006



Source: CSO Small Area Population Statistics 2006

Figure 3: Lone Parent Families 2006



in the upper (Kilmallock Road) part of O'Malley Park, followed closely by Weston (50 per cent) and St Mary's Park (48 per cent).

This area-based data is strongly indicative of high levels of poverty and deprivation among families and individuals living in public rented housing. More direct evidence of the link between tenure and socio-economic distress are available from a recent profile of individuals living in accommodation rented from Limerick City Council.²⁷ The population covered by the profile overlaps with, but does not match exactly, that in social area type five, as described earlier. The information on which it is based includes the age, sex and incomes of individuals resident in tenant households as at September 2004.²⁸ In terms of the basic demographic attributes of sex and age, it is a highly distinctive population, with a much higher proportion of females, children and adolescents than the population as a whole. In total, 56 per cent of the renting population was female, but this rises to 62 per cent for heads of household. The youthful age profile of individuals in tenant households is reflected in the fact that 36 per cent were aged under fifteen years, with 50 per cent aged under twenty five years. The youth dependency ratio (i.e. the number of persons aged under fifteen years relative to those aged fifteen to sixty-four) was more than two-and-a-half times greater than that for Limerick urban area as a whole.²⁹ Household composition was also significantly different from the

population at large. The most common type of tenant household consisted of a single adult (lone parent) and children, which accounted for 33 per cent of all households, and for 46 per cent of family-based households, as compared to 21 per cent in Limerick City and suburbs.

With regard to labour market engagement, the activity rate for City Council tenants aged fifteen years and over (34 per cent) was significantly below the rate for the city as a whole (59 per cent), and the unemployment rate (53 per cent) was almost five times higher. Given the low levels of employment, it is not surprising that persons aged fifteen years and over were primarily dependent on social welfare payments as a source of income. In total, welfare payments accounted for 83 per cent of all incomes. Reflecting the household composition, and in particular the high rate of lone-parent families, the single most important income source was the one-parent family payment, which was the main income source for 30 per cent of primary income recipients (i.e. those with the highest income in each household).

Social imbalances in the profile of tenant households are associated with particularly high rates of income poverty risk. Altogether, 80 per cent of individuals lived in households with incomes below the poverty line, a rate of poverty risk that was almost four times the contemporaneous (2004) national rate.³⁰ In general, the rate of poverty risk was somewhat greater for females than for males, with the gender gap most evident among heads of household, where the female rate was 82 per cent as opposed to 74 per cent for males. Rates of poverty risk were inversely related to age, so that the highest rate (89 per cent) was for children aged less than fifteen years. There were also differences according to household composition, the highest rate of poverty risk occurring among individuals in lone-parent households, 90 per cent of whom had incomes below the specified poverty line.

While the socio-economic attributes described above clearly differentiate local authority rented housing from other tenure categories, there is nevertheless significant variation within the tenure category, with differences evident among estates in respect of age-sex profiles, unemployment rates and income levels. In general, the pattern that emerges is of more imbalanced age, sex and family structures on estates that are located further from the city centre. Likewise, the highest rates of poverty risk tended to be in the more peripheral estates. These include the area of Moyross formerly known as Glenagross Park, in which 94 per cent of the renting population were at risk of poverty, and the Keyes Park/Carew Park area of Southill where the at-risk rate was 85 per cent. To some

extent this geographical pattern corresponds with the age of the estate, less central estates generally being younger. However, the highest overall rate of poverty risk (96 per cent) was for part of the Ballinacurra Weston estate built over half a century ago, in the 1950s.

In summary, Limerick's public housing estates are characterised by a demography and pattern of household composition that is extremely imbalanced relative to that of the city as a whole and indeed the wider Irish society. These demographic and social imbalances are associated with levels of household income that place the vast majority of tenants and their families at risk of income poverty. The spatial concentration of poverty in the estates has contributed to a number of social problems. In particular, there is evidence of declining social capital and the intensification of a number of neighbourhood problems ranging from environmental degradation to antisocial behaviour, crime and intimidation of residents.³¹ Given these data, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the City Council estates are highly marginalised in socio-economic terms within the city. It is not true to say that they have failed to participate in the economic growth of recent years, as there is some evidence that unemployment rates, for example, decreased more than in other areas during the 1996–2002 period.³² However, such convergence tendencies have been weak at best, and the disparity between local authority estates and the rest of the city remains stark.

Remaking the Social Geography of Limerick: the challenge for Regeneration

The process of residualisation in local authority estates in Limerick is closely linked to population trends. The census suggests that there has been a general decrease in population across these estates, to an extent that has been quite exceptional in some cases, and this decrease appears to be both the outcome and the reinforcing cause of residualisation. In the period 1981 to 1991, the O'Malley Park area of Southill lost 26 per cent of its population, and analysis of the decrease has shown that there was a significantly higher level of out-migration from the area than might be expected on the basis of the net migration rates for the City as a whole.³³ This process of 'differential' out-migration has been linked to the social and economic problems experienced on the estate. In the more recent period, 1991 to 2006, against the background of a 20 per cent increase in the population of the city, the area lost a further 43 per cent of its population, which now stands at roughly two-fifths of its 1981 peak level. Perhaps more than any other single indicator, this population

collapse attests to the problems experienced in the area, and the failure of the City's housing programme in recent times.

Migration from O'Malley Park and other local authority estates has been largely accommodated elsewhere in the city, and there is evidence to suggest there has been an influx to the city centre in particular. Earlier in this chapter the high rate of lone-parent families in social area type two (the redeveloped city centre) was noted. Interestingly, the 2006 census shows that, between 2002 and 2006, the number of lone-parent families in the O'Malley Park and Weston areas decreased, but there was a considerable increase in parts of the city centre.³⁴ A similar pattern is discernible with regard to the unskilled and semi-skilled social classes over the longer period of 1996 to 2006. The numbers in these classes declined in almost every ED containing a local authority estate, but increased in the city centre. In the Ballynanty–Moyross area the decrease was 27 per cent; in O'Malley Park–Keyes Park it stood at 47 per cent. By contrast, the two quayside EDs in the centre experienced an increase of almost 300 per cent. The data suggest, then, that there has been a dispersal of both these groups (which of course overlap to some degree) out of the local authority rented estates and into private rented housing in the centre.

Though further research is needed on these demographic changes, it would seem that dispersal has been largely facilitated by recent changes in housing policy and its mechanisms. One aspect of this is the increased activity by the City Council in acquiring private housing to let to households on the housing list. However, this activity seems to have been focused mainly on the suburbs. Of greater significance in explaining the trend towards the city centre is the rapid increase in the rent supplement scheme, which was reconfigured as the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS) in 2005. While there has been recognition of the potential of both these housing schemes to increase social mixing, and counter social segregation and exclusion, there have also been criticisms on a number of grounds. In particular, concerns have been expressed that vulnerable individuals and families moving into city-centre apartments may lose contact with both formal social services and informal, community-based, social support systems.³⁵ There is also a possibility that rent supplement/RAS could contribute to further residualisation of the local authority estates, thereby compounding the adverse consequences of past policy measures.

This is the context in which the N3.1 billion Regeneration plan for Moyross, Southill, Ballinacurra Weston and St Mary's Park was launched in 2008. Given the prevailing macro-economic climate, the plan could

scarcely have been launched in more inauspicious circumstances. It is equally true that the need for large-scale intervention in the most marginalised areas of the city has probably never been greater. The plan proposes a radical solution to the problems of these areas, based on wholesale clearance and reconstruction. In rebuilding the estates, the importance of diversifying both land use and housing tenure is recognised. Thus, the Regeneration blueprint envisages the development of retail, commercial and other uses alongside residential development, and, within the latter, a variety of housing types, densities and tenures. The emphasis on land use and tenure diversification suggests that important lessons have been learned from the past, and that there is a determination not to repeat the mistake of developing over-large, single-class housing estates with poor accessibility to services.

Nevertheless, there continues to be some contention in both academic and policy discourse about the benefits of tenure-mixing policies and, more fundamentally, about the value of the area-based approach to Regeneration. Questions have been raised about the efficacy of the approach in dealing with problems that are rooted in market-based processes of economic change and in failures of national policy-making, and which, therefore, are systemic or structural in origin, rather than local.³⁶ There is a strong argument that the solution of these problems requires interventions at a higher level than the locality, and on a larger scale. Among the various justifications put forward in defence of area-based interventions, probably the most important in the Limerick context is the argument that the deleterious effects of systemic processes have accumulated in the Regeneration areas to such an extent that complex area effects have been created that are feeding the downward spiral of out-migration and increased residualisation. The population trends noted above lend support to this position.

If the need for an area-based approach in Limerick is accepted, the next question is whether the correct areas have been targeted. In general terms, this would appear to be the case, as the designated Regeneration areas have been shown earlier to have the highest concentrations of two of the key poverty risk factors: unemployment and lone-parent families. The 2006 data also reveal that, even before the onset of the current recession and the accompanying crisis in the public finances, there were signs of a worrying economic deterioration in these areas.³⁷ For example, having decreased between 1996 and 2002, the unemployment rate in both St Mary's Park and O'Malley Park increased sharply between 2002 and 2006. The economic climate and budgetary position since 2006, and

the expected social fall-out from rising unemployment, welfare cuts and contracting household incomes, together point to the likelihood that the already serious problems in these areas will be exacerbated in the short to medium term. At the same time, it must be recognised that social problems are by no means confined to the Regeneration areas, in part due to the effects of the migration trends noted above in dispersing at-risk groups throughout the city and producing a more fine-grained geography of poverty and deprivation. One consequence is that there has been a decrease in the incidence of poverty in the Regeneration estates, i.e. in the percentage of the city's poor who live there, and hence a corresponding decrease in the effectiveness of area-based interventions as a means of targeting the poor. While effective or complete targeting of those in need has never been put forward as a justification of the Limerick Regeneration programme, these trends towards the de-concentration of poverty and disadvantage underscore the fact that area-based measures should be seen as a complement to, not a substitute for, the provision of mainstream social supports that are based on an individual's or a family's personal circumstances rather than their place of residence.

Closely related to the issue of whether interventions should be area-based or not is the question of the content of those measures, and in particular the mix of economic, social and environmental initiatives. The Regeneration master plan sets out a wide range of actions in all three domains, but it is the environmental or physical measures, involving the extensive construction of new housing in completely re-designed estates, that are the most detailed. They are also the only fully costed measures, presumably because they will be delivered by the Regeneration Agencies themselves as opposed to other statutory service providers. If the physical Regeneration programme is delivered on the scale that is planned, the benefits will be considerable. However, these benefits are unlikely to be sustained in the longer term if they are not supported by appropriate social measures in areas such as health, education and family support, and also by economic improvements. On the economic side, the measures proposed by the Regeneration master plan include investments in hard infrastructure and in enterprise support, as well as fiscal incentives for employers, which are designed to stimulate the demand for labour. One of the problems of localised measures designed to boost labour demand is that there can be no guarantee that the resulting jobs will go to locals. For this reason, and because the planned infrastructural investments also transcend the local scale, it is important that a wider city-region perspective be maintained. This in turn raises the issue of the

linkage between the Regeneration programme and the governance of the urban area as a whole. The key element of urban governance remains the local government itself, and there is growing evidence of the importance of local government to the economic performance of urban areas. At the time of writing, the Limerick Local Government Committee has been established by the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government to review the civil administration of Limerick City and County. The committee's recommendation will have significant long-term implications not just for the provision of public services in the city but for the local and regional economy, and hence for the Regeneration areas and other disadvantaged areas of Limerick.