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Social Polarisation in Global Cities: Theory and Evidence

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Summary. This paper examines the debate over social polarisation in global cities. It focuses on the claims made by Sassen that the processes of economic change in such cities are leading to a growing polarisation of the occupational and income structures whereby there is absolute growth at both the top and bottom ends of the distribution and a decline in the middle of the distribution. It is argued that while these claims may hold true for New York and Los Angeles, possibly because of their very high levels of immigration and the creation of large numbers of low skilled and low paid jobs, her attempt to extend the thesis to all global cities is problematic. In other cities professionalisaton appears to be dominant. Evidence on occupational change in Randstad Holland is presented to support this argument.

Introduction

The last 10 years have seen considerable interest in the role and characteristics of what are termed 'global' or world cities. These cities are seen to play a key role in the new international division of labour, acting as command and control centres for transnational and multinational corporations and finance capital and providing a crucial infrastructure of corporate business services.

A key element of the global cities thesis, particularly associated with the work of Sassen (1986, 1987, 1991), is that because of their particular industrial structure, which is dominated by financial and business services and other services rather than by manufacturing, they are said to be characterised by a growing 'polarisation' in their occupational and income structures. It is argued that the global cities have seen the growth of advanced producer services and associated growth of professional and managerial jobs needed to staff them. But, it is also argued that they have seen a decline in their traditional manufacturing base (and consequently in skilled manual jobs) and growth of low-skilled and low-paid service jobs. The result is said to have been an expansion at the top and bottom ends of the occupational/income distribution at the expense of the middle. This polarisation is linked to changes in housing demand leading to a gentrification of parts of the inner city and to a concentration of the less skilled in the less desirable parts of the housing market. Thus, occupational polarisation is accompanied by growing social, tenurial and ethnic segregation.

This thesis has become widely popularised but a defining characteristic of the debate has been lack of discussion of what is meant by the term social polarisation, how it relates to other theories of occupational change and how it should be measured. The debate has

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been characterised more by assertion than conceptual analysis and evidence.

This paper critically examines Sassen's polarisation thesis. Its structure is as follows. First, it summarises the key elements of the global cities thesis. Secondly, it spells out the main elements of the polarisation thesis; thirdly, it critically examines the thesis, contrasting it with previous theses about the changing division of labour and occupational change in late capitalist societies and identifying some theoretical contradictions. Fourthly, it examines the origins of the polarisation thesis and asks to what extent it is based on a specific American urban experience. Finally, it examines the empirical base for the thesis in the case of Randstad Holland.

The Global Cities Thesis

The last 10 years have seen a growing interest in the relationships between global economic restructuring, the social and spatial division of labour and changes in the urban hierarchy. Attention has been particularly focused on the global cities at the top of the urban hierarchy which play a key role in the control and coordination of international capitalism (Cohen, 1981; Sassen, 1985, 1991; Friedmann and Wolff, 1982). Although the notion of a world economy articulated through key urban centres is of long standing, the role of the global cities is argued to have changed dramatically in recent time. As Smith and Williams (1986, p. 211) graphically comment:

> If the late feudal city was defined by the concentration of commercial capital (in 'market towns'), and the early capitalist city is defined by the concentration of productive capital in industry, the late capitalist city is defined ... by ... the concentration of money capital and the gamut of financial, administrative and professional services that lubricate the money flow. It is this function that defines the late capitalist cities at the top of the new urban hierarchy.

Put simply, it is argued that the last 40 years have seen the emergence of a new international division of labour in which multi- and transnational corporations have freed themselves from national constraints and established a global network of production and distribution. This has required greater control and coordination and reliance on financial and associated producer services which are concentrated in a number of large global cities. Thus, Friedmann and Wolff (1982, p. 310) argue that:

> The specific mode of their integration with this system gives rise to an urban hierarchy of influence and control. At the apex of this hierarchy are found a small number of massive urban regions that we shall call world cities. Tightly interconnected with each other through decision-making and finance, they constitute a worldwide system of control over production and market expansion.

Cohen (1981, p. 300) also stressed the importance of global cities in the new international division of labour, arguing that

> Changes in the organisation and the structure of advanced corporate services have led to the emergence of a series of global cities which serve as international centres for business decision making and corporate strategy formulation ... these places have emerged as cities for the co-ordination and control of the new international division of labour.

One of the leading proponents of the global cities thesis has been Saskia Sassen. Her earlier work on immigration and the informal sector in New York and Los Angeles and what she terms 'the new labor demand in global cities' (1984, 1985, 1986, 1987), was followed by a major study of the mobility of labour and capital (1988), culminating in her book *Global Cities* (1991). She argues that:

> A combination of spatial dispersal and global integration has created a new stra-

> tegic role for major cities. Beyond their long history as centers for international trade and banking, these cities now function as centers in four new ways: first, as highly concentrated command points in the organization of the world economy; second, as key locations for finance and specialized service firms, which have replaced manufacturing as the leading economic sectors; third, as sites of production, including the production of innovations, in these leading industries; and fourth, as markets for the products and innovations produced. (p. 3)

Sassen (1991, p. 4) goes on to argue that:

> These changes in the functioning of cities have had a massive impact upon both international economic activity and urban form. Cities concentrate control over vast resources, while finance and specialised service industries have restructured the urban social and economic order. Thus *a new type of city has appeared. It is the global city.* [Emphases added.]

Social Polarisation in Global Cities: The Basic Thesis

It is not my intention here to criticise the global city thesis, which has very considerable theoretical leverage. My intention, rather, is to outline, and then critically examine the associated thesis of social polarisation in global cities. This thesis is explicitly linked to changes in the social and spatial division of labour and, as such, it goes beyond recognition of the fact that world cities have long had major concentrations of wealth and poverty and sharp divisions between rich and poor. The thesis was outlined by Friedmann and Wolff (1982, p. 320), when they noted the existence of a dynamic process of social polarisation consequent on the evolving economic role and structure of world cities:

> A primary fact about world cities is the impact which incipient shifts in the structure of their employment will have on the economy and on the social composition of their population. The dynamism of the world city economy results chiefly from the growth of a primary cluster of high-level business services which employs a large number of professionals—the transnational élite—and ancillary staffs of clerical personnel.

They identified two other growing clusters of employment. The second cluster is defined as essentially serving the first and consists of real estate, construction activity, hotel services, restaurants, luxury shops, entertainment, private police and domestic services. The third cluster, overlapping the second, focuses on international tourism. Friedmann and Wolff (1982, p. 320) suggest that:

> The growth of the first three clusters is taking place at the expense of manufacturing employment. Although a large cluster, its numbers are gradually declining as a proportion of all employment.

They also identify a government services cluster which is concerned with the maintenance and reproduction of the world city, and a sixth and final cluster which they call the 'informal', 'floating' or 'street economy' which is particularly, though not exclusively concentrated in the semi-periphery cities of the Third World where it can be the largest cluster of employment. They argue (p. 322) that while

> Transnational élites are the dominant class in the world city, and the city is arranged to cater to their life styles and occupational necessities.... The contrast with the third (or so) of the population who make up the permanent underclass in the world city could scarcely be more striking.

Thus, Friedmann and Wolff conclude (p. 322) that "*the primary social fact about world city formation is the polarization of its social class divisions*".

The polarisation thesis has been been developed by Sassen (1984, 1988, 1991) who argues that the changes in social structure are a direct result of the changes in economic

base. She argues (1991, p. 9) that the evolving structure of economic activity in global cities, particularly the rapid growth of financial and business services and the sharp decline of manufacturing industry has "brought about changes in the organisation of work, reflected in a shift in the job supply and polarization in the income distribution and occupational distribution of workers".

More particularly, Sassen (1991, p. 9) argues that jobs in financial and business services are associated with concentrations of incomes at top and bottom whereas the manufacturing industry jobs they replace tended to be middle income:

> Major growth industries show a greater incidence of jobs at the high- and low-paying ends of the scale than do the older industries now in decline. Almost half the jobs in the producer services are lower income jobs, and half are in the two highest earnings classes. In contrast, a large share of manufacturing workers were in the middle-earnings jobs during the post-war period of high growth in these industries in the United States and UK.

In addition to these changes in economic structure, Sassen (1991, p. 9) also argues that:

> Two other developments in global cities have contributed to economic polarisation. One is the vast supply of low-wage jobs required by high-income gentrification in both its residential and commercial settings. The increase in numbers of expensive restaurants, luxury housing, luxury hotels, gourmet shops, boutiques, French hand laundries, and special cleaners that ornament the new urban landscape illustrates this trend. Furthermore, there is a continuing need for low-wage industrial services, even in such sectors as finance and specialized services. A *second* development that has reached significant proportions is what I call the downgrading of the manufacturing sector, a process in which the share of unionised shops declines and wages deteriorate while sweatshops and industrial homework proliferate.

Sassen (1991, p. 13) summarises her thesis as follows:

> New conditions of growth have contributed to elements of *a new class alignment in global cities*. The occupational structure of major growth industries characterised by the locational concentration of major growth sectors in global cities in combination with the polarised occupational structure of these sectors has created and contributed to growth of a high-income stratum and a low-income stratum of workers. It has done so directly through the organization of work and occupational structure of major growth sectors and it has done so indirectly through the jobs needed to service the new high-income workers, both at work and at home, as well as the needs of the expanded low-wage work force. [Emphases added.]

The polarisation thesis has been consistently reiterated by Sassen since the mid 1980s, and it is possible to point to many similar, or even identical passages in her earlier work (1984, 1985, 1988).

Sassen's Social Polarisation Thesis: A Critical Appraisal

Sassen's thesis is a fascinating one, linking changes in the national and international social and spatial division of labour, the concentration of financial and producer services, the decline of manufacturing industry and employment and growth of a low-skill service sector in global cities, to changes in occupational and income distribution in these cities and to social segregation.

Central to her thesis is the assertion that global cities have been characterised by growing occupational and income polarisation which reflects the changes in industrial and employment structure. The thesis is internally consistent and well argued and it has become almost the conventional wisdom about contemporary social change in global

cities, including the Randstad. The question, however, is not how attractive the thesis is, but whether it is theoretically and empirically valid. As I shall argue, there are a number of weaknesses in the thesis and its application which render it problematic. These can be summarised as follows:

1. Conceptual and definitional ambiguity.
2. The extent to which the thesis contradicts other work on social change, particularly on professionalisation.
3. The extent to which the thesis is based on experience of high immigration cities of Los Angeles and New York.

1. The Ambiguity of Social Polarisation

Despite the centrality of the concept of polarisation in Sassen's thesis on employment and occupational change in global cities, it remains a most unclear and ill-defined concept which can mean very different things to different people (Pahl, 1988). There is uncertainty over the units of measurement, the variables to be incorporated and the definition itself. As Pinch (1993) has noted there has been a tendency for two main types of polarisation thesis to develop on different sides of the Atlantic. In the first thesis, characterised by Sassen's work (but see Kuttner, 1983; Lawrence, 1984; and Levy, 1987), it is argued that changes in the social and spatial division of labour are leading to the decline of middle-income groups and the expansion of high- and low-paid jobs at the ends of the occupational spectrum. The second main type of polarisation thesis has emerged from the work of Pahl (1988) in Britain which is associated with the division of work between households, but this is not my focus here. Sassen is nowhere clear as to precisely what she means by polarisation. One of the best definitions is that of Marcuse (1989, p. 699):

> The best image ... is perhaps that of the egg and the hour glass: the population of the city is normally distributed like an egg, widest in the middle and tapering off at both ends; when it becomes polarized the middle is squeezed and the ends expand till it looks like an hour glass. The middle of the egg may be defined as intermediate social strata ... Or if the polarization is between rich and poor, the middle of the egg refers to the middle-income group ... The metaphor is not of structural dividing lines, but of a continuum along a single dimension, whose distribution is becoming increasingly bimodal.

As Marcuse rightly points out, polarisation is a process whereby "distribution is becoming increasingly bi-modal". But Sassen herself tends to slide from arguments based on changes in occupational structure to arguments based on income distributions and she is vague whether polarisation is to be viewed in absolute or relative terms.

This may seem a trivial point about measurement procedure but it is crucial given the strong emphasis in her thesis that changes in the division of labour are producing *more* jobs at the top and at the bottom and *less* in the middle. There is a huge difference between asserting that changes are creating *large numbers* of low-skilled and or low-paid jobs and changes which lead to a *larger proportion* of low-skilled jobs but not larger numbers. Sassen suggests that a process of absolute polarisation is occurring. This may be true of New York and Los Angeles for reasons which are outlined below but in most Western capitalist countries the numbers of semi-skilled and unskilled jobs have been steadily shrinking for the last 20–30 years. While it may be possible to find relative occupational polarisation, this can occur as a result of differential shrinkage of the labour force. This is a very different process from the ones outlined by Sassen which are said to be creating larger numbers of less-skilled and low-paid workers.

2. Polarisation, Professionalisation and Proletarianisation

The social polarisation thesis can be criticised for failing to address the wider literature on the changing occupational structure of advanced capitalist societies. In particular,

it seems to ignore the literature on the growth of professionalisation, and what has been termed the 'new middle class'. This thesis was first advanced by Bell (1972) in *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society*. He argued that Western societies were characterised by the shift from industrialism to post-industrialism, from the production of goods to the production of services and by the development of a knowledge society organised around professional, managerial and technical skills. He argued that this was leading to a class structure characterised by an expanding professional and managerial workforce.

Bell's thesis was very strongly criticised by the left, not least because it runs directly counter to the Marxist thesis of progressive proletarianisation and immiseration (Braverman, 1974), as Wright and Martin (1987, pp. 2–3) observe:

> Technological change is generally viewed by postindustrial theorists as increasing the cognitive complexity of work and the demand for experts while generally eliminating routinized, and especially, manual jobs. As a result, post-industrial theorists would generally expect a process of gradual deproletarianization characterised by an expansion in the semi-autonomous employee category and a decline in the working class. Marxists however generally postulate an inherent tendency in capitalism for technical change to destroy highly skilled, cognitively complex jobs and to reduce the autonomy and self-control of wage earners in the labor process. While technical change may also create new kinds of skilled positions, overall there should be a net tendency for working-class jobs to expand relatively to semi-autonomous or expert jobs. It would generally be predicted, therefore, that transformation of class structure should be characterised by a continuing process of increasing proletarianization.

Wright and Singelmann (1982, p. 3) tested these theses for the US using data for 1960–70 and found that there were simultaneously processes of proletarianisation and deproletarianisation during the 1960s: "*within* economic sectors, the relative size of the working class was increasing, but, since least proletarianized economic sectors were growing the most rapidly—across economic sectors there was a deproletarianization".

But it is important to note that in subsequent work on the transformation of the American class structure, 1960–80, Wright and Martin (1987, p. 15) found that "far from the acceleration of tendencies towards proletarianization observed in the 1960s, the pattern in the 1970s appears to be a direct reversal of these tendencies". "The implications of these analyses ... is unmistakable: the results are more consistent with what we construe to be the postindustrial society thesis than the traditional Marxist proletarianization thesis" (p. 18); and they added (p. 19) that

> We believe that the results presented in this study pose a real challenge to traditional Marxist assumptions about the trajectory of development of the class structure of advanced capitalist societies, in general, and about the process of intensive proletarianization, in particular.

As Wright is one of the leading Marxist class theorists, these conclusions cannot be dismissed as anti-Marxist and similar conclusions have been found in most major Western countries. Myles (1988, p. 350) found that in Canada: "the years from 1961 to 1981 were a period not only of continued but acceleration of new middle class jobs" and work by a variety of other class analysts points in the same direction (Ehrenreich and Ehrenreich, 1979; Belz, 1992; Brint, 1984; Kriesi, 1989; Gouldner, 1979).

2.1 Professionalisation and world cities. It should be noted that the analyses discussed above are of national data. They are not specific to world cities, and quite different trends may be occurring within these cities. The available evidence does not support this view, however. On the contrary, there is evidence that a process of professionalisation

is concentrated in a number of large cities with a strong financial/producer service base. As Ley (1992a, p. 10) noted in a Canadian metropolitan context:

> The positioning of the new middle class has a geographic as well as a sociological dimension. The astonishing pace of embourgeosiement in the central cities gives a dramatic geographical form to the expansion of the new middle class jobs.

Ley (1992b) has shown that in Canada in the 1970s there was a massive expansion of professional and managerial jobs in major metropolitan areas. And even in the 1980s, which saw the deepest recession in 50 years in Canada, there was a marked increase in the rate of growth of professional and managerial employees in these cities.

Nor is the evidence confined to North America. Ruth Glass (1973) argued that

> London is now being renewed at a rapid pace, but not on the model about which we are often warned. Inner London is not being Americanised: it is not on the way to becoming mainly a working class city, a polarised city, or a vast ghetto for a black proletariat. The real risk for inner London is that it might well be gentrified with a vengeance, and be almost exclusively reserved for a selected higher-class strata. (p. 426)

Subsequent work by Hamnett (1976, 1986, 1987) confirmed that London experienced an increase in the proportion of professional and managerial workers in 1961–81, while the numbers and the shares of all other groups declined. There is no evidence for absolute social polarisation in London in the 1960s and 1970s, and the 1991 census is most unlikely to reveal a sudden reversal of fortune. To the extent that professionalisation is the dominant process of change in the occupational structure in international Western cities this raises the question of why Sassen is able to draw opposite conclusions from her analysis of New York and Los Angeles. An attempt is made to explain this below.

3. Slaves of New York?

An examination of Sassen's previous work shows that the polarisation thesis is based on her work on migration and informalisation in New York and Los Angeles, both of which are cities with extremely high and continuing levels of immigration and a large low-wage immigrant labour supply. Sassen (1984, p. 140) argued that a process of *"peripheralisation at the core"* is leading to "the shaping of a new class alignment in advanced capitalist economies". She argues (1984, pp. 139–140) that:

> It is growth trends, not decline trends, which are generating the polarization in the occupational structure, including a vast expansion in the supply of low wage jobs and shrinking in the supply of middle-income jobs ... The large new immigration, directed mostly to a few major urban centers, can be shown to be primarily associated with this expansion of low-wage jobs.

In 1984, Sassen (p. 158) noted that:

> The large influx of immigrants from low-wage countries over the last fifteen years, which reached massive levels in the second half of the 1970s, cannot be understood separately from this restructuring. The available evidence for New York City and Los Angeles ... strongly suggest that a large share of immigrants in both cities represent an important supply of low-wage workers. New York and Los Angeles have the largest Hispanic populations of all SMSAs and the size of their Hispanic populations is significantly larger than that of the next series of cities.

This statement is repeated in Sassen (1985) and also in Sassen (1988), almost verbatim, in her book *The Mobility of Labor and Capital* (p. 146):

> New York and Los Angeles, two major arenas for the consolidation of these trends, contain a disproportionate share of the new immigrants compared with their share of the native population. They have the largest Hispanic population, including

> Mexicans and Puerto Ricans, of all SMSAs. The latter are, furthermore, much larger than the Hispanic populations that follow in size.

She also notes (1984) that New York City and Los Angeles also contain, together with San Francisco, the largest concentrations of Asians in the US, and New York is the major recipient of West Indians. She adds (1984, p. 159) that:

> Hispanics in these two cities had, by far, the highest incidence of low-wage semi- or unskilled jobs: 50% of Hispanics in New York City and 56.8% in Los Angeles were laborers, service workers or operatives. The corresponding figures for whites were 14.1% in New York and 20% in Los Angeles.

The argument and the evidence is consistently repeated in Sassen's work, but she fails to make an obvious inference that the polarisation thesis, as it effects growth at the bottom end of the occupational and income distributions, may be contingent on the existence of large-scale ethnic immigration and a cheap labour supply. The absence of such high levels of in-migration and informalisation elsewhere may limit its generality. Indeed, it could be argued that it is the existence of such a large supply of cheap labour that enables a large-scale low-wage service sector and a 'down-graded' manufacturing sector to exist. In countries lacking such a large supply of cheap immigrant labour, it may be necessary to invest in capital-intensive processes or to engage in what Gershuny (1978) has called the self-service economy. French hand laundries may be common in New York and Los Angeles, but they are not very common in Paris or London where labour costs are higher.

Sassen (1988, p. 146), however draws the reverse inference, namely that:

> The large influx of immigrants from low-wage countries over the last fifteen years which reached massive levels in the second half of the 1970s cannot be understood apart from this restructuring. It is a mistake to view this new immigration phase as a result mostly of the new legislation and as being absorbed primarily in declining sectors of the economy. The expansion in the supply of low-wage jobs generated by major growth sectors is one of the key factors in the *continuation* at ever higher levels of the current immigration.

This is not to argue, of course, that other global cities do not have a large migrant presence, or that these groups are not concentrated in low-skill and low-wage jobs. This would be wrong. The 1991 Census found that 20 per cent of Greater London's and 25 per cent of inner London's population were ethnic minorities, and aliens and ethnic minorities totalled 21 per cent of the four major Dutch cities and 24 per cent in Amsterdam (van Amersfoort, 1992).

The argument rather is that the size of the recent ethnic immigration in other cities is much smaller than in New York or Los Angeles. The 1990 US Census found that of the 7.3m enumerated population of New York City, just 43 per cent were non-Hispanic whites (down from 63 per cent in 1970). The number of non-Puerto Rican Hispanics increased by 63 per cent in 1980–90 as did the non-Hispanic Asian population. The total foreign-born population in 1990 was just over 2m or 28 per cent. The proportion of foreign-born migrants is similar in Los Angeles, and non-whites now makes up over half the total population (Clarke, 1993).

These proportions are far higher than in other cities. To this extent, Sassen's social polarisation thesis may be a slave of New York which she has erroneously generalised to all global cities. It also suggests, as Clark (1987) has argued, that demographic change may be as important an influence on urban social change as economic change. As Feinstein *et al.* (1992, p. 13) have perceptively pointed out:

> The images of a dual or polarised city are seductive, they promise to encapsulate the outcome of a wide variety of complex

> processes in a single, neat, and easily comprehensible phrase. Yet the hard evidence for such a sweeping and general conclusion regarding the outcome of economic restructuring and urban change is, at best, patchy and ambiguous. If the concept of the 'dual' or 'polarising' city is of any real utility, it can serve only as a hypothesis, the prelude to empirical analysis, rather than as a conclusion which takes the existence of confirmatory evidence for granted.

Similar sentiments have been expressed by Mollenkopf and Castells (1991) in their book, *Dual City*.

The remainder of the paper analyses the evidence for social polarisation in Randstad Holland, comprising the cities of Amsterdam, Rotterdam, the Hague and Utrecht and their contiguous suburban areas.

The Evidence for Social Polarisation in the Randstad

There have been frequent suggestions that the Randstad has experienced a process of polarisation in recent years. Van Weesep and Van Kempen have sought to link economic change to income differentiation and housing in the Netherlands, arguing that both producer service and low-paid service-sector jobs have become concentrated in the Randstad as intermediate manufacturing employment has simultaneously decreased. They argue that "a duality has emerged in the labour market, whereby the middle is being squeezed and the lower end has become marginalised" (1992, p. 989).

They also argue that these tendencies, combined with the spatial structure of the housing market and the welfare state have "boosted the number of the poor in the large cities". This tendency has been reinforced by demographic transition and the suburbanisation of the middle classes during the 1960s and 1970s. They argue (1992, p. 989) that

> A spatial differentiation has emerged within the metropolitan housing market area, whereby the 'victims' of the economic restructuring have become locked in the cities while the 'winners' have become concentrated outside. A spatial segregation has ensued ... Not all the higher income households, however, have opted for a home in a suburban setting. They are also found in the pockets of attractive, expensive houses in the cities themselves.

Although Van Weesep and Van Kempen are correct regarding the role of the housing market in social segregation, we will argue that the evidence for polarisation to date is weak. What is not in dispute is that both the Netherlands as a whole, and the Randstad in particular, have witnessed rapid deindustrialisation since the 1950s accompanied by the growth of the service sector (Jobse and Needham, 1988). Atzema and de Smidt (1992) show that manufacturing as a proportion of total employment in the Randstad fell from 22 per cent in 1977 to 17 per cent in 1987, and Jobse (1987, p. 306) comments that "The industrial city has almost completely disappeared in the Netherlands. Nearly all cities have now acquired a predominantly service character".

During the second half of the 1980s, commercial services provided the major source of job growth in the Randstad as they did elsewhere in the Netherlands. The key issue however is what type of jobs were provided and what have been the changes in occupational and income structures. The analyses which follow use data from the Netherlands Labour Force Surveys for 1981 and 1990 and data on income from the 1981 and 1989 Housing Surveys.

The Changing Occupational Structure of the Randstad

The occupational data for the Netherlands provided by the Labour Force Survey are very ambiguous and unsatisfactory for the purpose of occupational class analysis consisting as it does of a rather uneasy mixture of occupational and sectoral categories. There are nine occupational categories (de-

tails of which were kindly supplied by Oedzge Atzema):

1. Qualified staff: scientific and educated specialists including doctors, economic and legal professionals and teachers and artists.
2. Managers.
3. Administrative occupations: bookkeepers, superintended transport and communications personnel, cashiers and other administrators.
4. Commercial occupations: managers of firms in wholesale and retail trade, purchasers, trade agents, salespersons, insurance agents, shop personnel.
5. Service occupations: managers and personnel in the hotel and catering industry, cleaners, fire brigade, police and security staff.
6. Others: farmers, fishermen and military.

7–9. Manual labour: production and construction workers, painters, drivers and other transport personnel, craftsmen.

It is clear from this list that there is no clear and unambiguous divide between managers and other occupations. Service occupations include managers as well as all those in the personal service sector. The commercial occupations include managers and administrative occupations cover a wide range of jobs. Even the qualified staff category is wide-ranging, including as it does, artists and teachers along with lawyers and doctors. It should also be pointed out that the 1990 Labour Force Survey, unlike the previous survey, included information on persons working part-time less than 12 hours a week. Not surprisingly, this resulted in a very considerable increase in the number of employed workers, particularly women part-time workers.

Atzema and de Smidt (1992) show that the total number of jobs in the Netherlands increased by 1.25m or 24 per cent over the period 1981–90. Not surprisingly, given the inclusion of part-time work of less than 12 hours per week, growth of the services sector and the increase of female labour force participation in the Netherlands, almost two-thirds (815 000) of the increase in employed workers were women. The composition of these changes is shown in Table 1.

It is clear from the figures in Table 1 that there was a considerable increase in the number and proportions both of managers and specialists. The number of managers grew by 139 000 (+ 103 per cent), while the number of specialists rose by 509 000 (+ 51 per cent). The number of administrators rose by 169 000 (+ 18 per cent); the number of commercial workers rose by 167 000 (+ 32 per cent); and the number of service workers rose by 206 000 (+ 36 per cent). Rather surprisingly, the number of manual labourers also rose, though by just 38 000 or 2 per cent.

We are therefore dealing with an occupational structure which grew across the board. What is interesting however is that by far the largest absolute increase was in the number of specialists (+ 509 000) and the number of managers grew by 139 000. In percentage point terms, these groups together increased their share of occupational structure by 6 points while the administrators lost 0.9 points. The share of manual workers and others fell by 7 points. It is clear that by far the largest increase was at the professional end of the occupational spectum, although it must also be noted that commercial and service workers grew by 373 000 or 1.8 points. If these groups are taken to represent low-skilled workers and manual workers are taken to represent middle occupational groups then it is possible to argue that limited polarisation has occurred, but the overall direction of the occupational change is towards growing professionalisation not polarisation. As Atzema and de Smidt (1992, p. 292) argue:

> The composition of the working population in the eighties shows two trends: an increasing professionalization and a growth in the proportion of women.... Educated specialists like technicians, physicians, lawyers, teachers and medical staff account for almost half of the total growth

Table 1. The Netherlands occupational structure, 1981–91

	1981 (000)	Percentage	1990 (000)	Percentage	Absolute change (000)	Percentage change	Percentage-point change
Managers	135	2.6	274	4.3	+ 139	+ 103	+ 1.7
Specialists	1000	19.6	1509	23.9	+ 509	+ 51	+ 4.3
Administrative	953	18.7	1122	17.8	+ 169	+ 18	− 0.9
Commercial	525	10.3	692	11.0	+ 167	+ 32	+ 0.7
Service	572	11.2	778	12.3	+ 206	+ 36	+ 1.1
Manual labour	1497	29.3	1535	24.3	+ 38	+ 2	− 5.0
Others	426	8.3	400	6.3	− 26	− 6	− 2.0
Total	5108	100	6310	100	+ 1202	+ 23.5	0

Source: Calculated from Atzema and de Smidt (1992).

> of the working population. Also the number of people fulfilling executive functions has risen sharply. Presently almost 30 per cent of the working population belong to one of these two occupational groups.

These conclusions are for the Netherlands as a whole, but what of the Randstad? Atzema and de Smidt's (1992) article gives data for 1985–90 which is not directly comparable to that for the Netherlands as whole, but it shows growing professionalisation, and they argue (p. 293) that "What is happening in the Randstad is a concentration of the fast-growing category of qualified staff personnel (specialist and executive functions) and an under-representation in the most declining occupational group of unskilled work".

They further argue (p. 294) that while "unskilled labour is on the rise as a result of the economic growth in the second half of the 1980s", this is not true of the Randstad which is specialising in commercial services. They point out (p. 294) that

> In 1985, 63 per cent of the male working population in the Randstad manufacturing sector were employed in manual jobs. Five years later this figure had dropped to 33 per cent. The proportion of executives and specialist professions among the male working population of the Randstad, however, increased from 18 per cent in 1985 to 39 per cent in 1990. A spatial division of labour is developing whereby manual labour jobs are increasingly concentrated outside the Randstad in the rest of the Netherlands.

To examine the validity of their analysis for the Randstad over 1980s, the Labour Force Survey data for 1981 and 1990 were analysed. Data were provided for the four major cities, their surrounding suburban areas and commuting zones, and were aggregated for the four city regions as a whole. The data supplied by Atzema grouped managers and qualified staff together, and they are both termed qualified staff.

Looking first at the four city regions as a whole, the total working labour force rose by 301 000 or 19.5 per cent from 1.54m to 1.84m (Table 2). As noted earlier, however, this is partly a result of changing statistical definition as the 1990 figures include part-time work of less than 12 hours per week. The increase was comprised of 207 000 women and 94 000 men. The distribution of the changes 1981–90 (Table 3) shows that the great bulk of the increase—231 000 or (77 per cent)—was of managers and qualified staff. The numbers in this category grew by 61 per cent from 380 000 in 1981 to 611 000 in 1990. The other increases were all relatively small by comparison. The administrative category grew by 27 000 or 7.3 per cent from 1981 to 1990. The 'commercial' category grew by 33 000 or 21 per cent (11 per cent of the total growth), and the service category grew by 51 000 (27 per cent)—11 per cent of the total increase. Both the manual workers and the other category declined by just under 10 per cent. It is clear that, even given the unsatisfactory nature of the occupational categories and the inclusion of part-time work of under 12 hours a week, the overall trend was growing professionalisation. There is no indication in the occupational data for a trend towards growing polarisation in Randstad Holland, though it is possible that the content of different jobs has changed leading to *de facto* deskilling. This is impossible to determine on the basis of occupational data alone (see Wright and Martin, 1987, for a discussion).

Nor is it the case that the overall professionalisation trend conceals a marked gender polarisation, with women becoming increasingly segregated in low-skill jobs. The number of women in administrative and commercial jobs, many of which are routine office jobs, rose faster than men and the proportionate increases were much greater—24 per cent for administrative jobs (compared with 10 per cent for men) and 33 per cent for commercial occupations (compared with 13 per cent for men), and the increase (30 per cent) in the service category was also greater than for men (23 per cent). But the absolute increase in qualified staff was broadly equal: 124 000 men and 107 000

Table 2. Working labour force, by occupation, Randstad, 1981 and 1990 (thousands)

	Total four cities				Total four regions				Total city regions					
	Men		Women		Men		Women		Men		Women		All persons	
	1981	1990	1981	1990	1981	1990	1981	1990	1981	1990	1981	1990	1981	1990
Qualified	100	154	66	115	144	214	70	128	244	368	136	243	380	611
Administrative	90	77	90	96	95	90	95	134	185	167	185	230	370	397
Commercial	39	40	28	32	57	69	33	49	96	109	61	81	157	190
Services	42	45	62	69	28	41	54	82	70	86	116	151	186	237
Manual labour	177	134	11	5	186	199	12	10	363	333	23	15	386	348
Other	19	16	4	3	34	26	6	12	53	42	10	15	63	57
Total	467	466	261	320	544	639	270	418	1011	1105	531	738	1542	1843

Table 3. Working labour force, by occupation, Randstad, 1981–1990 (change in thousands)

	Total four cities		Total four regions		Total city regions		
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	All persons
Qualified	54	49	70	58	124	107	231
Administrative	− 13	6	− 5	39	− 18	45	27
Commercial	1	4	12	16	13	20	33
Services	3	7	13	28	16	35	51
Manual labour	− 43	− 6	13	− 2	− 30	− 8	− 38
Other	− 3	− 1	− 8	6	− 11	5	− 6
Total	− 1	59	95	148	94	207	301

women. Given the smaller base of qualified women in 1980, the proportionate increase for qualified women (79 per cent) was much greater than for men (51 per cent). Looked at overall, the proportion of women in qualified occupations rose from 25.6 per cent in 1980 to 32.9 per cent in 1990, while the proportion in all other occupational categories decreased. The proportion of men in qualified occupations rose by slightly more, from 24.1 per cent to 33.3 per cent: a total of 9.2 percentage points compared to 7.3 points for women, but women are by no means being concentrated in low-skilled jobs in the four city regions (Tables 4 and 5).

This conclusion also holds when the four major cities are analysed separately from their surrounding urban regions. Tables 2 and 3 show that the number of managers and qualified staff in the four cities grew by 103 000 (62 per cent) in 1981–90, compared to a total increase in the employed labour force of 58 000 and a decrease of 49 000 manual workers. The increases in the administrative, commercial and services occupational categories were very small, totalling 7000 in all. The proportion of qualified staff in the labour force in the four cities rose sharply from 23 per cent to 34 per cent (Tables 4 and 5).

Table 3 shows that the number of managers and qualified staff in the urban regions excluding the cities rose by 128 000 (60 per cent), compared to a total increase in the labour force of 243 000. How does this compare to the cities? Although the absolute increase in the number of qualified staff was slightly larger than in the cities (128 000, as against 103 000), the percentage rise in the number of qualified staff in the four cities was slightly higher than in the surrounding regions, and the increase in qualified staff as a proportion of the total increase in the labour force was far higher in the cities than in the regions. The urban regions were characterised by a large (115 000) increase in the number of workers in categories other than that of qualified staff. In the cities, the increase was almost exclusively in the category of qualified staff.

The cities accounted for 44 per cent of the total increase in the number of qualified staff but only 19 per cent of the increase in the total labour force. There is thus no basis whatsoever for arguing that the urban regions fared better than the cities in terms of qualified staff. On the contrary, the reverse is the case. Atzema and de Smidt are quite correct to argue that a spatial division of labour is occurring in the Netherlands, with a concentration of qualified staff in the cities. There is thus no evidence for occupational polarisation in the Randstad in the 1980s. The proportional increase in the number of administrative, commercial and service jobs was much greater in the city regions than in the cities, but this applied to both men and women and may reflect the decentralisation of population in these categories (Jobse and Musterd, 1992).

Table 4. Working labour force, by occupation, Randstad, 1981–90 (percentage change)

	Total four cities		Total four regions		Total city regions		
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	All persons
Qualified	54	74.2	48.6	82.9	50.8	78.7	60.8
Administrative	− 14	6.67	− 5.3	41.1	− 9.7	24.3	7.3
Commercial	2.56	14.3	21.1	48.5	13.5	32.8	21
Services	7.14	11.3	46.4	51.9	22.9	30.2	27.4
Manual labour	− 24	− 55	6.99	− 17	− 8.3	− 35	− 9.8
Other	− 16	− 25	− 24	100	− 21	50	− 9.5
Total	− 0.2	22.6	17.5	54.8	9.3	39	19.5

What can we conclude from this analysis of employment in the 1980s? Atzema and de Smidt (1992) argue that "The Randstad economy is developing a specialised employment structure (where) growth occurs in better qualified and high-wage jobs" (p. 284). They argue that there are major doubts whether the dual city concept can be applied to the Randstad. First they argue that the Randstad does not have a segmented labour market along American lines and they suggest that the process of economic restructuring has been slower in the Netherlands than elsewhere, partly because the economy of the Randstad has always been orientated more towards services and trade rather than the industrial sector. Finally, they point to the major role of the Dutch welfare state in ameliorating social inequality (Kloosterman and Lambooy, 1992).

The Changing Educational Structure of the Randstad

The occupational classification is problematic as we have seen. Fortunately, the Labour Force Survey also provided data which enable us to assess the educational attainment of the labour force. This measure is a valuable complement to the occupational one. There are six categories: unknown primary, lower, intermediate, higher and university.

Looking first at the changes in educational levels in the Randstad as a whole, the picture is very clear. Of a total increase in the labour force of 307 000 or 20 per cent, between 1981 and 1990, the 'unknown' and 'primary' categories fell by 36 000 (− 77 per cent) and 77 000 (− 26 per cent) respectively, and the 'lower' category fell by 5000 (− 1 per cent). Conversely, the other three categories all showed increases. The 'intermediate' category grew by 178 000 or 33 per cent, the higher category grew by 108 000 or 62 per cent and the university category grew by a remarkable 109 000 or 131 per cent. The proportion of graduates almost doubled from 5.4 per cent to 10.4 per cent, while the proportion of workers with higher education qualifications rose from 11.3 per cent to 15.3 per cent and the proportion with intermediate school rose from 35 per cent to 39 per cent. The other categories fell sharply. The evidence is clear. The educational composition of the Dutch labour force underwent an upward shift in the 1980s which is consistent with growing professionalisation (see Table 6, 7, 8 and 9).

This upwards shift in educational attainment was not just a male prerogative. On the contrary, although the absolute increase in the number of males with university degrees (+ 71 000) was almost double the increase in the number of women (+ 38 000), the proportionate increase among women was far higher than men (211 per cent as against 109 per cent). And the absolute and proportionate increases in the numbers of women with intermediate and higher educational qualifications were also far higher than for men.

Table 5. Working labour force, by occupation, Randstad, 1981 and 1990 (percentages)

	Total four cities				Total four regions				Total city regions					
	Men		Women		Men		Women		Men		Women		All persons	
	1981	1990	1981	1990	1981	1990	1981	1990	1981	1990	1981	1990	1981	1990
Qualified	21.4	33	25.3	35.9	26.5	33.5	25.9	30.6	24.1	33.3	25.6	32.9	24.6	33.2
Administrative	19.3	16.5	34.5	30	17.5	14.1	35.2	32.1	18.3	15.1	34.8	31.2	24	21.5
Commercial	8.35	8.58	10.7	10	10.5	10.8	12.2	11.7	9.5	9.86	11.5	11	10.2	10.3
Services	8.99	9.66	23.8	21.6	5.15	6.42	20	19.6	6.92	7.78	21.8	20.5	12.1	12.9
Manual labour	37.9	28.8	4.21	1.56	34.2	31.1	4.44	2.39	35.9	30.1	4.33	2.03	25	18.9
Other	4.07	3.43	1.53	0.94	6.25	4.07	2.22	2.87	5.24	3.8	1.88	2.03	4.09	3.09
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Table 6. Educational levels of the working labour force, 1981 and 1990 (thousands)

	Total four cities				Total four regions				Total city regions					
	Men		Women		Men		Women		Men		Women		All persons	
	1981	1990	1981	1990	1981	1990	1981	1990	1981	1990	1981	1990	1981	1990
Unknown	16	3	9	1	14	3	8	4	30	6	17	5	47	11
Primary	117	73	54	40	85	67	41	40	202	140	95	80	297	220
Lower	120	75	72	69	137	148	76	108	257	223	148	177	405	400
Intermediate	146	158	82	116	210	271	98	169	356	429	180	285	536	714
Higher	40	54	35	64	64	88	36	77	104	142	71	141	175	283
University	29	73	10	34	36	63	8	22	65	136	18	56	83	192
Total	468	466	262	324	546	640	267	420	1014	1106	529	744	1543	1850

Table 7. Educational levels of the working labour force, 1981–90 (change in thousands)

	Total four cities		Total four regions		Total city regions		
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	All persons
Unknown	−13	−8	−11	−4	−24	−12	−36
Primary	−44	−14	−18	−1	−62	−15	−77
Lower	−45	−3	11	32	−34	29	−5
Intermediate	12	34	61	71	73	105	178
Higher	14	29	24	41	38	70	108
University	44	24	27	14	71	38	109
Total	−2	62	94	153	92	215	307

Table 8. Educational levels of the working labour force, 1981–90 (percentage change)

	Total four cities		Total four regions		Total city regions		
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	All persons
Unknown	−81	−89	−79	−50	−80	−71	−77
Primary	−38	−26	−21	−2.4	−31	−16	−26
Lower	−38	−4.2	8.03	42.1	−13	19.6	−1.2
Intermediate	8.22	41.5	29	72.4	20.5	58.3	33.2
Higher	35	82.9	37.5	114	36.5	98.6	61.7
University	152	240	75	175	109	211	131
Total	−0.4	23.7	17.2	57.3	9.07	40.6	19.9

The proportion of women with intermediate qualifications rose by 58 per cent (20 per cent for men) and the proportion of women with higher educational qualifications rose by 99 per cent compared to just 36 per cent for men. This suggests that Dutch women made very major progress in the educational system in the 1980s, and that they are rapidly narrowing the gap in the university sector. It is also very clear when we compare the cities with the city regions that, although the proportion of the labour force with intermediate, higher and university qualifications was higher in the city regions than in the cities in 1981, this situation has been reversed by 1990. The increase in both the number and the proportion of city residents with university degrees was much greater than in the regions, thus confirming Jobse and Musterd's (1992) findings that the more highly educated are concentrating in the cities. The educational data provide no evidence of polarisation.

The Changing Income Structure of the Randstad

The evidence provided by income is far less sanguine than that from occupational data and, in some respects, it is quite contradictory. Kloosterman (1991) suggests that in the first half of the 1980s there was an increase in the number of low-wage jobs in the service sector in the Netherlands. His data suggest that the number of low-wage jobs grew very rapidly in the Netherlands as a whole between 1979 and 1988. They indicate that out of a growth of 633 000 jobs, 457 000 were low-paid, and 215 000 were middle-paid with a loss of 39 000 high-paid jobs. Numbers of low-wage jobs grew sharply in the hotel, catering and retail trades. But there

Table 9. Educational levels of the working labour force, 1981 and 1990 (percentages)

	Total four cities				Total four regions				Total city regions					
	Men		Women		Men		Women		Men		Women		All persons	
	1981	1990	1981	1990	1981	1990	1981	1990	1981	1990	1981	1990	1981	1990
Unknown	3.42	0.64	3.44	0.31	2.56	0.47	3	0.95	2.96	0.54	3.21	0.64	3.05	0.59
Primary	25	15.7	20.6	12.3	15.6	10.5	15.4	9.52	19.9	12.7	18	10.3	19.2	11.9
Lower	25.6	16.1	27.5	21.3	25.1	23.1	28.5	25.7	25.3	20.2	28	22.8	26.2	21.6
Intermediate	31.2	33.9	31.3	35.8	38.5	42.3	36.7	40.2	35.1	38.8	34	36.7	34.7	38.6
Higher	8.55	11.6	13.4	19.8	11.7	13.8	13.5	18.3	10.3	12.8	13.4	18.2	11.3	15.3
University	6.2	15.7	3.82	10.5	6.59	9.84	3	5.24	6.41	12.3	3.4	7.22	5.38	10.4
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	95.9	100	100

Table 10. Growth of number of jobs by wage class and sector in the Netherlands, 1979–88 (thousands)

	Low	Middle	High	Total
Manufacturing	− 9	− 109	31	− 87
Tertiary services	137	213	23	720
Trade, hotels and catering	139	− 6	14	147
Producer services	82	57	38	177
Quaternary services	329	111	− 93	347
All manufacturing and services	457	215	− 39	633

Source: Elfring and Kloosterman, 1991.

was also an upwards shift in the income structure of manufacturing. The figures for number of jobs added differ considerably from those of Atzema and de Smidt's, but this may be a result of the differences in the time periods utilised (Table 10). It should also be noted that the growth in the number of low-paid jobs and the fall in the number of high-paid jobs, particularly in the quaternary sector, partly reflects government policy in the early 1980s of civil service pay cuts (Kloosterman, 1991). As Kloosterman and Lambooy (1992, pp. 133–134) point out

> The wage cuts in the public sector ... which led to a sharp increase in the number of low paid jobs has not affected the four cities much more than ... the national ecomony.... In both the Greater Amsterdam and the Greater Rotterdam area, the wage cuts affected all pay scales. Besides inducing a rise in low-paid public sector jobs, these wage cuts also led to a substantial decrease in the number of high paid jobs in the public sector. This decrease has more than offset the growth of high-salary positions in the Greater Rotterdam area.

These are national figures, but housing survey income data on the four major cities for 1981–89 confirm the picture. Table 11 shows that the percentage of households in each of the lowest four income deciles rose over the period, while the proportion in each of the top six income deciles fell. The proportion of households with incomes in the bottom four deciles rose from 63.1 per cent in 1981 to 68.1 per cent in 1989: an increase of 5 points. When the proportion in each decile in the four cities is compared to the Netherlands average (10 per cent in each decile), it is clear that the major cities were strongly overrepresented in the lower income deciles and underrepresented in the higher income deciles in 1981, and that the concentration of low-income groups in the cities increased between 1981 and 1989. This partly reflect the suburbanisation of the high-income groups over the last 20 years, and data for the four city regions would show a less marked pattern (Kloosterman and Lambooy, 1992; Jobse and Musterd, 1992).

The concentration of lower-income groups in the cities is confirmed by other writers. Thus, Kloosterman and Lambooy (1992, p. 128) state that

> An overrepresentation of old and young, foreign, employed, single and lower-income people live in the cities. An overrepresentation of middle-aged families with children, Dutch, employed and higher-income people are to be found in the neighbouring suburbia ... The principal variable in explaining this dichotomy is the spatial distribution of cheap housing. The four big cities have constructed an ample supply of cheap dwelling units ... These cities consequently function as a kind of gateway for households with low incomes ... These households are more of less forced to live in the big cities.

These views are echoed by Van Kempen and

Table 11. The proportion of households by income deciles in the four cities of the Randstad, 1981–89

	Utrecht		Amsterdam		The Hague		Rotterdam		Total	
Income decile	1981	1989	1981	1989	1981	1989	1981	1989	1981	1989
1	26.8	22.6	24.0	26.1	19.6	18.2	24.4	24.2	23.3	23.4
2	16.0	14.3	17.5	18.2	14.9	19.2	17.8	18.3	16.8	18.0
3	8.0	15.9	12.3	14.7	11.1	14.3	12.5	13.3	11.6	14.4
4	11.7	12.1	10.2	12.0	12.2	13.6	12.0	12.0	11.3	12.4
5	8.1	10.0	8.8	7.2	9.4	9.6	10.2	8.7	9.3	8.5
6	7.7	7.9	7.0	5.3	7.9	6.8	6.3	7.2	7.1	6.5
7	6.8	4.9	6.4	4.9	8.0	5.5	5.8	5.8	6.7	5.3
8	5.2	6.1	5.2	4.8	6.1	4.2	4.5	5.1	5.2	4.9
9	5.4	3.5	5.3	3.9	7.1	4.9	4.1	2.6	5.4	3.7
10	4.3	2.7	3.3	2.9	3.5	3.6	2.4	2.7	3.2	3.0

Source: WBO (1981), WBO (1989/90).

Van Weesep (1989, 1992) who argue that, as a result of the changing geographical structure of housing market opportunities (with growth of home-ownership outside the cities, and the continued growth of social housing within the cities), and the out-migration of the better-off during the 1970s, there has been a concentration of the elderly, the unemployed and the poor in the cities. The better-off are concentrated in home-ownership outside the cities but they argue that because of the income support system and the large social housing stock (43 per cent) in the Netherlands there is no clear relationship between the changes taking place in the occupational and income structure and housing and social segregation. In particular, the housing subsidy and housing allowances system helps low-income households to gain access to better housing. Thus they conclude (1989, p. 11) that

> It is not entirely clear whether or not we can speak in terms of divided cities in the Netherlands because of the polarisation tendencies. Low-income households have fewer chances to obtain high quality housing than high-income groups, yet many live in accommodation of very similar quality. There is a tendency for specific neighbourhoods to move out of reach of low-income groups, yet there is no clear pattern of social segregation in Dutch cities. The tendencies for social polarisation in Dutch society do not seem to be reproduced in the patterns of housing opportunity of the various income groups. This is an outcome of various government policies.

Van Kempen and Van Weesep are quite correct that there is no clear pattern of segregation in Dutch cities and that this is a result of government income and housing policy which mean that low-income groups are not disproportionately concentrated in social housing. Where I disagree is over their suggestion that there is a tendency towards social polarisation in the Netherlands. The Randstad appears to have been characterised by professionalisation rather than polarisation, at least during the 1980s.

Immigration in the Netherlands

Given my argument that Sassen's social polarisation thesis is, to a large extent, dependent on the existence of large numbers of low-skilled, low-paid immigrants in New York and Los Angeles, it is necessary here to say a few words about the scale of immigration in the Netherlands in general, and the Randstad in particular. Like most other western European countries, the Netherlands has experienced a large influx of immigrants over the last 30 years (Roelandt and Veenman, 1992). Ammersfoort (1992, p. 442) states that "like all developed countries the Netherlands is an immigration country, though only on a modest scale". As of the 1 January 1991, the Central Bureau of Statistics estimated that the number of persons who qualify as 'ethnic minorities' totalled some 850 000 (5.7 per cent) of a total population of about 15m.

Most of the migrants have arrived over the last 30 years, and the major groups are those of Surinamese ethnic origin (244 200), Turks (207 000), Moroccans (167 000) and about 40 000 Moluccans (Ammersfoort, 1992). The Surinamese and the Moluccans are a product of the Netherlands colonial history. Not surprisingly, the immigrants are overwhelmingly concentrated in the four major cities. Ammersfoort (1992) states that the number of aliens and ethnic minorities in the four cities totals some 411 000 (21 per cent). This proportion excludes suburban juristrictions, and the city boundaries are quite tightly defined. The proportions vary from 15 per cent in Utrecht, 20 per cent in the Hague and Rotterdam, reaching some 24 per cent in Amsterdam. Migrants are strongly concentrated in certain areas, particularly the older inner-city areas and some new estates (Dieleman, 1993), but Ammersfoort (1992, p. 450) states that "The Bijlmermeer is the only spot in Amsterdam where we can find in highrise flats an absolute concentration resembling the segregation phenomena that are so fam-

iliar from American cities. In Amsterdam we see no concentration that according to our definition could be called a 'ghetto' ".

But Ammersfoort and Dieleman both point to the fact that, because of the demographic structure of immigrant groups on the one hand and the Dutch population on the other, some neighbourhood schools have a very large ethnic composition. The fundamental problem facing many immigrants is that with the recessions of the 1980s there has been a sharp rise in unemployment, and ethnic minorities have much higher rates of unemployment than others. Roelandt and Veenman (1992, p. 139) conclude that while

> there is no ethnic underclass in the Netherlands ... an ethnically and culturally heterogeneous group of Turks, Moroccans and some Surinamese and Antilleans ... who are concentrated in the inner city neighbourhoods of the country's larger cities, are at risk of becoming an underclass ... There is little upward social mobility of any kind whatsoever and labour market prospects, especially for young Turks and Moroccans, are bleak.

It is not possible to be sanguine about the bleak prospects for immigrants in the Dutch labour market, but the situation is clearly very different in scale from that in the US.

Conclusions

It has been argued that Sassen's thesis of growing social polarisation in global cities is flawed on several counts. First her concept of polarisation is vague and undefined, shifting between occupational and income polarisation and fails to distinguish between absolute and relative social polarisation. Secondly, it fails to engage adequately with existing work on social change, and the evidence of large-scale professionalisation in the occupational structure of Western societies and many global cities. Thirdly, it appears to be based primarily on evidence from New York and Los Angeles, both of which are distinguished by the presence of large-scale, continuing immigration and hence a large supply of low-wage workers. Its applicability in other contexts appears to be more limited and data on the Netherlands suggest that, although there is some evidence of income polarisation, occupational and education change in Randstad point strongly towards professionalisation. As Feinstein *et al.* (1992, p. 13) point out "If the concept of the 'dual' or polarising city is of any real utility, it can serve only as a hypothesis, the prelude to empirical analysis, rather than a conclusion which takes the existence of confirmatory evidence for granted".

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