

## ● 15.08.11 - Understanding London's new East End

Geographers have been studying the decline of the traditional white working class population and culture of London's East End over the last 40 years, and its replacement by a decidedly multi-ethnic one as part of a wider process of de-industrialisation. Professors Chris Hamnett and Tim Butler of Kings College London have looked at the impact of these social and economic changes on schools, and in particular the importance the aspiration parents have for their children.

Forty years of de-industrialisation have dramatically reshaped London's economy, its occupational class structure and its housing market. In East London in particular, the closure of the docks and the loss of industry and development of Canary Wharf, have transformed the economic, ethnic and class basis of the area, which has seen the growth of a large and varied minority ethnic population.

However, contrary to the experience of some other European countries, where ethnic minorities have remained amongst the most economically and socially disadvantaged, London has witnessed some significant upward social mobility amongst some minority ethnic groups, particularly Chinese and Indian.

Geographers, Professors Tim Butler and Chris Hamnett of Kings College London, have carried out research examining the ethnic dimensions of social class and housing market change and the importance of aspiration and education within this— specifically on the way parents try to achieve the best for their children in the education system.

The work involved analysis of large scale educational data sets, together with 300 face-to-face interviews with middle-class residents with school age or pre-school children from different ethnic groups in five areas across East London.

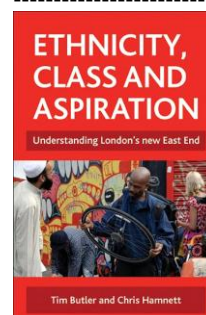
The work found that certain ethnic minority groups are receptive to 'aspirational' mobility, and nowhere has this played out more than in the emerging 'market' in education – where parents stress that their priority is to secure an appropriate schooling for their child. East London traditionally has some of the country's worst

performing schools and a mismatch was identified between the educational aspirations for their children of many of inner London's new middle-class inhabitants and the lack of provision of high quality schooling, particularly at secondary level.

In most boroughs the shortage of places at the best/more popular schools is 'solved' by allocating places on the basis of distance to school. Parents can list up to six 'choices'. If they live close to a popular school they have a good chance of being accepted, but otherwise are more likely to be allocated a school lower down their preference list (and therefore probably a lower attaining school).

Parents voiced concerns about their children being 'brought down' by disruptive pupils (seen more often than not as white and black-Caribbean working-class boys). In response to this, their preference would be to send their child to a private school, or move to a different catchment area, than send them to what they view as a 'failing' school. Butler and Hamnett's research has shown that government stress on increasing choice has failed to deal with variations in attainment which result from differences in the intake, creating a perception of 'failure' for schools which are often doing well in challenging circumstances.

The findings of this work have been promoted to wider audiences, with appearances discussing the work on Radio 4, in the Guardian, and through a book "Ethnicity, Class and Aspiration: Understanding London's new East End".



- Professors [Tim Butler](#) and [Chris Hamnett](#), Kings College London
- Ethnicity, class and aspiration by Chris Hamnett and Tim Butler is published by The Policy Press can be [ordered at 20% discount on their website](#)