

# Barcelona's got talent: migration, residential change and socioeconomic polarisation

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The Barcelona City Council has, for the first time, provided to researchers the educational level of the population among the results of its register for migration and residential mobility. With these data, in addition to the well-known structure by age, sex and place of origin of migrants, it is now possible to know the educational profile of people arriving in the city and those moving within it. This is a key factor for understanding the processes of polarisation and social segregation in the city of Barcelona and its neighbourhoods.

The data show that Barcelona has power, considerable power of attraction for a highly-qualified youthful population, but little power when it comes to distributing this population homogeneously among its neighbourhoods. The central part of the city is more attractive for the well-qualified population which is arriving, while hardly any of the less-educated population is moving into these neighbourhoods. Moreover, the internal residential mobility of the Barcelona inhabitants tends to perpetuate pre-existing socioeconomic differences in the city. The neighbourhoods of higher household income retain and attract more educated people, while lower-income areas retain and attract less-educated people with fewer chances of moving up the housing ladder. The combination of these dynamics is, then, contributing towards the process of socioeconomic polarisation in the city of Barcelona.

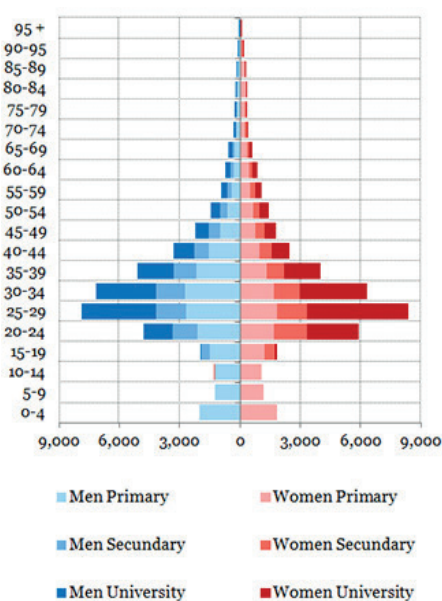
## BARCELONA'S GOT TALENT

Barcelona has the power to attract a well-educated population. For decades, this feature has determined the city's demographic filter (Cabrè and Pujadas, 1982; López-Gay, 2008) but it has accentuated in recent years after a slowdown in international immigration of low socioeconomic profile, and a rise in the numbers of better-educated people.

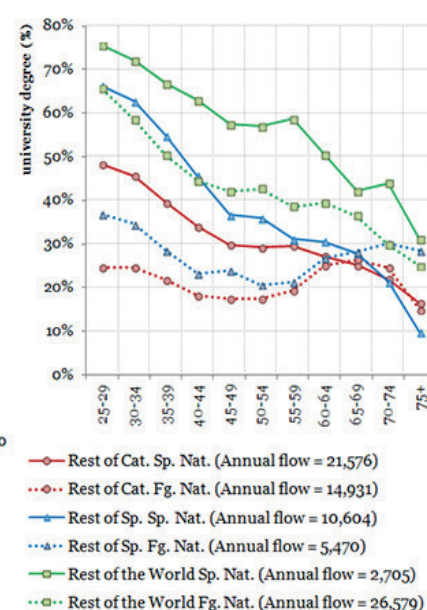
Between 2011 and 2014 an average of some 80,000 people arrived each year in the municipality of Barcelona, making up a total which is approximately equivalent to 5% of the city's population. Of this group, 45% came from elsewhere in Catalonia, 35% from other countries and 20% from other parts of Spain. This is an eminently young-adult population of which half is aged between 25 and 39 years and highly educated, the women especially so (Figure 1A). Hence, 43% of the men and 55% of the women in this age group have university-level ed-

**FIGURE 1. Sociodemographic characteristics of the immigrant flow, 2011-14**

**A)** Annual flows, absolute averages, 2011-14



**B)** Proportion of the population with university studies, 2011-14



Source: Compiled by author on the basis of records in the Barcelona City Council register.

education, a proportion which has been increasing in the period under study (so that in 2014 it rose to 47% for men and 58% for women).

These figures conceal a heterogeneous range of profiles in terms of origin and nationality (Figure 1B). The population of foreign nationality coming from elsewhere in Catalonia and Spain, in which 30% of the young adults have completed higher education, shows the lowest educational level. However, more than 65% of the young-adult population (whether of Spanish or foreign nationality) arriving from other parts of the world, and that with Spanish nationality coming from elsewhere in Spain have university degrees. These results show that, in any case, the image of the flow of immigrants coming from other countries and associated with low educational levels is a throwback to past stages of immigration.

In the metropolitan context, Barcelona is a highly favoured destination among the more educated population. In the absence of the same records for the rest of the municipalities, data from the 2011 census demonstrate this: 56% of the population aged from 25 to 39 and who arrived in the municipality of Barcelona between 2007 and 2011 had completed higher education, compared with 32% of people with the same educational level who went to other municipalities of the metropolis.

## NEIGHBORHOOD SELECTION

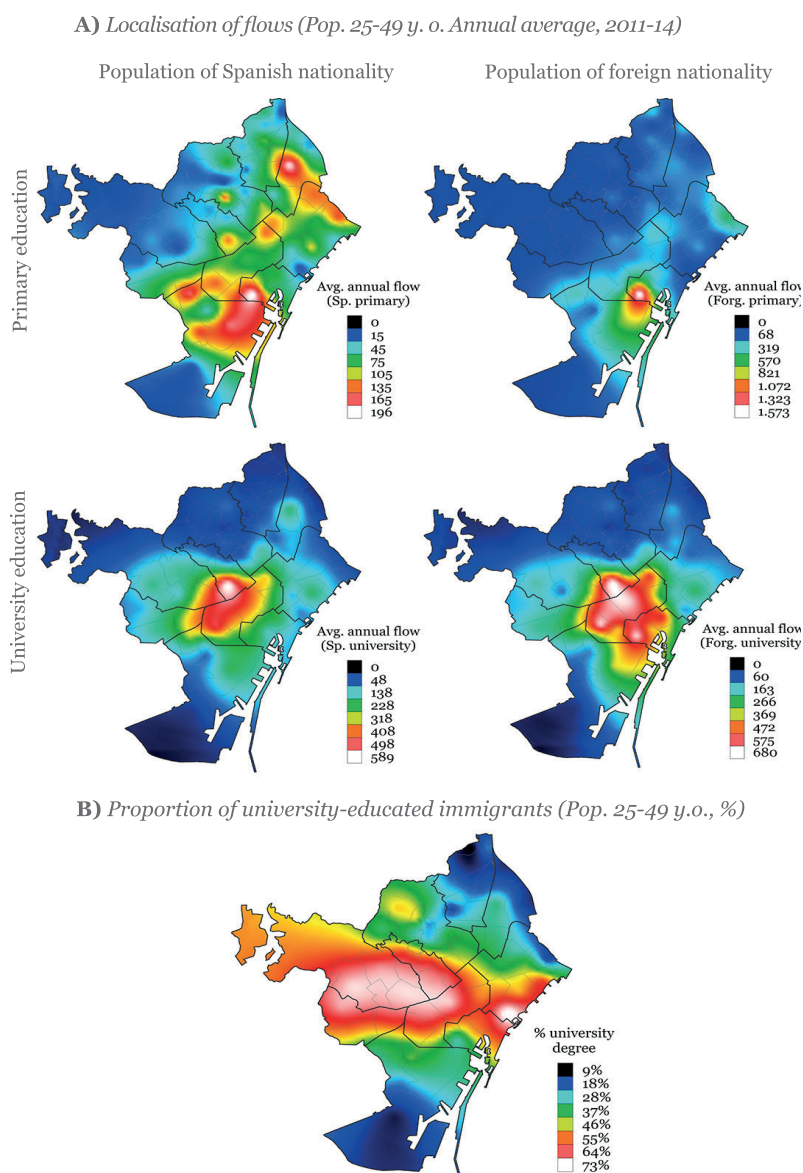
Not all the city's neighbourhoods attract the same kind of people. The different neighbourhoods show considerable heterogeneity with regard to the educational profile of immigrants arriving in the city, as may be seen in the maps of Figure 2A. A focus on the absolute distribution of immigrant flows reveals that the central districts of the city are the preferred destination of the population with the highest educational level. The population of Spanish nationality conspicuously clusters in the Vila de Gràcia neighbourhood, although members of this group are also to be found in the whole area of l'Eixample, and in the extension of this area to the districts of Sants-Montjuïc (Sants and Poble Sec), as well as Les Corts, Sarrià-Sant Gervasi and Sant Martí (the southernmost neighbourhoods, next to the coast). Apart from these areas, the foreign-born population with university-level education is significantly concentrated in the neighbourhoods of the inner-city Ciutat Vella district.

The neighbourhoods furthest from the city centre are notable for the small presence of highly-educated new arrivals. The districts of Nou Barris and Horta-Guinardó, the closest neighborhoods to the Besòs River, which belong to the dis-

tricts of Sant Andreu and Sant Martí respectively, together with the neighbourhoods of Marina de Port and Marina del Prat Vermell in Sants-Montjuïc, show very scant population inflows of people with university education. Nevertheless, these are the zones which outstandingly appear as points of arrival for the population with lower levels of education, especially in the case of people with Spanish citizenship. In the case of the population of foreign nationality, besides the neighbourhoods of Besòs and El Maresme, Trinitat Vella, Ciutat Meridiana, Roquetes and Carmel, there is a very significant concentration in the Raval neighbourhood of Ciutat Vella and its extension to Poble Sec.

The territorial contrast between the neighbourhoods is still more evident when analysis is carried out of the proportion of people with university degree in the whole population settling in each neigh-

**FIGURE 2.** Localisation of immigrant flows in accordance with educational profile, 2011-14



Source: Compiled by author on the basis of records in the Barcelona City Council register Barcelona.

bourhood (Figure 2B). At one extreme of the distribution, in Vila Olímpica of Poblenou, 74% of the population aged between 25 and 49 which arrived in the neighbourhood between 2011 and 2014 is university educated. In Pedralbes, Sant Gervasi-Galvany, Sarrià and Les Tres Torres the figure is almost 70%. The neighbourhoods with the highest proportions of these highly-qualified newcomers are located along the route of Avinguda Diagonal, especially above it and in the westernmost section (districts of Les Corts and Sarrià Sant-Gervasi) and, below it, in the eastern section (the seaside neighbourhoods of Sant Martí). At the other end of the distribution, the figure for university-educated people among the newly arrived population settling in neighbourhoods like Ciutat Meridiana, Torre Baró and Trinitat Vella is barely 10%. This situation is mainly explained by the composition of the population of foreign nationality which makes up the largest part of the flow of immigrants into these neighbourhoods.

## WHERE AM I FROM OR WHERE AM I GOING?

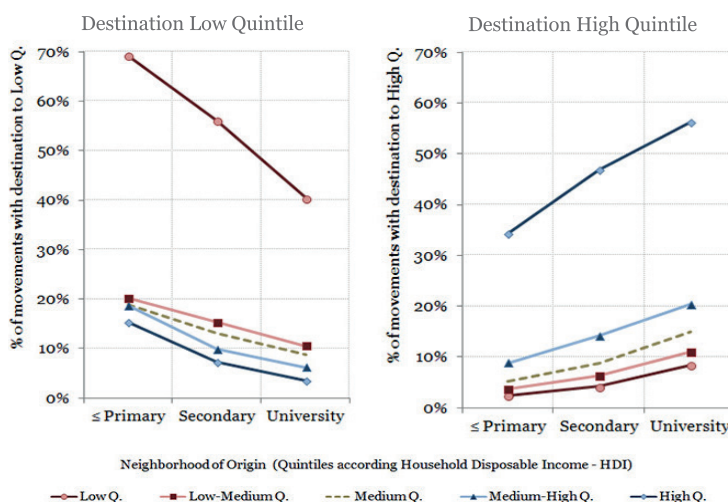
In order to complete the Barcelona migratory and residential overview, it is necessary to incorporate data on residential mobility within the municipality. It is only recently that information about this kind of movement has been available since it was previously given little attention by traditional statistical sources. Intra-urban movements are the most frequent in the case of Barcelona and, between 2011 and 2014, add up to an annual average of more than 100,000 moves. For every one of these moves, the neighbourhoods of origin and destination are known.

Do the neighbourhood of origin and educational level have an influence in the neighbourhood to which people relocate? The answer is affirmative. The population which begins a change of residence in neighbourhoods with lower figures for Household Disposable Income (HDI)<sup>1</sup> is the most likely to stay in neighbourhoods with similar levels of income (Figure 3). As income in the neighbourhood of origin rises, the likelihood of moving to neighbourhoods of the lowest quintile clearly diminishes. In high-income neighbourhoods, the opposite situation appears. Individuals coming from neighbourhoods which are furthest away in socioeconomic terms are those who are least likely to move into those of the lowest quintile. This probability then increases the extent to which the neighbourhood of origin shows a higher profile.

1. The Barcelona City Council publishes the HDI on an annual basis for the city's 73 neighbourhoods. Five groups of these have been created according to their value (Quintiles), ensuring that 20% of the population of Barcelona resides in each group. For example, the Low Quintile includes the 20% of people residing in neighborhoods with the lowest HDI.

The most prominent results are those which are obtained at the point when educational level of the population is incorporated into the analysis. The resulting educational gradient is very marked. The primary-educated population which begins its change of residence in neighbourhoods with the lowest incomes has a 70% probability to relocate in the same type of neighbourhoods, compared to the 40% of the most educated individuals. In other words, the university-educated population from the lowest income neighbourhoods has twice as many chances as the population with primary education of setting up the new home in higher-income neighbourhoods (60% versus 30%). The educational gradient is reproduced in all the groups of neighbourhood of origin: the higher the educational level, the fewer the chances of moving into a lower-income neighbourhood. In contrast, the likelihood of moving into a high-income neighbourhood increases as the educational level rises. The fact that none of the lines are crossed in terms of the type of starting-point neighbourhood shows that, in the destination after a change of residence, what matters is not only what people are like, but also where they come from.

**FIGURE 3.** Destination of changes of residence by type of neighbourhood of origin and educational level of the population (25-49 y.o.), 2011-14



Note: The figure shows the proportion of residential changes moving into neighborhoods that belong to the lowest and highest HDI groups by type of neighborhood of origin and educational attainment. We have only included the destinations of the quintiles with the lowest and highest HDI.

Source: Compiled by author on the basis of records in the Barcelona City Council register.

## TOWARDS POLARISATION OF BARCELONA? IT NEVER RAINS BUT IT POURS

Including migration and residential mobility together with educational level in the analysis of territorial inequality makes it possible to represent the dynamic nature of processes of spatial segregation and to offer new evidence in the debate on territorial polarisation





and segregation in Barcelona (Sarasa *et al.*, 2013; Domingo and Blanes, 2015; Nel-lo, 2015). This study has demonstrated the role of migration and residential mobility as a mechanism with a great capacity to perpetuate and accentuate differences in the territory.

Barcelona is the most favoured destination of the highly qualified population. This kind of flow, moreover, tends to be concentrated in certain zones of the city, usually the more central areas where hardly any members of the population of low educational level are arriving since, with few exceptions, they tend to settle in neighbourhoods which are further away from the city centre. In addition, the current pattern of residential mobility of Barcelona residents within the city accentuates socioeconomic differences which already existed in the territory. It never rains but it pours. To a very marked degree, neighbourhoods of lower household income retain and attract population from low-income economic strata which do not move up the housing ladder; higher-income neighbourhoods retain and attract people from more privileged social strata. There can be no doubt, then, that both these dynamics are fuelling the process of socioeconomic polarisation of the city of Barcelona along the lines of what is also happening in other European cities (Tammaru *et al.*, 2016). Nonetheless, owing to the absence of data prior to 2011 it cannot be claimed that this process is occurring with more intensity now than in the past. Moreover, there is no data for the other municipalities of the Metropolitan Area of Barcelona. Our hypothesis is that the mechanisms of selection of residential and migratory flows would be even more influential if the metropolitan scale were taken into account.

Attracting a highly qualified population has its effects on the housing market, which has expressed this pressure in a recent price hike in

sectors where the demand is concentrated. This is not a new situation if seen from the historical perspective but it is a novel feature in the period which began with the onset of the economic crisis. If the present trend continues over time, thus increasing the pressure in these central sectors, it might be expected that more and more people will be left behind in the competition to reside in the more elite neighbourhoods, and that they will progressively include other zones in their residential trajectories. The experience of other cities which have specialised in attracting a highly educated population indicates that, in certain urban sectors, housing becomes an exclusive (and excluding) asset and that this area of exclusiveness has been spreading out from the central neighbourhoods, bringing about a progressive suburbanisation of poverty (Hochstenbach, C. and Musterd, S., 2016). It is true that in the case of Barcelona, owing to the lower intensity of residential mobility, it seems unlikely that these processes will occur as fast as they do in other cities of the world. However, now more urgently than ever, attention should be given to the potential of residential mobility for altering the socioeconomic composition of Barcelona's neighbourhoods.

Hence, if the success of a city is measured by its ability to attract talent and a well-qualified population, this is counterbalanced by the concentration of population in certain areas or its expulsion towards suburban zones. In addition, attracting talent should never neglect creation of talent (Capel, 2015). If Barcelona is not to be doomed to die of success, the model to follow should include policies that redistribute the benefits generated by the arrival of highly-qualified population. Coordination of these policies on the metropolitan scale is essential.

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