

229A

14,14,16

309.1

ae

University of Cape Town

Department of Social Science

40B



SERIES OF REPORTS AND STUDIES

ISSUED BY THE

**SOCIAL SURVEY
OF CAPE TOWN**

CONCEPT OF
OVERCROWDING

Price 1s. d.

No. SS 19

ae

613.5

~~339.46~~

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN
School of Social Science and Social Administration

REPORTS AND STUDIES
of
THE SOCIAL SURVEY OF CAPE TOWN

by

PROFESSOR EDWARD BATSON
Director of the Survey

-
- SS 1 The Growth of the Population of Greater Cape Town
SS 2 The Ethnic Distribution of the Population of Greater Cape Town
SS 3 The Survey Poverty Datum Line
SS 4 The Distribution of Poverty among Coloured Households in Cape Town
SS 5 The Distribution of European Households in Cape Town
SS 6 The Occupational Class of European Male Voters in Cape Town
- SS 7 The Future Population Growth of Greater Cape Town
SS 8 A Socio-Economic Classification of Occupations in Cape Town
SS 9 A Brief Description of the Methods Employed in the Household Sample
Investigation
SS 10 The Distribution of Poverty among European Households in Cape Town
SS 11 European Housing in Cape Town: Average Occupancy
SS 12 Coloured Housing in Cape Town: Average Occupancy
- SS 13 The Rents Paid by Coloured Households in Cape Town
SS 14 The Distribution of Coloured Households in Cape Town
SS 15 The Occupational Class of European Male Voters: Classification II
SS 16 The Geographical Distribution of Population in the Cape Division
SS 17 Twenty Basic Definitions
SS 18 The Personal Incidence of Poverty in Relation to Age (Coloured
Population)
- SS 19 A Note on the Nature of Overcrowding Standards
SS 20 European Housing in Cape Town: Bedroom Occupancy
SS 21 Coloured Housing in Cape Town: Bedroom Occupancy
SS 22 The Personal Incidence of Overcrowding in Relation to Age (Coloured
Population)
SS 23 European Housing in Cape Town: Overcrowding
SS 24 Coloured Housing in Cape Town: Overcrowding

NOTES ON
THE CONCEPT AND MEASUREMENT
OF OVERCROWDING
I THE CONCEPT OF OVERCROWDING

BY
PROFESSOR EDWARD BATSON

MARCH 1944

REPORT SS 19

Overcrowding is a relative matter. Rich passengers on ocean liners are content to sleep in rooms much smaller than those allotted to their upper servants at home, and nobody has ever suggested that the provisions of the Slums Act should be applied to railway trains.

Although we may measure our ideas of overcrowding by quotas of rooms or space, all such measures are relative to assumptions as to the manner in which and purpose for which the rooms or space are to be used. An adult, we may say, must have at least 40 square feet of free floor space -- in a house, that is; not on a train or in camp. In fact, to consider the matter further, not even in any and every kind of house, but in a house of Western design occupied by a Western household following a Western way of life.

Fundamentally, overcrowding is a cultural, not a technical, concept. All technical standards of overcrowding, quotas of space per human unit, are projections of human standards of living. This means that we cannot properly construct, understand, or apply, a standard of overcrowding unless we relate it to the following human factors:-

- (a) the way in which the space is to be used -- the manner of living of the persons concerned, their behaviour, habits, biotic and social actions;
- (b) the purpose for which the space is to be used -- a norm of living for the persons concerned, a criterion of health, comfort, decency, or other aspect of welfare.

(a) The significance of the manner of living in this connection has seldom received the explicit attention it merits although its importance as a matter of principle is often asserted in discussions of housing reform. A recent survey of the domestic circumstances and habits of English evacuees took as its motto the following quotation from Charles Booth:-

There are two distinct tasks: to raise the general level of existence, but especially at the bottom level, is one; to increase the proportion of those who know how to use aright the means they have is another and even a greater. [Women's Group on Public Welfare, v]

Few writers, however, have attempted to analyse the concept of "right" use or to discover whether there may possibly be more than one right use of dwelling space, possibly even a whole series of right kinds of use related to different kinds of dwelling and different social systems. Certain commentators, it is true, have paved the way for such an approach by pointing out that the manners and customs of the comfortably-housed are not only far from being the universal pattern but need not be accepted as the universal ideal. Howard Marshall, for instance, has thrown additional light on the question of "educating the slum dweller" by recording his assurance

that the standard of decency in the slums is very high ... The mothers told me of their expedients for separating the grown-up children; how the men would undress in the dark or out on the stairs; how they would hang curtain across their rooms. [Marshall, 26]

And again that

if the picture is to be authentic, it will show you kindly, decent, self-respecting, amazingly courageous people, living in conditions where you and I would lose decency and self-respect in a week. [Marshall, 8]

But Carle C. Zimmerman stands out as one of the very few contemporary authorities on the sociology of housing who have explicitly emphasized the complementary nature of the relationship between habit and habitat. The case is most clearly illustrated by reference to sleeping accommodation:-

Probably seven hundred and fifty million people on this globe sleep under conditions where persons of different sexes and ages occupy the same room, some of whom have socially permitted hetero-sexual intercourse with each other. In but relatively few of these families does sexual intercourse of the socially non-permissible kind develop. One explanation of this is the effectiveness of social control by the family even under conditions of "bad housing". [Zimmerman, 164]

As Zimmerman himself elsewhere shows, it is unnecessary to go beyond the pale of Western Civilization to find cases in point. In a study of the people of the Ozark Highlands in north central Arkansas, Zimmerman found that each 100 homes had 140 bedrooms for the use of 570 persons. His comment is illuminating:-

At first sight these figures show room overcrowding, according to urban standards. Such overcrowding does not seem to trouble the Highlander and does not seem to affect his health appreciably. The Highlander refuses to enlarge the house or to build another. These figures need intimate knowledge of the Highland man and his mode of living for their interpretation. The major portion of the time of these people is spent out-of-doors. They do not use indoor space as much as other rural or urban groups. Their mores permit the use of indoor rooms by several members of the family without any of the customary "moral difficulties" found in urban areas. A guest, when not a stranger, is allowed to occupy the same room with women and married couples without stigma. The Highlanders' conception of privacy is considerably different from that of urban families. [Zimmerman and Frampton, 198]

Here we may seem to have encountered a variant ideal of privacy, a matter belonging rather to discussions of the norm than of the manner of living, our second point indicated above rather than that with which we are at present concerned. Probably both concepts are involved. The Ozark Highlander is less "overcrowded" than city dwellers might be in the same circumstances because his attitudes and behaviour have been conditioned to securing for himself and ensuring for others a higher degree of personal convenience from the given household environment. At the same time he also feels less overcrowded because the provision of facilities for personal seclusion is not for him one of the important purposes for which dwellings exist.

The second point is one to which we must return. As far as the first is concerned, enough has probably been quoted to support the contention that there can be no standard of overcrowding or its converse except in relation to the manner of living of the persons concerned. No general recommendation of the way of life of the Ozark Highlander or the London slum-dweller is implied, but only a warning against supposing that there is anything universal or inevitable in that at present followed by those Westerners whom we regard as comfortably housed.

(b) Writers have often been much more explicit in their treatment of the second set of relationships, those between the dwelling and the purposes it is intended to serve. The following views are typical:-

Desirable or optimum standards may be treated in a variety of ways: First, with reference to human needs for health, safety, convenience, comfort, beauty, privacy, economy, and development of mind and character. [Ford, 652].

Certain first principles, [decency, health, amenity, comfort, convenience, safety] which we may call vital standards, are common to almost all the new dwellings, from Stockholm to Liverpool. [Bauer, 141]

The house may be built for privacy, for protection from other human beings, for working comfort, for economy, for study purposes, or for entertaining. [Zimmerman, 141]

The most important qualities in a house, summed up by Professor Kerr in his book, The Gentleman's House, in 1865, are 'Privacy, Comfort, Convenience, Spaciousness, Salubrity, Aspect and Prospect, Cheerfulness and Elegance'. [McAllister, 61]

The chief functions of the house are to satisfy the needs of shelter, eating, sleeping, recreation, health, cleanliness, and beauty. In addition there are certain important needs, which come under the ideas of hospitality, privacy, service, storage, and communication. [Bertram, 5f.]

The objectives of housing [have been defined as] the furnishing of healthful accommodations adequately provided with facilities for privacy and comfort, easily accessible to centers of employment, culture and amusement, accessible from the centers of distribution of the food supply, rentable at reasonable rates, and yielding a fair return on the investment. [Aronovici, xii]

Considerable though the measure of agreement in regard to this second of our two problems may be, this problem of the norm of living and its relationship to housing accommodation remains a subject for future research rather than for immediate consensus. A fortiori, the allied problem of the manner of living. For the present, we are reduced to work by rule of thumb, no very promising basis for the national Housing Policy to which so many hopes have been pinned.

REFERENCES

- Aronovici, C. Housing the Masses. Wiley, New York. 1939
 Bauer, Catherine. Modern Housing. Houghton Mifflin, New York. 1934
 Bertram, A. The House: a machine for living in. Black, London. 1935
 Ford, J. Slums and Housing. Harvard University Press. 1936
 McAllister, G. and E.G. Town and Country Planning. Faber and Faber, London. 1941
 Marshall, H. Slum. Heinemann, London. 1943
 Women's Group on Public Welfare. Our Towns: a close-up. Oxford University Press. 1943
 Zimmerman, C.C. Consumption and Standards of Living. Williams and Norgate, London. 1936
 Zimmerman, C.C. and M. Frampton. Family and Society. Williams and Norgate, London. 1936

The present notes on the concept and measurement of overcrowding are continued in two further reports in the series issued by the Social Survey of Cape Town:-

- II Measures of Overcrowding, SS 26
 III The Cape Town Survey Standard, SS 27

Collection Number: AD1715

SOUTH AFRICAN INSTITUTE OF RACE RELATIONS (SAIRR), 1892-1974

PUBLISHER:

Collection Funder:- Atlantic Philanthropies Foundation

Publisher:- Historical Papers Research Archive

Location:- Johannesburg

©2013

LEGAL NOTICES:

Copyright Notice: All materials on the Historical Papers website are protected by South African copyright law and may not be reproduced, distributed, transmitted, displayed, or otherwise published in any format, without the prior written permission of the copyright owner.

Disclaimer and Terms of Use: Provided that you maintain all copyright and other notices contained therein, you may download material (one machine readable copy and one print copy per page) for your personal and/or educational non-commercial use only.

People using these records relating to the archives of Historical Papers, The Library, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, are reminded that such records sometimes contain material which is uncorroborated, inaccurate, distorted or untrue. While these digital records are true facsimiles of paper documents and the information contained herein is obtained from sources believed to be accurate and reliable, Historical Papers, University of the Witwatersrand has not independently verified their content. Consequently, the University is not responsible for any errors or omissions and excludes any and all liability for any errors in or omissions from the information on the website or any related information on third party websites accessible from this website.

This document forms part of the archive of the South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR), held at the Historical Papers Research Archive at The University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa.