The Shifting Residential Geodemographic Differentiation of Greater London

This paper presents the results of a new geodemographic study of Greater London that utilises population and built environment characteristics from the 2021 Census to differentiate Output Areas by their salient residential geography. This extends work conducted for the national extent where because of London’s unique urban structure relative to the rest of the UK, this returns a substandard classification for use within this context. Our regionally tailored model demonstrates enhanced performance relative to the Office for National Statistics national model and is also used to demonstrate how Greater London’s unique geodemographic structure has evolved over the past decade since the 2011 Census.

Introduction

Geodemographic classification are categorical indicators that summarise a rich tapestry of attributes about people those places in which they live. There are multiple geodemographics that are created with a common objective of differentiating the most salient features of small area residential geography for national or regional extents. They are typically comprised of a series of hierarchical classes which are accompanied by labels and other descriptive material. Geodemographic classifications are used to make comparisons between different geographic contexts, create linkages between other ancillary data, and hold utility in operational applications for the targeting of products or services across both the public and private sectors.

Geodemographic classification emerged from a lineage developing quantitative indicators of urban structure within Urban Geography and Planning, with the most notable precursor being Social Area Analysis.

The earliest geodemographic classification for the UK were created in the 1970s for the city of Liverpool. This took advantage of the then newly digitised 1971 Census of the Population, and was developed as a method of targeting deprivation alleviation funding. During the 1980s, models were expanded to the national extent and their effectiveness in private sector applications related to direct mail marketing established them as a commercially valuable tool. Commercial geodemographic classification have continued to be developed, with the two most prevalently used models including Acorn by CACI, and Mosaic by Experian. Academics have also generated a number of national geodmeographics classifications in the 1981 – 2021 Censuses. Contemporary models for regional extents are less prevalent, with the notable exception of London in 2011. As a technique, geodemographic classifications have also been developed and applied within numerous international contexts.

As exemplified by the 2011 London Output Area Classification, there is a robust rationale for considering London separately from the rest of the UK given the uniqueness of its urban structure. Although a regional geodemographic limits applications that require national comparability, it does enable it to be more effectively used within a local policy context. The 2011 London Output Area demonstrated a number of policy orientated applications, notably being incorporated into a series of transport evaluation activities by Transport for London. To illustrate the pervasiveness of London’s unique geography, both 2011 and 2021 Census variable rates are presented in Table ?? for a number of selected Census variables.

Table : Percentage of People in Selected 2011 and 2021 Census Attributes in England and Wales

[TABLE NEEDED]

?? Describe rates and table…..

The