THE CITY IN CULTURAL CONTEXT

Edited by
John A. Agnew, John Mercer
and David E. Sopher

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Syracuse University, New York

Preface

Although there has been an explosion of information and research in urban geography and in urban studies generally since 1960, the study of cities and of urbanization has remained unbalanced. We have often forgotten that it is people – through institutions – who have the central rôle in building and developing cities, and in bringing about the various transformations embodied in the urbanization process.

A major problem has been caused by assigning too much explanatory power to such concepts as 'the market,' and 'the mode of production,' while not paying enough attention to human actions and to the attitudes, values, and beliefs that relate to those actions. We have not attended to Park's dictum (Park 1936, p. 133): 'Cities ... are, with all their complexities and artificialities, man's most imposing creation, the most prodigious of human artifacts.' By saying so, however, we are not imputing unlimited authority or even equal authority to all individuals to make decisions regarding city building or urbanization. Nor do we endorse the beguiling but dangerous notion of consumer sovereignty. The self-confidence of behavioral studies and analyses of decision making has been shaken by work that has laid bare the constraints under which human intentions are realized. These constraints, which are real enough and have had varying influence on different people in different contexts, are themselves socially constructed. They are the result of human agency, past and present.

This book, then, has a central purpose: to begin to restore balance to our perspective on cities and urbanization by emphasizing their cultural context. A full treatment of what we mean by this is given in the Introduction, and in varying ways the individual authors also articulate their understanding of the notion. We ourselves understand culture to embody not only elements that reflect continuity, but those that arise from change as well, and we have therefore wanted to emphasize the continuous interaction that goes on between the making of cities and the making of culture.

The Introduction has other purposes. One is to review the literature of urban studies critically. Our survey of the literature is organized around the principal objects of analysis in urban studies, disciplinary orientations to them, and collective and particular failures to recognize the relevance of cultural context. Another goal is to elaborate the problems that face any study using cultural context in an explanatory fashion. The last section of the Introduction tells how and why the papers have been organized as they have been in this book. The contents of the papers are summarized to provide an overview of the collection at a glance.

The book is intended for two audiences. One comprises students of human geography, simply because, as geographers, we editors are convinced that our discipline suffers as much as any from the lack of balance we have spoken of. The lack of intellectual exchange and collaboration between urban geographers and cultural geographers is especially disturbing. The second audience consists of students of cities and urbanization no matter what their discipline. The field of urban studies has been notably multidisciplinary, rather than interdisciplinary, although signs of mutual recognition are appearing now. By bringing together contributions from a number of disciplines, including anthropology, sociology, history, and planning, in addition to geography, we have tried to make a collection of work that will be of interest and value far beyond our discipline.

Because the contributions suppose the reader to have a certain familiarity with basic concepts, the text is not intended for beginning undergraduates. On the other hand, because most of the papers were first presented as public lectures to a general university audience, they are not so specialized as to be understood only by *cognoscenti*. The book might therefore be used by senior undergraduates and graduate students, for whom the collection as a whole and the particular thrust of individual essays can serve as a springboard for an exciting leap in their urban studies. In short, we believe that the book points in a new and necessary direction in urban geography and, in varying degree, in other urban fields.

Except the two editorial chapters and the contributions of Allinson, Claval, the Duncans, and Western, the papers were first delivered in the spring of 1981 in a series of public lectures sponsored by the Department of Geography in the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, Syracuse University. The editors, who organized the series, then requested revisions in the written versions of the lectures, and solicited other essays to broaden the geographic range of the whole set.

Some of the authors from whom papers were solicited in the later stage did receive provisional drafts of the essays that had first been written for the lecture series. In addition, the authors of some of the essays were able to see drafts of certain papers by other authors in the series. We hope that these exchanges have gone some way to achieve a degree of integration that is often missing in collections of this sort.

Few papers are themselves explicitly comparative (Hall's is an obvious exception). It was, however, our intention to allow the reader to draw conclusions by comparing the statements of experts in various culture regions on particular aspects of urbanization and urban development in those regions. We try to help the reader to do so in the concluding chapter. Among our objectives in that chapter is to point out connections, some involving similarities, some contrasts, among the papers. Style and approach of individual essays are of course varied. We can even expect that the work of some authors will elicit strong criticism from other authors.

There is, however, a common theme, and we have tried editorially to resolve some of the discordance, in addition to effecting a large integration in our chapters at the beginning and end.

Clearly, the individual essays raise a number of theoretical questions that are not immediately resolved. Placed in the context of this thematic collection, they present a challenge to conventional and current practice in urban studies. Ignore the rôle of culture and its manifestations, they tell us, and theories of city structure, city building, and urbanization will continue to suffer from premature closure and incompleteness, and the dangers they entail of misunderstanding and policy error.

We do not regard this characterization of urban studies as too severe. But neither do we see the increased understanding of cultural context and its incorporation in urban studies as providing a simple nostrum. A quick cultural 'fix' would be no better than behavioral or structural ones. Rather, we see that the work presaged by this book will require urban scholars to have command of a broader literature and a wider range of research methodologies than they now have as a rule. It will require an end to the Western ethnocentric parochialism (Masotti & Walton 1976) that has marred urban studies. This is too much to expect from one individual, but with collective attempts to achieve this goal we may yet see urban studies transformed from a multidisciplinary enterprise into a truly interdisciplinary one. We hope that this book will be a step in that direction.

A number of debts are incurred in preparing a book such as this for publication. We wish to thank Pam Walker for her editorial assistance. D. Michael Kirchoff made a number of the maps. Harriet Hanlon and Pam Walker shared the typing. Finally, we would like to thank Bob Jensen, chairman of the Department of Geography at Syracuse University, for his encouragement and support.

JOHN A. AGNEW, JOHN MERCER AND DAVID E. SOPHER
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1 Introduction

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The study of the city in cultural context implies two things. First, networks of practices and ideas exist that are drawn from the shared experiences and histories of social groups. Secondly, these practices and ideas can be invoked to account for specific patterns of urban growth and urban form. Such a study does not imply acceptance of a questionable and now largely discredited concept of 'urban culture' (Benet 1963). That concept would have a universal rural–urban continuum (defined by population density) provide the essential kernal of explanation for all urban phenomena. Instead, consideration of the city in cultural context implies an emphasis on the practices and ideas that arise from collective and individual experiences, and that are constitutive of urban life and form. The practices and ideas are not themselves uniquely urban but derive from the social, economic, and political situations that have shaped group and individual existence. In turn, the practices and ideas – in short, 'culture,' – have shaped urban worlds.

An enduring Western conceit in urban studies has been that all contemporary cities can be explained by reference to a 'rational' economic calculus of profit and loss for the individual or group. This explanation itself comes out of a contemporary Western cultural context (Poggi 1972, p. 116). Applied to other places and times, it improperly projects recent Western experiences on to other contexts, accounting in an invalid, a priori fashion for urbanization and urban life.

The basic premise of this book is that culture counts. The concept of culture is, however, notoriously difficult to grasp (Bauman 1973, Williams 1977, 1982). There is some agreement that culture refers to the 'ways of life' and the 'systems of meaning' established by groups of people who form communicating networks, or did so at one time. How culture comes to be constituted and how stable it is are more controversial matters (Duncan 1980). For many (like Sahlins 1976), culture is largely equated with 'tradition,' and contemporary populations are seen only as its carriers. For others, including most of the contributors to this volume, culture is created by thought and actions of both historical and living populations. Culture can change because it refers to material and symbolic contexts or limiting conditions for individual behavior; it does not comprise an *entity* that governs what every human being thinks and does

(Williams 1958, 1977, Geertz 1973, Beeman 1977). Nor is the idea of continuity in culture without problems. The assumption of inertia that underlies much culture theory plays down the need for culture to be created anew in each generation. As Moore (1966, p. 486) puts it:

> To speak of cultural inertia is to overlook the concrete interests and privileges that are served by indoctrination, education, and the entire complicated process of transmitting culture from one generation to another.

Culture is the 'glue' of society, but it cannot exist independent of human action.

To study the city in cultural context therefore requires us to use a concept of culture that is sensitive to the *causes* of both cultural continuity and change. It also requires us to insist on the importance of the collective experience of national, ethnic, and social groups. It is thus set apart from other contemporary approaches to the study of cities and urbanization, such as those outlined by Saunders (1981). The emphasis on culture helps to resolve four fundamental problems that occur in other approaches: (a) the structure–action problem; (b) the problem of 'Eurocentric evolutionism;' (c) the 'base–superstructure' problem; and (d) the problem of student 'self–consciousness.'

First, much conventional reasoning in urban studies deduces the causes and features of urbanization and urbanism in specific contexts from 'structures,' either empirical or abstract, that are held to operate in or through human agents. The early urban sociology of Manuel Castells (1977) and the environmental psychology based on behavioristic postulates are examples. For other writers, 'action' is primary: for them, 'individuals' are 'free' to behave 'as they please,' or according to rules 'freely' negotiated with others. Much work in urban economics and in the sociology that focuses on 'urban life' is of this kind. We discuss this literature in more detail later.

The structure–action problem refers to the difficulty of finding a way to avoid these extremes while recognizing the significance of both human agency and structural constraint (Abrams 1980, Manicas 1980). One solution is to focus on 'cultural contexts' as we have defined them, to recognize human action as both motivated and intended, and at the same time both mediated by social structure and generative of it. This is not an easy task. There is a strong tendency to slip toward an emphasis on either structure or action. The cultural–context approach holds out at least the possibility of resolving this venerable and stubbornly persisting dilemma.

Secondly, a conspicuous feature of Western social science that deals with cities and other phenomena has been a 'Eurocentric evolutionism.' In much modernization theory and in Leninist interpretations of Marx, the

world is divided into regions at different 'stages of development' (Gusfield 1967, Tipps 1973, Pletsch 1981). Although 'the West' (or by some 'the East') is defined as the most 'advanced' or 'modern,' the populations of other world regions need not despair. They will advance inevitably as they follow the Western experience. Cities will follow suit, moving from the traditional end of the continuum to the modern one and losing their individual characters along the way. Apart from its Eurocentric view of world history, this line of thinking involves a denial of human agency. However, when urban growth and urban form in a particular region are seen in cultural context, the basis for understanding their patterns is provided by the region's historical experience, including the changing character of the region's ties to an increasingly integrated world political economy. Calcutta, then, need not 'evolve' in the same way as Chicago, nor need Tokyo come to be like Los Angeles.

A third advantage of the cultural–context approach to urbanization and urbanism lies in its potential for resolving the 'base–superstructure problem' that has bedeviled most of the other approaches. The problem has been articulated most clearly in discussions among Marxists on certain questions: 'economic determinism,' the 'relative autonomy of the state,' and the rôle of thought in social change (Brenner 1977, Williams 1980, Wood 1981). The problem is not merely one of Marxist exegesis ('what Marx really meant'). Many Marxists as well as others used to see cultural phenomena – ways of life and systems of meaning – as mere 'reflections' of the economic base, serving the function of 'reproduction' for its survival. The resolution that seems to be emerging would collapse the base–superstructure metaphor into a concept of productive activity, or 'praxis.'

The concept of cultural context that we have outlined then becomes crucial. Williams (1980, p. 38) writes:

> . . . In any society, in any particular period, there is a central system of practices, meanings, and values, which we can properly call dominant and effective . . . which are organized and lived . . . It is a set of meanings and values which as they are experienced as practices appear as reciprocally confirming. It thus constitutes a sense of reality for most people in the society.

Thus, the *practical* nature of everyday life, rather than the abstracted nature of economic organization or superorganic culture, becomes an alternate focus for social explanation. Not only does this point to resolution of the base–superstructure problem, but it directs attention to what we are calling cultural context.

Finally, openness to the possibility of a world marked by cultural variety has an important methodological implication for the student of cities. It helps to unveil the attitudes and assumptions brought by the

student to the research. This need not lead to cultural relativism, although there is always that danger. What it will do is to encourage development of a critical self-consciousness in selecting and applying concepts, and watching for those that may be bound to a particular context of time and place. Encounters with unfamiliar cultural contexts can also deepen understanding of what we think we know. In a challenge to 'common-sense' views of knowledge, the familiar may prove to be less familiar than was previously thought (Grew 1980). The cultural-context approach thus opens up the possibility of exploring the 'taken-for-granted' in cultural contexts that we all think we know 'from the inside.' We may find that truth in Fuentes' words (1982, p. 69): 'To discover the other is to discover our forgotten self.'

While an examination of the city in cultural context moves toward resolutions of the problems in contemporary urban studies that we have outlined, the approach is certainly in need of additional elaboration and criticism. We try to provide these in the next part of this chapter (and again in the concluding chapter). Next, we identify some of the chief themes and objects of analysis in the urban literature and, at the same time, outline the particular concerns of different disciplines involved in the study of urban questions.

The city in cultural context

We have made some bold claims for studying the city in cultural context, and their validity will have to be measured by the individual contributions to this book. Here we want to lay out some of the problematic issues that face a study of this kind. In the closing Commentary we deal with some of the problems as they have arisen in individual chapters. Taken together, then, Introduction and Commentary are our attempt to provide a critical perspective on the theme of the book and on the chapters themselves.

First of all, the concept of the city itself is problematic. In recent years, the separation of 'the urban' as an object of study has often been questioned. The city, it is said, cannot be a significant unit of study in its own right. It should be seen as an 'ideal type' that cannot have much use in the development of sociological theory (Saunders 1981). But this criticism confuses two different questions. One is whether cities in their various aspects can be the objects of analysis. The other is whether explanations of 'urban phenomena' can themselves be restricted to the level of the urban.

A negative answer to the second question does not, as some critics seem to think, require a negative answer to the first. For the geographer, the historian, and the political economist, (if not for the sociologist as well – Saunders 1981), the city is not merely a research milieu or a population concentration – it is also a place. Its study has usually involved concepts

that presuppose the insufficiency of explanation at the level of the urban itself. One can therefore reject the idea of 'urban explanation' while accepting the urban object of analysis.

For the sociologist, however, the *significance* of distinguishing the urban is clearly problematic. Although the city can be a significant condition for the development of social forces, as it was for the division of labor in medieval Europe, the concept of the urban is typically not equatable with the physical object of the city. In societies dominated by urbanization and urban ways, the division between city and country is not of much significance. Saunders (1981, p. 13) concludes that in 'advanced capitalist countries,' and perhaps in others:

> the city . . . is no longer the basis for human association (Weber), the locus for the division of labor (Durkheim), or the expression of a specific mode of production (Marx), in which case it is neither fruitful nor appropriate (for the sociologist) to study it in its own right.

But even such critics acknowledge that this is a recent condition in a few parts of the world. It is dangerous to project it to other times and places.

The second problem in our approach is with the basis for the concept of culture. Our analysis here owes a special debt to the writing of Raymond Williams. Cultural anthropologists and cultural geographers in the United States have tended to view culture in transcendental–idealist terms. It is a superorganic entity, the 'informing spirit' through which a social order was reproduced (Duncan 1980). Some anthropologists and sociologists now prefer to see culture as a 'realized signifying system' (Williams 1982, pp. 207–9), embedded in everyday life through 'activities, relations, and institutions.' For some, such as Geertz (1973), this system seems to be largely symbolic in nature and mental in origin. For others (such as Williams 1980, 1982), culture is practical in origin if also symbolic in nature. For Williams (1982, pp. 207–8):

> a signifying system is intrinsic to any economic system, any political system, any generational (kinship and family) system, and, most generally, to any social system.

Emphasis on the practical, the grounding of culture in everyday life, is a position that has been criticized (Sahlins 1976, Cosgrove 1982). However, much of Sahlins' argument rests on a conflation of the terms 'practical' and 'utilitarian.' The practical is reduced to 'the economic,' as reference to everyday life is taken to represent the workings of an 'economy' in which people persistently take a cost–benefit approach to individual and collective decisions. The argument is an example of a naïve dualism in which 'ideas' are separated from 'material reality.' This is an important failing of

most modern social theories. Rather, as Williams (1977, pp. 59–60) argues, 'consciousness is seen from the beginning as part of the human material social process and its products in "ideas" are then as much part of this process as material products themselves.' Culture, then, need not be thought of as superorganic or mental in origin and continuation, but as practically rooted in material social life.

A related issue is the extent to which culture is equated with tradition and continuity. Anthropology and geography, and to some degree all the social sciences, have emphasized cultural inertia and continuity (Duncan 1980), reflecting the perception of culture as a superorganic entity or a social fact. An alternative view is that it cannot be reduced to 'fixed forms.' As collective social experience changes, so must the signifying system that defines a culture. The dominant set of meanings and symbols held by a social group in any period represents both continuity and change. How much of each is represented is an empirical rather than a conceptual question.

Such a wide range of ideas and activities has been taken in the anthropological literature to form the bundle called 'culture,' so as to give the term the sense of 'a whole way of life.' This has the merit of avoiding the strong social-science tendency to engage in the 'separated analysis' of 'economic,' 'political,' 'social,' and other aspects of life (Williams 1982, p. 209). But the view of culture as a whole way of life suffers from insufficient attention to the relational aspect of culture as a mechanism for weaving ideas and practices together into a framework that has meaning for people. To regard culture as a signifying system produced and reproduced by collective experience emphasizes the centrality of symbolism, and avoids the generality and lack of analytic clarity in the definition as a way of life. There is another advantage. It draws attention to the political and social orders with which culture as a signifying system is interwoven, and which together form the context for the genesis of symbols and meanings.

The concept of 'hegemony' is sometimes used now to extend this concept of culture. It contributes a sense of what is found in most societies, the dominance and direction of one part vis-à-vis another. Williams (1977, p. 108) explicates:

> 'Hegemony' goes beyond 'culture,' as previously defined, in its insis-
> tence on relating the 'whole social process' to specific distributions of
> power and influence. To say that 'men' define and shape their lives is
> true only in abstraction. In any actual society there are specific in-
> equalities in means and therefore in capacity to realize this process.

One can therefore conceive of hegemonic or dominant cultures which give meaning to the 'whole social process,' including the character of

domination and subordination, in all societies (Anderson 1976, Cheal 1979, Della Fave 1980). In addition, the concept of hegemony opens up the possibility of viewing cultures as contestable. Contrary to the usual sense of the term 'ideology,' according to Williams (1977 p. 112), a hegemony:

> does not passively exist as a form of dominance. It has continually to be renewed, recreated, defended, and modified. It is also continually resisted, limited, altered, challenged by pressures not at all its own.

While a hegemonic culture is always dominant by definition, it is rarely totally dominant or exclusive (Wrong 1969, Williams 1977). There can be alternative or directly opposing cultures within a society at any time. In one terminology, these would be labeled 'autonomous' in contrast to the 'directed' nature of a hegemonic culture. Alternatively, they can be seen as either 'residual' or 'emergent' cultures, depending on their historical origins (Williams 1980, p. 204).

Not only culture, but the concept of culture itself, is then clearly contestable. Whether one chooses to identify culture with continuity, with the superorganic or with practical reason, as a whole way of life or as a signifying system, as directed or autonomous, one's definition is open to challenge and discussion. In one respect, however, most recent usage has tended toward a consensus in taking national societies as the units to which the concept of culture is most appropriately applied. In cultural anthropology, of course, tribes or ethnic groups have always been the typical units of analysis, although a problem has been recognized in the range in size of such units (from a few people to several hundred million). Cultural geography has faced the same difficulty in its search for cultural expression in lands ranging in size from county to continent. In other social sciences, too, there are references to 'ethnic cultures,' 'subcultures,' and 'class cultures,' including those that are 'feudal' and 'bourgeois.' (In social history and historical sociology, concepts of 'class-consciousness' and 'minority-group consciousness' are more common.) But the sense of culture as a national entity, developing as the global system of states develops, seems prevalent now.

We have decided to use the term 'cultural context' rather than 'culture' because we do not want to be tied to the concept of culture as national or hegemonic. The term we prefer should suggest a nesting of contexts, from class and ethnic to national and global, by which specific cultures are defined and relate to one another. The term also strengthens the sense of culture as a contextual matrix of symbols and activities which give meaning and direction to people's lives.

To put the city in cultural context is to view it as the product of both hegemonic and subordinate cultures and, at the same time, as the site for

their production. Placing cities in the context of their societies, we are able
to see how the cultural motifs of a society are embedded in the form of its
cities and in the lives of its urban population. We can also see the city as a
socioeconomic and political factor in the organization of the society as a
whole.

The idea of the city in cultural context has sometimes been realized by
treating the city as solely a product of culture rather than as both producer
and product. The Turkish cities of Anatolia have been viewed as the
products of a cultural context in which the patrimonial claims of the
Ottoman state left little scope for local control, and 'the culture of the
Palace' dominated the urban scene (Mardin 1969). In Brazilian cities, the
clientelist culture of the countryside has been transferred through migra-
tion to the class-based context of the cities, and provides the dominant
frame of reference that is still evolving for the mass of the urban popula-
tion (Oliven 1979). Finally, in 19th-century French cities, local loyalties
were replaced by national ones, and the solidarities and antagonisms of
social class replaced the ties of trade and patronage as French society
experienced intensive industrialization and the growth of a national
education system (Aminzade 1979).

Until this century, city life was the experience of a minority. Only in
England in the middle of the 19th century did the urban population of a
region exceed the rural population for the first time anywhere. Massive
urbanization in the 19th century involved concomitant changes in the social
organization of culture. The cities created by the new urbanization in turn
represented and communicated the new culture as well as significant aspects
of both older and emergent cultures.

However, the 'dialectic' between city and cultural context is not
entirely a modern phenomenon, as cultural anthropologists and other
students of urbanism remind us (Thrupp 1961, Fox 1977, Lefebvre 1978,
1980). What is different now is that urban living and the influence of the
urban have become pervasive. In a discussion of urbanization and culture
in 19th-century France, Merriman (1979, p. 131) captures both the trans-
formational and the reflective aspects of their relationship:

> The city itself – its configuration, neighborhoods, and relationship to
> its region – is often the neglected historical personage in the drama of
> social and political change when in fact it came to define and shape
> those changes. The impact of large-scale industrialization, the cre-
> ation of a working class, and the development of the labor movement
> cannot be divorced from its physical setting.

In their form and in the lives of their inhabitants, cities have reflected the
working of dominant, residual, and emergent cultures. To study the city
in cultural context therefore requires us to acknowledge that cities are
cultural creations and that they are best understood as such.

Urban studies: themes and perspectives

In the past two decades, the literature of urban studies has grown exponentially. In the established social-science disciplines, new or expanded urban subfields are now thriving. In the United States, some came early (urban sociology), some much later (urban history), and some were, so to speak, force-fed by money from foundations (urban economics). Reflecting a basic uncertainty about the theoretical significance of the city as object of analysis, the literature of these subfields ranges across a surprisingly wide variety of themes. The city may appear as agent, as cause, or as backdrop, a stage for large social events and trends.

Like their parent disciplines, these proliferating subfields have undergone marked changes of direction. Even in specialties of short pedigree, redefinitions of the field have been striking enough to warrant the label 'new' for the later work (e.g. Masotti & Lineberry 1976, Richardson 1977). Nevertheless, we have tried, at the risk of being somewhat reductive, to identify persistent, dominant themes in the literature and to discern the different perspectives on the city that each discipline has.

Here we must enter a disclaimer regarding what follows. However much we may hope for the emergence of a more balanced understanding of the city in cultural context, we must face the fact that what we present here has a decidedly ethnocentric cast. Irrespective of discipline, most of the literature of urban studies has been written by Europeans and Americans about European and American cities. In geography we can of course point to the existence of some regional surveys of cities in the 'Second World' (e.g. Bater 1980) and the 'Third World' (e.g. McGee 1967), but the overwhelming mass of urban geographical study and writing has been about North America and Western Europe. Here, to our regret, we can only handle the core of the mass, to the neglect of some fine, important work.

The literature we have surveyed has several principal themes: urban origins, urbanization, urban form, urbanism, urban systems, city government, and the distribution of community power. Some of these present problems of definition: 'urbanism' is sometimes used as an umbrella category, subsuming the others, as in the title of an eclectic reader edited by Fava (1968). Urbanism and urbanization have been treated both as processes (Harvey 1973) and as products. The other categories are generally treated as products.

These themes have received different degrees of attention from the disciplines whose work on cities we are reviewing – anthropology, economics, geography, history, political science, and sociology. To guide the reader as our survey proceeds, we have indicated the different disciplinary emphases in the form of a necessarily crude scheme (Table 1.1).

Table 1.1 Disciplinary emphases in urban studies.

Discipline	Urban origins	Urbanization	Urban form	Urbanism	Urban systems	City government	Community power structures
anthropology	×	×		×			
economics		×	×		×	×	
geography	×	×	×		×	×	
history	×	×		×	×	×	
political science				×		×	×
sociology		×	×	×			×

Urban origins How and where cities came into being, and what consequences urban settlement had for the conduct of daily life are questions that have been important to some disciplines although not to others, such as urban economics. In line with their primary concern with the city, political scientists find early cities of interest chiefly in relation to their forms of governance.

For the most part, questions about urban origins have not been explicitly considered as related to the 'base–superstructure' problem although it is certainly an appropriate frame of reference. The contention surrounding urban origins hinges on what is truly the basis of city formation and growth. For some (Childe 1950), the economic base in the form of the emergence of a sufficient surplus is the fundamental prerequisite. Political and religious organization then develops as superstructure on the material base. The argument advanced by some Marxists (among others) that city growth is a function of intercity trade in the regional surpluses appropriated by the cities also ascribes significance to the incipient urban economy; other forms of organization are secondary, derived from conditions pertaining to the base.

Alternative positions regard spheres of activity other than the economic as basic. For Boulding (1963), cities arise when political means are employed to convey food surpluses into authoritarian hands, and other urban activities follow. But this begs the question of how authority can emerge with sufficient capacity to employ 'political means.'

Except recently, and then perhaps only in Western society, religious institutions have played an important rôle in urban life, and their buildings have been focal points in many cities. In the early cities, the ruler could be an authoritarian figure in a political sense *and* a religious leader, even a deity. For Wheatley (1971), the symbolic integrative functions of the early cities were of the first importance. Wheatley (1971, p. 282) cannot accept the economic base as an explanation of urban origins:

Despite the emphasis which has been placed on trade as a primary motivating force in the generation of urban forms, it has not yet been demonstrated clearly and unequivocally first, that a generalized desire for exchange is capable of concentrating political and social power to the extent attested by the archaeological record, or second, that it can bring about the institutionalization of such power.

Somewhat surprisingly, the potential significance of ancient city formation is ignored by theorists of urban society, notably Marx and Weber (Saunders 1981). Urban economists, moreover, have not seen the question as providing matter for their classification of functions as 'basic' and 'nonbasic' (Thompson 1965).

As we pointed out earlier, the base–superstructure question is a dilemma which we should want to avoid, in connection with urban origins as much as with any other urban question. Wheatley (1971, pp. 318–19) hints at recognition of this:

It is doubtful if a single autonomous, causative factor will ever be identified in the nexus of social, economic, and political transformations which resulted in the emergence of urban forms, but one activity does seem in a sense to command a sort of priority . . . This does not mean that religion . . . was a primary causative factor, but rather that it permeated all activities, all institutional change; and afforded a consensual focus for social life.

Whenever possible, we need to turn to studies by the historian of the practical nature of everyday life in the ancient city (e.g. Carcopino 1940). These studies throw light on the relationships between such activities as the production and appropriation of the surplus, trade, the exercise of authority, religion, and ceremony, and the origin and initial growth of cities.

Within the category of urban origins, other questions have been debated. One has to do with the rate of change in urban development, that is evolutionary change (Mumford 1961, Adams 1966) versus urban revolution (Childe 1950). Another is the question of the geographic diffusion of cities (as a settlement form and as an idea) from one source, most likely the Near East or a number of independent cultural hearths (Hammond 1972, Carter 1977), with the latter argument now replacing the conventional wisdom of the former. These issues are ably reviewed by Carter (1977).

Urban form   Urban form can be narrowly conceived as the physical arrangement of structures and open spaces, including streets and other pathways, within some defined area, such as the space enclosed within a

wall that is called a town or city. Urban form then becomes synonymous with urban morphology.

Urban morphology has a distinguished tradition in geography (e.g. Conzen 1960, Whitehand 1981), and also in other fields (e.g. Gutkind 1964–72, Reps 1965). However, much of the work has been confined to a particular national context, and only a few studies (e.g. Dickinson 1961) have explicitly attempted to make comparisons among different countries. Apart from an effort to find the morphological features common to certain conventional regions ('the Islamic city,' for instance), there has been a notable lack of attention to theory.

Vance (1977) and Michael Conzen (1978) have gone some way to extend this literature. For Conzen (1978, p. 134), 'cultural differences of all kinds within and between cities play significant rôles' in the full geographic reality of cities, and cultural context demands a sensitivity not shown by an urban geography concerned with 'general forces' as explanations. He suggests, however, that American cities are less in need of a cultural–geographic analysis than Old World cities because American urban history has been short, and American urban life is dominated by the values of economic Darwinism. This implies a notion of culture that diverges from ours. We understand both duration of urban experience and a particular set of economic mores to be fundamental elements of cultural context that *must* be a part of any morphological analysis. As the urban sociologist Scott Greer (1972, p. 2) says: 'To understand our cities . . . one must know something about the culture and organization of the United States as a whole.'

Vance (1977) is no nearer to sharing our interpretation of culture. His study of urban form and morphogenetic processes does cross national boundaries freely within the somewhat arbitrary framework of 'Western civilization.' However, the emphasis is on technology as a variable and on the city as both place of production and market. Scale and physical process take precedence in explanation, notably in his discussion of suburban morphology (Vance 1977, p. 405), over such matters as social values, attitudes toward land as private property, and homeownership.

Urban form has a broader meaning as 'internal structure' of a city. As such it includes the geographic patterning of activities and social groups within a city or metropolitan area (Palm 1981). Whether studying the unique form of individual cities or generalizing about urban patterns, geographers have been chiefly associated with the description and analysis of urban form. What theory there is of urban form in geography, however, is largely derived from other fields. One is urban sociology, especially the human ecology school of Chicago (Park, Burgess, and others). Another is land economics, which has a longer intellectual lineage than urban economics proper; it runs from Hurd (1903) and Haig (1926) to Alonso (1965) and Muth (1969).

The distribution of activities within a city has almost always been explained by competition for a scarce resource (i.e. urban location with good access) and the importance of the market as almost the only mechanism of allocation. This set of ideas could accommodate the models of the human ecologists, which rested on Darwinian principles. Park and his associates did recognize the importance of cultural factors, in the adjustment to urban life for example, but these factors were placed on a separate analytical level and given less attention than the 'biotic' context (Saunders 1981).

The market perspective has now been challenged because of a growing conviction that the processes of land allocation are increasingly mediated by political institutions and processes. Whether these institutions are subservient to the interests of private capital in capitalist societies or truly reflect autonomous state interests remains a troublesome question. Ley and Mercer (1980) argued for the importance of political mediation in their study of locational conflict in Vancouver (more generally, see Kirby 1982). They found that the social values held by the city government and beliefs in what constituted a 'livable city' influenced and in some cases directed land-use patterns and changes in urban form. Although the stability of these values remains in question, they may be a portent of new value structures (Inglehart 1977, Kirby 1982).

Some of the debates on urban form in urban economics have been technical ones, referring to a received methodology such as regression analysis (Ball 1979). Others have been concerned with the need to relax the basic assumptions used in reducing the city to one-dimensional space and with the consequences of doing so, as in the debate over monocentricity versus polycentricity (Richardson 1976). Ball (1979), in an assessment of urban economics, criticizes the economic theorist for looking for general urban characteristics and for asking questions that imply the existence of a universal city structure. More reductionism is applied both to social relations, converting them into 'technical' or 'policy' problems by limiting them to the city itself (Ball 1979, p. 325), and to the varied social nature of people by inventing a universal economic man (Alonso 1965, p. 1).

The result is that cultural context is ignored by most urban economists. The primacy of the market's rôle in allocating private goods and services is assured. Some commentators (e.g. Lineberry 1980) now discern a 'political economy of the right' that looks to market primacy in the provision of *public* services and the making of social choices, processes which inevitably affect urban form.

In urban sociology, human ecology has foundered and some new modes deny the importance of the urban place (Saunders 1981). It is reduced to a container (like a beaker in a science laboratory) with little impact on the catalysis within. The implications for what Berry and

Kasarda (1977) call contemporary urban ecology are serious. Its shaky theoretical base is made up of social area analysis and human ecology, including spatial models of city structure derived from the Chicago work. Social area analysis never made the internal structure of the city or the urbanization process a central object of enquiry. Neither it nor the human ecology school, with its ecological framework of competition, gave much attention to cultural context.

As urban–ecological analyses were extended to non-American settings, questions of cultural context might well have arisen in connection with factorial structures and urban patterns that differed from those found in the United States. Had their practitioners developed the critical self-consciousness we have urged, these issues would surely have surfaced. But the questions posed were derived from Western, chiefly American, experience in urban research. Not being grounded in indigenous experience, they exemplify for Masotti and Walton (1976, p. 2) the 'parochialism' that appears:

> when researchers venture into 'foreign' settings with a prefabricated set of theoretical and methodological tools which presuppose the order and meaning of events.

While there is good reason to question basic economic assumptions regarding dominance and competition in the context of the United States they are less believable when applied to 'Third World' cities. Human ecology remains, as Hunter (1980) describes it, 'a macrostructural perspective,' although he claims that it can incorporate the case study of everyday urban life at the local scale. The macrostructural perspective is illustrated by the work of Kasarda (1978), but he provides no local case study and says nothing about values, beliefs, or the ordering of social relations. Other than in the mass, people are not his chief concern.

An alternative path in urban ecological analysis was pointed out by Firey (1947), Form (1954), and Willhelm (1962). But neither in human ecology nor in the urban geography that drew upon the work of the Chicago school did the intention of emphasizing symbolism, social structure, and values redirect the basic approach. These were minor modifications, still accepting the structural imperatives of 'competition' and turning to culture only for supplementary explanation.

Other limitations are clear. In urban economics, as in land economics, the rationally calculated self-interest of the individual economic man has never lost importance, and there has been little or no concern with the origins of individual preferences or wants. Even in urban sociology, despite Greer's remark about the need to look at American culture and organization to understand American cities, values and beliefs are usually subsumed under macrosocial processes that are not closely tied to urban

ones. He is correct in charging that human consciousness has been suppressed as an important aspect of human behavior (Greer 1972, p. 3).

The literature on urban form has not resolved the structure–action problem referred to earlier, and in most cases has failed to address it. Spatial models of city form – more broadly, factorial ecology and urban sociology – embody a structural view of human behavior. An action-oriented view of the city, on the other hand, is present in studies that look at the choice of residential sites, residential mobility, and the locational strategies of development and construction firms. These studies characteristically overemphasize individual decision making and do not specify context adequately. We believe that a successful integration of both human agency and structural constraint can be realized, although it is hardly to be found at present.

This alternative perspective has been employed with a measure of success by some American urban historians (Thernstrom 1964, Warner 1968, 1972, Hershberg 1981). To take but one example of this genre, Warner, in *The urban wilderness*, provides:

> a sweeping narrative of urbanization in American history . . . which . . . demonstrated how insights about the structure of cities and the dynamics of urbanization could inform, and yet be informed by, a general cultural analysis of American society (Frisch 1979, p. 375).

The potentials and pitfalls of this and related historical work are reviewed forcefully by Frisch (1979).

Urban systems   Traditional urban geography concerned itself with the 'situation' of the city, chiefly in relation to its region, that is, to the terrain and to the location of other settlements. This interest is transformed in the contemporary theme of urban systems: the city is now a node linked to and interacting with other large nodes, and also acts as the center of a 'functional' or 'nodal' region (Bourne & Simmons 1978). The idea of a hinterland, involving relationships between town and country, persists. Urban and regional economists try to explain the structure of the urban system and the changes in it and its associated set of regions as a response to a pattern of investment decisions, the comparative advantages of places, and exogenous influences, exerted most importantly by commodity and final demand markets (Hansen 1972, 1975a, 1978). Urban historians have focused on the changing relationship between the city and the surrounding region or countryside (Pirenne 1925, Weber 1958), while historical and urban geographers have sought to describe and explain the evolution of urban systems (Pred 1966, Ward 1971, Conzen 1977, 1981).

Urban geographers in particular have wanted to learn the structure of the system and how it operates. System organization, involving the

notion of hierarchy or core–periphery relationships, which imply domi-
nance and exploitation by the core, and the direction and magnitude of
flows have engaged most attention. Regional development is understood
to be intimately linked with the performance of the urban system, and
geographers, economists, and regional planners have joined in studying it
for this reason. Their aim has been to discover ways of reducing regional
inequalities, in particular to stimulate economic growth in lagging
regions; the city is conceived as 'growth pole' (Berry 1973b, Friedmann &
Alonso 1975, Hansen 1975b). City–countryside relationships have been
viewed in two ways. In Christallerian terms, the city is a 'central place'
serving the smaller settlements and dispersed population of the country-
side. Through Marxist lenses, it is dominant and powerful, exerting force
when necessary to appropriate the surplus value generated by the
countryside.

While notions of culture are largely absent from these analyses,
awareness of the need for a culturally informed approach seems to be
growing. Berry (1973b, p. 36) now thinks that the essential motor for
growth in the American urban system is to be found in social rather than
economic dynamics. Basic to these dynamics is a significant element of
American culture, the personal drive for success and achievement that
fosters social and spatial mobility. There is here some intimation of people
sharing in a collective self-portrait and acting upon the values and beliefs it
embodies. Lacking theoretical development, this view is still a minority
one in the study of urban systems (Gilbert 1978).

However, values and beliefs do appear explicitly in the study of
city–country relations. Perhaps the most loudly expressed modern
Anglo-Saxon attitude to the city is that it is loathsome and corrupting,
degrading to the human spirit as an embodiment of the headlong pursuit
of profit. The countryside is morally superior, a place where people are
ennobled through close contact with natural rhythms. Others see this
view of the countryside as highly romantic and quite inaccurate and feel
that the positive virtues of the city have been ignored. Conceding that
'chaos and misery' are a part of life in the new metropolis, they suggest
that out of the struggle of the city there arises 'a new vision of society'
(Williams 1973, p. 231). The experience of urban life is first needed to
demystify social processes before new value systems can emerge. One
illustration of this is the rise of the cooperative movement from its
founding in industrial Rochdale in 19th-century northern England.

Community Power and Urban Government   The closely linked themes of
community power structure and city government seek answers to a
central question: who 'really rules' this place? Sociologists, working in the
community-studies tradition established by the Lynds in the United
States, and political scientists have long argued the question, although

without giving the place itself particular significance. The question of whether the distribution of power is 'élitist' or 'pluralist' has been debated in a large body of work (Lineberry 1980).

The debate led social scientists to look closely into the meaning of power and the way decisions regarding the city are made (Bachrach & Baratz 1970, Lukes 1974, Wrong 1979), but the problems encountered had the effect of reducing interest in this research. There were endless conceptual difficulties and operational dilemmas. How, for example, should one measure 'nondecisions?' There was also a failure to show that differences in the character of community power can explain why the material results of policy making are distributed unevenly. Attention turned to the bureaucracy as studies showed that elected politicians in city hall seem less important than professional administrators who implement policy and often set it (Burnett 1981, p. 203, Crenson 1982). The classic Weberian theme of the rôle and power of bureaucracies has been given a specific new focus, the geographic and distributional consequences of administrative decision making (see the extensive bibliography in Burnett 1981).

Little in this recent work is concerned with cultural context, but such a point of view might raise intriguing questions. As a professional field of public administration grows in the United States in urban planning for example, does an administrative or bureaucratic subculture appear into which the practitioners are socialized (cf. Nachmias & Rosenbloom 1978, 1980)? What value system and set of meanings does such a subculture share? How does an administrative élite relate to community groups that have different subcultures?

Urbanism   Conceptual confusion over 'the urban' as an object of study goes back to different interpretations of 'urbanism.' Wirth's seminal paper (1938) has been a mixed blessing. Wirth conceived urbanism as 'a distinctive mode of human group life' by distinguishing between the ideal types of urban–industrial society and the rural–folk one. But urbanism was then restated as 'that complex of traits which makes up the characteristic mode of life in cities.' Wirth could even claim that it was not the result of 'specific locally or historically conditioned cultural influences.' However important, these were not the 'essential determinants' of the character of a city – clearly, we disagree.

The sociological definition of a city rested on size, population density, permanency of settlement, and social heterogeneity, and a number of propositions were formulated relating these variables to urbanism as manifested in the daily lives of people. The propositions remain unverified, chiefly because a wide range of settlements was found to be arrayed on each variable.

Nevertheless, these relationships remain the central concern in the study of urbanism, although the focus has shifted. Many writers now

simply equate urbanism with urban ways of life. They do not question its
theoretical status, especially the claim that it is *the* urban way of life. What
matters for them are the consequences for individuals of leading urban
lives. Are the behavior and attitudes associated with urban living caused
by urban living? Reviewing both theoretical and empirical work, Fischer
(1976) identified three sociological theories of urbanism.

(a) Determinist theory follows Wirth in making urbanism foster social
     and individual personality disorders in contrast to the rural mode of
     life.
(b) Compositional theory (expounded by such as Herbert Gans and
     Oscar Lewis) denies urbanism any direct effect. Urban–rural differ-
     ences arise from the different composition of the populations
     involved, and the urban experience operates indirectly at most.
(c) Subcultural theory, of which Fischer himself is the leading advocate,
     adopts the compositional perspective but holds that urbanism does
     have direct measurable effects on urban folk.

Cultural characteristics acquire importance in compositional and sub-
cultural theories. For Gans (1962), there can be more than one way of life
in the city, but each is little affected by the surrounding urban environ-
ment. Fischer argues that the urban environment promotes the hetero-
geneity of residents, as groups, fostering subcultures or 'social worlds.'
Structural differentiation arising from the division of labor in large
settlements also fosters subcultures. In contrast to compositional theory,
subcultures are both created and strengthened by urbanism, which is thus
assigned a causal rôle, as it is in determinist theory.

The perhaps simplified conclusion is that people living in cities,
especially large ones, differ in behavior both qualitatively and quantita-
tively from rural and small-town populations, even allowing for the
spread of urbanism beyond the metropolis (Sedalla 1978). Just as the city is
seen negatively, so are the personal consequences of urbanism, which is
held responsible for the individual's detachment, insulation, and excessive
concern with self. Alienation is only a step away. But to what extent are
individualism and privatism features of American society rather than
urbanism per se?

Moving from the question of whether urban life is disintegrative,
Fischer (1982) now wants to understand the different *integrations* of urban
and rural life. But the particularities of historical period continue to
constrain generalizations about the consequences of urbanism for human
behavior, as, even more, does cultural context, ignored by Fischer except
for the notion of American subcultures.

Fischer's framework can accommodate political studies of 'public-
regarding' and 'private-regarding' ethos (Banfield & Wilson 1963). Those
adhering to a particular ethos might represent a subculture, although