Structuralist Marxism, urban sociology and geography: reflections on Urban sociology: critical essays

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Introduction

Urban sociology: critical essays is largely a set of translations of articles on urban development, first published in French in 1968-72, and written by authors adopting a Marxist perspective. Chris Pickvance's collection was one of the first attempts to introduce to an English-language audience a new research tradition that profoundly influenced not just urban sociology but also urban, regional and, more generally, human geography.

At the point in time when this volume was published, geography was a fairly clearly defined discipline: geography was a study of the characteristics of places, in which the ideographic preoccupations of the regional tradition (Figure 1) had temporarily declined in influence. The reasons why lay in the rediscovery and further development of a range of models/theories designed to represent/replicate certain aspects/characteristics of geographical landscapes and, more ambitiously, to identify generative mechanisms (the actions of actors and, depending on the approach, the impact of the circumstances in which they found themselves). This new tradition, which played a vital role in revitalising the discipline and which survives alongside other approaches, had nonetheless two major features that were matters of deep concern for a new generation of researchers and academics. The first was that the new discipline was uncritical of an established national and international social order whose economic, political and cultural legitimacy faced major challenges. The second was that established models were seen as inadequate/insufficient: in some cases models had virtually no explanatory content (gravity and associated principles of least effort were a case in point); in others models were seen as over-emphasising generic principles (indeterminate abstractions) at the expense of the specificity of different types of social order; and in yet others models were seen as essentially ideologies designed to justify a capitalist social order. The objections were in other words ideological and scientific, although these objections also embraced disagreements about the nature of science and the validity of predominantly empiricist theories of knowledge.

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1My choice of this volume derives in part from a brief conversation with Ron Johnston and Roger Lee and most importantly from the fact that it was used as a key text in an urban and regional geography course taught with Tony Fielding and Andrew Sayer at the University of Sussex in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

2Commenting at the 2006 opening of a new Center for Geographical Analysis at Harvard on the 1948 decision to drop geography, the university president, Lawrence H. Summers said: 'Geography is a very different field today, and it is increasingly at the center of a very wide range of intellectual concerns'.

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The quest for theories had already forced geography to engage with other social sciences: the abandonment of the idea derived from an interpretation of Kant's philosophy that geography and history involved the compilation of chorological and chronological empirical information which was subject to conceptual investigation in the systematic sciences required that geographers engage with the other social sciences. At an early stage the engagement with sociology saw the incorporation into geography's research agenda of aspects of ecological theories of urban development. As a result it was quite natural for geographers seeking to reshape their own discipline to pay considerable attention to parallel developments in other disciplines, and, in the case of Marxism, to pay attention to continental Europe, where the Marxist tradition was far stronger than it was in the Anglo-American world.

As for this volume, it deals with three issues: the scientific status of urban sociology (Castells); the economic analysis of land, housing, property and urban development (Lamarche and Lojkine); and the analysis of urban social movements (Castells, Olives and Pickvance). Each of these subjects is of considerable geographical relevance, although I intend to concentrate on the first two.

The scientific status of urban sociology (and geography)

To help make sense of the philosophical and scientific issues involved in establishing the scientific status of a research field, Table 1 distinguishes two main approaches to the
philosophy of social science. The first, essentially naturalistic, approach is entitled explanation. Originally it involved a belief in the existence of a mind-independent realm of nature and the potential existence of one true, complete and justifiable account of that world and its workings. In its strongest version knowledge (justified true belief) involved establishing a verifiable correspondence between the characteristics of this independently existing natural or naturalised social world and the causal relationships (causal laws and the conditions in which they operate) that make it work on the one hand and human accounts of it on the other. The path to knowledge was through science. Science involved a combination of two activities: (1) the identification of empirical regularities (empiricism whether inductive, hypothetico-deductive or deductive-nomological) involving empirical observation and inference from observed facts; and (2) reasoning (intellectual intuition, for example, in the case of Descartes) which enables the mind the escape the confines of experience and identify unobservable forces, such as gravity or deep structures (rationalism). A division emerged in this general approach between empiricists/positivists who think that all knowledge derives ultimately from sense experience alone and structuralists, realists and others that attribute a role to reason, although there are also other differences. A case in point is the question as to whether causal laws are simply regularities or are necessary and universal (Sayer, 2000).

Table 1 Four kinds of social science Source: Hollis, 1994: 19 and 248

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Explanation</th>
<th>Understanding</th>
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<tr>
<td>Holism</td>
<td>I Systems</td>
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<td>Individualism</td>
<td>II Agents</td>
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<td>IV Actors</td>
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The second approach is associated with a rival interpretative or hermeneutic social/human science. This approach rests on the idea that the social world is unlike the natural world. In the social world actions are imbued with meaning: actions are self-conscious, are theoretically-informed and embody purposes, intentions, reasons, emotions, and values. A knowledge of social action therefore requires, it is argued, two things: one is self-understanding and the activity of Verstehen so that one mind can understand what is in the mind of others (identifying what the actor meant); the other is an analysis of the stock of individual and shared (intersubjective) meanings, conventions, symbols and theories and shared rules on which individuals can draw (establishing what actions mean). In this tradition the claim is that meanings do not generate action in the same way as causes generate effects.

The vertical distinction Hollis makes is between holism and methodological individualism. Holistic approaches emphasise the importance of the top-down impact of a social order or its main components considered as wholes/totalities. In some cases (determinism/structuralism) structures are construed as 'abstract systems that determine action and social phenomena without working through practical or cognitive understanding' (Schatzki, 1998). In others structure is assimilated to the grammatical rules that govern speech (grammaticicism) and social structures are seen as socially constructed rules, principles, norms and conventions that act as drivers of social action. 'These rules do not determine action, but structure its possibilities, and do so by being embedded in actors’ practical understandings or cognitive processes' (Schatzki, 1998). At the opposite end of the spectrum lies methodological individualism. In this case all that exists are individuals, their mental states and their actions. Any order that exists is a result...
of the patterns that result from wilful human actions. In some cases (voluntarism) these patterns are considered not to influence human activity. In others (empiricism) they do: 'all phenomena of society are phenomena of human nature, generated by the action of outward circumstances on masses of human beings' (Mill, cited in Hollis, 1994). Clearly there are intermediate positions that combine structure and agency.

Applying this framework to geography and the volume under consideration one can make several points. The first is that regional geography occupied the upper half of this matrix. Its precise position depends on whether it is considered as examining deterministic or possibilistic causal relationships between people and nature, or is considered interpretative (Hartshorne, 1959). Note, however, that the case for interpretation was a special ones related to the uniqueness of geography's objects of study, and a refusal to employ abstractions and distinguish what is general from what is particular (Dunford and Perrons, 1984). The quantitative revolution positioned geography in category II as it embodied universal ideas of individual rationality and empiricist epistemologies. (Modern cultural geography falls mainly in category IV). Althusserian Marxism falls conversely in category I in that it was concerned with structures and systems, and was scientific but anti-empiricist. This anti-empiricist approach was however also associated with ideas concerning the theory-dependence of observation that were also influential in the philosophy of science (Kuhn, 1962; Feyerabend, 1975). Accordingly, it encouraged a move in the direction of relativism (the idea that the order that we perceive in the world is not inherent in the world, but is a product of our minds), and the interpretative tradition (category III), contributing to the current idea in geography that almost anything goes. As Manuel Castells, for example, says in this volume: 'All thought is more or less consciously shaped by a pre-existing theoretico-ideological field ... To deny the need for theoretical definition prior to any concrete research is to adopt a perspective which is narrowly empiricist and thus devoid of any scientific value' (p.83).

The question of the scientific status of urban sociology is dealt with in two papers by Castells entitled Is there an urban sociology? and Theory and ideology in urban sociology, and in the editor's introduction. Just as Marx established a science of society and history, Castells' aim is to identify a science of urban sociology, drawing on Althusserian Marxism. Castells' Althusserian starting point is the claim that a science is distinguished by its possession either of a specific theoretical object (concepts developed to account for a particular aspect of reality) or of a specific real object. A 'science either general or particular which has neither a specific theoretical object nor a specific real object does not exist as a science' (p.60). A discipline that is not a science may still have an institutional existence in which case it produces misknowldge or displaced knowledge. Such activity is not theoretical but ideological.
Castells' conclusions are mixed: urban sociology has neither a theoretical object nor a specific (urban) real object; urban sociology is an ideology that performs a specific functional role in helping to handle problems of social integration and cohesion; this social role remains significant, although the new urban problems requiring treatment concern the management of spatial interdependence (urban planning) and the political management of cities; and yet Castells identifies several areas (several non-urban theoretical and real objects) in relation to which urban sociologists have produced knowledge and that offer opportunities for scientific activity.

Castells identifies three foci of theoretical activity, all of which are rooted in the work of the Chicago School (Park, Burgess and McKenzie, 1925). The first involves two sets of propositions and an associated contribution to the policy arena: (1) the identification of a new cultural system and way of life called urban culture/urbanism; (2) the identification of urbanism as a causal consequence of the city (defined as permanent human settlements that are large, dense and heterogeneous) and urbanization; and (3) a policy concern with social disorganization, integration and cohesion. As far as urban culture is concerned, what was involved was the emergence of new norms, values, attitudes and beliefs in a society characterized by a deep division of labour, impersonal arms-length market relationships, increased role segmentation and social differentiation, increased mobility, a decline in the role of extended families, a diminished sense of community and a competitive ethos, amongst other things. Castells objects strongly to this thesis. (This thesis is in any case flawed in that it fails to acknowledge the emergence of new types of social solidarity in capitalist cities). For Castells the Chicago School model of urbanism is simply the cultural system of industrial capitalist societies: urbanism is the 'cultural expression of [industrialization in general and in particular of] capitalist industrialization, the emergence of the market economy and the process of rationalization of modern society' (pp. 38 and 54)

In contrast to the allusions of sociological writing on urban culture, it is not the cultural system of modernity that is the end point towards which all societies are moving. Capitalism is not 'the end of history' nor indeed is the cultural system of US cities in the 1930s the same as that of the more individualized risk societies of the contemporary era of globalization (Beck, 1992). As a result urban culture cannot be a specific theoretical object for urban sociology. Instead it is 'an ideology of modernity ethnocentrically identified with the crystallization of the social forms of liberal capitalism' (p.68). As for the policy arena, what emerges is recognition of the fact that urban sociology restricts itself to the transition from traditional folk to modern capitalist societies and integration into the culture of capitalist industrialization.

Wirth's attempt to make the city an independent variable (pp. 36-40) and to associate urbanism with the size, density and heterogeneity of the population of a settlement lacks theoretical coherence: 'it can hardly be disputed that social organization and cultural system depend on something other than the number and diversity of individuals who constitute the society' (p.68). These characteristics 'must be incorporated into the technico-social structure underlying the organization of any society .... Transformations in the technico-social base of society lead both
to new types of social relations and a new form of spatial organization. The theoretical coherence of the process cannot be discovered by inter-relating the elements which coexist on the surface of reality, but only by establishing relations between structural elements through which this surface is organised' (pp. 68-9). For geographers however Castells will be considered as going too far in arguing that ‘as soon as the urban context broken down even into such crude categories as social class, age or interests ... processes which seemed to be peculiar to particular urban areas turn out to be determined by other factors. (p. 40). For geographers the way in which a society is spatially structured is a source of areal differentiation. Figure 2 captures some of these relationships: urbanism/urban culture is a result of a particular social structure in part mediated through a spatial form that it itself also creates,

![Figure 2 Urban culture and urban structures are a result of a specific social order](image)

The second research theme is rooted in Burgess's account of the impact on the organization of geographical space of economic development and social change by means of his concentric zone theory. In this case the city is treated as a dependent variable (pp. 40-3). This research demonstrates the dependence of a city and its evolution on the structure and transformations of a social order. Castells claims that although the organization of space is a real object whose articulation with other material aspects of social organization warrants exploration, it does not lead to a specific theoretical field. 'Where Burgess errs is in (implicitly) presenting as a universal feature a social process which is found only under particular conditions ... social heterogeneity, a commercial industrial city, private property, equally available transport throughout the city, cheap land available on the periphery of the agglomeration and location governed only by the rules of the market' (pp. 40-1). What are involved are not universal ecological mechanisms but mechanisms characteristic of a particular social order. Moreover the society-space relation is a dialectical one in 'which social action shapes a context and is in turn influenced by the pre-existing forms' (p. 42). All these ideas were strongly reflected in subsequent geographical research including the idea that there is a dialectical relationship between social processes and spatial organization in which social action creates an environment and is in turn shaped by the already-existing spatial forms which it has helped create and which can impose themselves as, in Park's words, 'a crude external fact'.

The third research theme is the deployment of the 'organic analogy of Malinowskian functionalism' which treats the city as a self-adjusting ecological complex, ultimately comprising environment, population, technology and social organization. The ecological approach, Castells concludes, affords not a specific urban theoretical object but a general theory of society.
In the first paper Castells also pays attention to recent French urban sociological research and Remy's (1966) volume on urban economics. The sociological research includes in depth observation and research seeking to identify regularities. In this section Castells makes an important point that needs to be made more forcefully to contemporary social scientists when he says that 'it is in no way inconsistent to use statistical techniques to verify the conclusions of 'qualitative' studies (p. 52). The main feature of this section is however the repeated criticism of the French research (notwithstanding its qualities, which in the case of Coing's famous study of urban renewal in the 13th arrondissement of Paris, for example, are considerable) for the absence of a specific theoretical framework: 'in the absence of specific theoretical framework, it is impossible to link socioeconomic categories and spatial behaviour ' (p. 46); 'the value of observation of this type depends on its being made within a theoretical system ... [dealing with] the structures of social action (p. 48); 'the descriptive character of the study and the restriction of the analysis to the manifest level rules out any possibility of verifying the initial hypothesis' (p. 49); 'studies in which demographic and urban changes ... are linked to the dates at which factories opened, local elections took place, etc. .... tell us strictly nothing ... real research starts afterwards .... In what way does a particular social structure contribute to the creation of the area concerned? To answer this question it is not enough to describe particular events: one must first have a theory of the creation of space which cannot be a social history of the space' (pp. 49-50); and 'even a field study must start from a clearly-defined theoretical framework and then go on to derive indicators, provide relevant evidence ..., and establish a logical link between observations and hypotheses' (p. 52).

Once the quest for the theoretical distinctiveness of urban sociology fails, Castells turns to the question as to whether urban sociology possesses a specific real object. The answer is that it does not (although Pickvance insists that Castells overlooks some areas such as the sociology of community). The reasons why are connected with the difficulties of defining urban areas, the problems associated with the rural-urban distinction and the non-validity of the confinement of a concept of urban culture to urban areas.

And yet two areas of reality studied in the urban sociological literature nonetheless remain for further sociological research. The first is relationships of space and society. The second is collective consumption. Collective consumption embraces housing, recreation facilities, and a range of collective urban services, and is an element of the reproduction of labour power, while a city is a 'a residential unit of labour power' (p. 148) defined by its commuting field. Castells makes a number of distinctions. First, he identifies three analytical approaches dealing respectively with the production of social forms, the functioning of social systems and the structure of semantic fields. Second, he distinguishes analyses of structures and actors. Third, he identifies three levels (individual, group and global system) at which the specific effects of the totality of the structures of a social formation are examined.

In these articles Castells confines further attention to the 'sociology of the production of space and of the social forms of collective consumption' (p. 77). Analysis of spatial structures involves an analysis of the way in which core elements of the social structure are spatially articulated (Table 2). For Castells a society is composed of several modes of production of which one is dominant. A mode of production is a combination of several systems of practices: economic, political and ideological. In his framework of analysis, Castells identified four
concrete spatial expressions (P, C, E and M) of the fundamental elements of the (relatively autonomous) economic, political and ideological systems and the relations that organise them. In the case of the economic system for example the elements are the factors of production (labourer, the means of production, and the non-labourer who appropriates surplus labour) and the relations between them (in a capitalist mode of production) are relations of property (the owner appropriates the product) and control (the owner organizes and controls the process of work). In The Urban question (Castells, 1977) the framework was extended to include I, M and S.

Table 2. Social practices and spatial organization (elaborated from Castells, 1977: 125-7, and Althusser and Balibar, 1970: 212-16)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instances, levels or systems of practices of social structure</th>
<th>Relations</th>
<th>Spatial expression</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Economic system</td>
<td>γ Property (appropriation of product)</td>
<td>γ P Production : ensemble of activities producing goods, services and information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>γ Real appropriation (technical labour process)</td>
<td>γ C Consumption : ensemble of activities relating to individual and collective consumption and reproduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>γ E Circulation and exchange</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politico-institutional system</td>
<td>γ Domination-regulation</td>
<td>γ I Institutional segmentation of space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>γ Integration-repression</td>
<td>γ M Administration and management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideological system</td>
<td>γ Rationalisation and legitimization of particular interests as expression of general interest</td>
<td>γ S Symbolic space (signs, signifiers, signifieds) : urban cultural forms as expressions of ideologies and ideological practices</td>
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Castells approach was strongly influenced by structuralist thought. This approach had negative and positive features. On the negative side it was thought to downplay the role of social action. Note however that Castells himself insisted that every social order is characterised by social conflicts and struggles. Indeed, a substantial contribution of this volume was to the initial study
of urban social movements. On the positive side it is clear that an explanation of the characteristics of particular places involves a synthesis of a multiplicity of practices including economic practices which involve a set of relationships between people and their environment. A further advantage was that it afforded a common set/parallel sets of theoretical ideas (the concept of a system and of structures) that helped reduce the degree of fragmentation of geography just as it had reduced the degree of fragmentation in other fields (comparative linguistics and comparative ethnology).

A structuralist approach involves the identification of the elements of a system and their inter-relations/the rules governing the ways in which the elements can be put together without regard to any specific content. Any object is interpreted as a product of a combination of structural elements within a system. Modern structuralism originated in the study of language where it proved remarkably successful. In this field the elements of the system are words (or the speech sounds and sign elements of which they are made up), and the rules include the grammar governing the way words can be put together. As a system of language has the function of signification/meaning and communication, a language is also system of signs. As a result expression elements (signifiers) such as sounds, sound images and words cannot be identified independently of their content, meaning or the concept to which they refer (signified). Note that a language is a system of interdependent elements (a whole) in which the value of one element depends upon the simultaneous presence of the others. A signifier considered on its own has a relation with its signified. In a system it has multiple relations with other signifiers of which the most important is the relation of difference: a signifier has a meaning as a result not of its association with a particular signified but of its difference from all the other signifiers. This idea of difference is founded on the idea of binary opposites: finding out what a word or sign is not involves comparing it to some other word or sign. In addition a language also has a creative role whose analysis resulted in a distinction between surface structures and deep structures (Chomsky's, 1966 generative grammar) rooted in the working of the human mind rather than in sense perception (although this conclusion was derived from painstaking observation and analysis).

Out of this literature emerged three ideas: (1) that systems of language have an underlying synchronic structure; (2) that this structure can be studied independently of its socio-historical context and the consciousness of actors; and (3) that this structure governs diachronic/historical and geographical practices without the awareness of the actors. The next step was Levi-Strauss' extension of the concepts of order and the methods of structural linguistics to anthropology. (As far as methods are concerned the idea was that structural characteristics reveal themselves only through examination of differences among customs, myths, kinship systems and so on). At the root of this extension was the idea that cultural phenomena are socially constructed, are frequently immaterial, are associated with meanings/symbolic values and can be considered as performing the function of communication, permitting analysis with a language model. Clearly there are similarities (objects of study that are meaningful) and radical dissimilarities with the interpretative tradition identified in Table 1.

In the 1960s these ideas were extended to the study of social and political phenomena to which a communication/language model was not applicable. A case in point was Althusserian
Marxism. Other extensions were into the fields of literary and cultural studies (Roland Barthes), psychoanalysis (Jacques Lacan), and intellectual history (Michel Foucault). Castells' aim was to extend the Althusserian variant of this type of approach to urban sociology. Through his work, structuralist Marxism came also to have a significant impact in the field of geography. (An early example was Massey and Catalano, 1978). As in the case of the approaches in other disciplines, the main characteristics of much of this work were four in number: (1) the identification of abstract structures that underlay the surface appearances of social life (putting them into opposition to empiricism/positivism); (2) an emphasis on the fact that social phenomena are parts of interdependent systems; (3) a de-emphasis of the role of history; and (4) a rejection of the idea that the social world derives from the activities of human agents (placing them in opposition to humanism).

The rejection of humanism (and methodological individualism) did not involve the exclusion of actors. One reason why is that the fundamental elements of a mode of production are defined as a set of practices (economic, political, ideological and theoretical). As a result actors play a prominent role, although actors were seen as the occupants of positions established by structures (support-agents, in Castells words). What was ruled out was the identification of 'the production of forms with their origin in action, ... acceptance of the notion of actor subjects, constructing their history in terms of their own values and aims ... [and acceptance of] the existence of primary essences, not deduced from social structures (pp. 77-8). In the Althusserian variant moreover actors were far from powerless (confined to re-arranging the seats on the deck) not least as what was developed was an account of particular types of society rather than a generic account of all societies. As a result Castells could define social movements as movements that produce 'a qualitatively new effect on the social structure' and urban social movements as movements whose development tends objectively towards the structural transformation of the urban system or towards a substantial change in the balance of forces within the political system as a whole' (pp. 151, 155). Indeed on page 155 Castells approvingly paraphrases Marx's (1851/1973: 146) famous statement that 'Men make their own history, but not of their own free will; not under circumstances they themselves have chosen, but under given and inherited circumstances with which they are directly confronted'

In spite of the fact that the structuralist approach was more complex than it was sometimes considered, the greatest impact of these ideas in geography perhaps came as these structuralist theses were explicitly qualified in two ways. First, more attention was paid to history and to the ways in which social structures change over time (challenging the primacy of synchrony vis-à-vis diachrony). Second, actors were granted a more significant role, even in the work of former structuralists (Castells, 1983). Although social life is governed by structures (material causality), much greater prominence was given to action (ideal causality) (Dunford and Perrons, 1984). These structures are moreover not time- and space-invariant. The structures that govern action are the socially-mediated natural and socially-constructed rules, institutions and practical knowledge that are drawn on by, provide a context for and are reproduced through action.

**Theories of capitalist urbanization**

The two chapters on the economic characteristics and drivers of capitalist urbanization do not draw on structuralist ideas. Instead these chapters draw directly on Marx's own account of the
dynamics of capitalist economies and, in the case of Lojkine, on the French Communist Party variant of the theory of state monopoly capitalism. In contrast to neoclassical theories which concentrate on the allocation of a fixed volume of resources Marxist economics concentrates on accumulation, growth and distribution: as a result these essays offer a distinct theoretical account of issues that were in some cases also dealt with in the quantitative tradition in geography and in urban economics.

For Lamarche and Lojkine capitalist cities (concentrations of people, instruments of production, capital, pleasures and needs) (p. 123) are a result of the development and the spatial concentration/social combination (p. 135) of the (individual and general) means of production and reproduction of capitalist economies. (Indeed Lojkine argues that spatial concentration is itself a general condition of production alongside the means of communication and transport, identified by Marx, and collective means of consumption). More specifically, cities result from the development and spatial concentration not just of the means of production (industrial capital), means of circulation (commercial capital) and means for the mobilization of financial resources (financial capital) but also, in the case of Lojkine, collective means of consumption (expenses' capital) and, in the case of Lamarche, property developments (property capital).

For Marx, a specialized commercial capital and financial capital drives down the costs of circulation and finance (reducing the deductions they make from the profits of industrial capital and speeding up capital turnover and re-investment). For Lamarche, a specialized property capital reduces the indirect circulation costs deriving from the distance separating commercial, financial and administrative activities agents, and organizes space in ways that increase synergies amongst them (co-locating retail outlets with office developments, for example). Its role is to plan and equip space. Its mode of operation involves the planning, purchase, letting and sale of property developments. And its income derives from rents and changes in the value of land. The rents paid (and the value of purchased and sold developments) include a cost of construction and finance element and a ground rent element. Ground rent itself comprises: differential rent I which derives from a development's location relative to amenities that result from other private and public investments (schools, open space, transport networks, etc.); differential rent II which derives from location relative to other amenities/users internalized within the development itself; and absolute rent which results from withholding land from the market for profitability to rise as a result of the development of the city (p. 108). The drive to raise rent-derived income explains why developers choose areas with good situational advantages, high-rise developments that maximize the mass of differential rent I, the complementarities that generate differential rent II, and large developments that internalize situational advantages. To these outcomes can be added the segregation of uses that do not generate rent-raising complementarities, investment priorities for in particular commercial development and high-income accommodation and the decay of areas awaiting anticipated future increases in land values. The actual outcome will of course depend on the impact of other

4The aim of Lamarche is to show that what are called urban problems (insufficient low-income housing, substandard housing and compulsory purchase of dwellings of low-income groups) are a consequence ‘of the capitalist mode of production, which requires a spatial organization which facilitates the circulation of capital, commodities, information, etc.’ (p. 86).
mechanisms excluded from this analysis and on the ways in which these mechanisms are institutionally mediated.

The chapter by Lojkine puts Lamarche’s approach into a wider analytical framework. Lojkine agrees that urbanization is a source of the economic dynamism of capitalist economies. Capitalist economies are however associated with a set of contradictions that place limits on accumulation and the ‘rational, socialized planning of urban development’ (p. 128). The existence of these contradictions necessitates the economic intervention of the state. (A similar set of ideas could be derived from welfare economics where market failures can be seen as eliciting state action). For Lojkine, however, state intervention accentuates/deepens/exacerbates the underlying contradictions.

The starting point is the idea that capitalist urbanization has a positive impact on productivity and profitability: increases in productivity stem not just from innovation, division of labour and mechanization/automation in workplaces but also from two other developments. The first is the expansion of the general conditions of production and reproduction (commercial and financial capital, means of communication and transport and means of individual and collective consumption (which include collective housing, health and cultural facilities, education services and public open space) required for the extended reproduction of labour power and of capitalist social relations). (More recent endogenous growth theory and new geographical economics captures a part of this emphasis on the reproduction of labour power through its emphasis on investments in human capital). The second is their spatial concentration (which permits greater interaction/co-operation and the realization of agglomeration economies). As a result cities are closely associated with the division of labour within society rather than simply with the division of labour within the enterprise (p. 124).

The second main point that Lojkine makes is that the relationship between urbanisation and capitalism is a contradictory one: as well as encouraging productivity growth and urban agglomeration, capitalism establishes a ‘triple limit on any rational, socialized planning of urban development’ (p. 128). As every investment in constant capital that increases productivity also raises the organic composition of capital and exercises downward pressure on the rate of profit, it also serves to check accumulation and urban development. The first limit is therefore that capital expenditure on means of consumption (expenses capital) increases the mass of capital invested, that investments in this domain are unproductive/completely devalorised (creating no new value), and that the character of the use values they create (collective, durable and indivisible) creates a situation in which the share of surplus value appropriated is very small. As profitability is limited, supply depends on state provision (which itself occurs only in response to class struggles). The second and third limits derive from the fact that co-operation is contradicted by two factors. The first is the anarchy of competition. Competitive mechanisms that regulate the social division of labour result in what neoclassicists would call market failures including an underdevelopment of ill-equipped areas and congestion/overdevelopment of well-equipped areas at regional and intra-urban scales. The second is private land ownership (which remains fragmented in spite of increasing concentration of ownership in the hands of international financial groups), and the appropriation of ground rent (which is deducted from profits).
To help resolve these contradictions and to manage/regulate the spontaneous tendencies of capitalist development, the state steps in. The outcomes include: public financing of the general conditions of production in the most developed capitalist countries (p. 140); the planning and co-ordination of urban development; and the assembly of development land and land taxation. As for the state itself, it is considered to be 'a condensed reflection of class struggle' (p. 140) opening the way to the analysis of social movements in the final part of this volume. For Lojkine state actions partially resolve the immediate difficulties that they are designed to handle, yet carry the contradictions between the necessities of urban socialization and necessities of capitalist industrialization to a new level. A consequence is 'an extended reproduction of urban conflict' (p.145).

Conclusions

The research tradition whose roots lay in part in the reception of this French urban research had a profound impact on geography and geographers. Although few of the participants in this movement still subscribe to many of the specific claims made in this early work, a number of its main themes survive in not insignificant quarters. One is the defence of science in the face of post-modern scepticism and hermeneutic relativism: it requires that one recognise that even if observation is theory-dependent, theories can be revised in the light of assessments of their validity and that at the end of the day 'the correct opinion is the one that conforms to that which exists' (Aristotle, cited in Rescher, 131). Another is the idea that areal differentiation should be analysed in terms of the reciprocal interaction of a social order and its inherited natural and humanly-created environment and, in some cases, the view that Marxism affords a particularly powerful theory of modern societies.

At the same time contemporary geographers have lost sight of some positive features of this research. One is a concern with the identity and coherence of a field of study. In 1968 Castells argued that 'the expansion of urban sociology in France coincides with its almost total disappearance as a distinct field in Anglo-Saxon research, due ... to the fragmentation of urban sociology into a variety of separate fields of study' (p.33). Although he paid too little attention to the institutional determinants of the reproduction of disciplines, the idea that there should be some degree of agreement on a discipline's object of study and core theories remains important (see Johnston, 2005). A second is the desire to tackle major macro-social issues which has declined in importance as attention has focused more on small-case qualitative issues. A third relates to the importance of analytical ideas and theories. Analytical ideas are often found wanting, yet their use is the only way to avoid naive description. In this volume Lojkine made some quite strong claims that in the end proved questionable. As he argued, the development and spatial concentration of the means of collective consumption include are vital aspects of contemporary urbanization, although the way in which he characterised them is questionable in a number of respects. More questionable was his expectation that collective modes of provision would increase in relative importance. The claim that 'the social needs created by the development of cooperation are increasingly leading to a shattering of [liberal] framework[s]' (p.122) does not square with the growth of private provision. And if the idea that 'housing ... is ... increasingly hard to dissociate from the urban environment (p. 123) explains gated communities it does so for reasons relating to a desire to reverse the relationship Lojkine
identified. More generally, the ascent of neo-liberalism raises a question-mark over the idea that collective goods are 'foreign to capitalist profitability while necessary to the overall reproduction of capitalist social formations' (p. 133). And yet this approach did at least have the merit of asking interesting analytical questions that scarcely figure in contemporary geography and which could be handled through a further refinement of aspects of the approaches on which French writers embarked nearly forty years ago.

References

Rescher, Nicholas (1987) Scientific realism. Dordrecht : Reidel,