

STUDY QUESTIONS

- What were some differences between the rural and urban ways of life?
- Explain some examples to show that religious codes were the earliest forms of urban planning.
- What were some of the earliest cities and what were some structural features and innovations that allowed them to prosper?
- Why was it necessary for cities to exercise power over their extended space? How did they do it?
- Name one early city and describe how it was built using symbolic codes.
- What is one difference between classical and medieval cities?
- According to Max Weber, what were some necessary elements of medieval cities?
- Name some features of the industrial city that differed from the medieval one.
- How are these same differences reflected in the difference between feudalism and capitalism as economic systems? How does this relate to Lefebvre's theory of urban space?
- Name some early urban sociologists and describe some of their main ideas.
- Why was there a "Chicago School" and what was its view of the city and city growth?
- Describe and contrast the approaches of Simmel and Wirth.
- What were some of the ideas promoted by Park, Burgess, and McKenzie as "Human Ecology?"
- How did the Chicago School neglect the role of capitalism and the role of government in urban development? That is, use the sociospatial perspective to critique them.

CONTEMPORARY
URBAN SOCIOLOGY

We began the book discussing several conceptual changes that are the hallmark of the new urban sociology. These include a shift to a global perspective on capitalism and the metropolis; the inclusion of factors such as class exploitation, racism, and gender, in the analysis of metropolitan development; integrating economic, political, and cultural factors into spatial analysis, paying special attention to the structural, pull factors of real estate investment and government intervention; and shifting our unit of analysis from just the city to the multi-centered metropolitan region (MCMR). This makes up what we call the *sociospatial* approach.

In addition to a change in perspective, the new urban sociology also involves important theoretical innovations in the way human environments are analyzed. The interesting theoretical developments began in the 1970s. Numerous writers in sociology, geography, and urban studies challenged the orthodox ideas of urbanization. Scholars working outside of the United States have been responsible for much of this theoretical work. Only recently has US urban sociology incorporated new theoretical insights into its core research questions. Regardless of the international scope and intellectual diversity, though, most of the new approaches have their origin in the application to city environments of Max Weber's, Karl Marx's, and Friedrich Engels's writings regarding the analysis of "political economy" and the city. While this perspective represents a considerable advance over those discussed in the previous chapter, mainly because the ecological perspective simply ignores the important role of economic and political interests, racism, inequality, as well as its inability to successfully explain change, it has its own limitations. Sociologists have tried to tailor the new theoretical ideas to the needs of their discipline. Thus, this chapter situates the sociospatial approach in its intellectual history as it unpacks the aspects of political economy and culture involved in the production of settlement space.

POLITICAL ECONOMY AND THE CITY: CLASSIC APPROACHES

Marx, Weber, and Engels

The classical sociologists Karl Marx and Max Weber turned to historical analysis to explore their ideas regarding the general laws of social development. Both understood that societies were organized around integrated systems of economics, politics, and culture. Marx emphasized the dominance of economic considerations in analysis, while Weber sought to show how cultural and political factors also affected individual behavior and social history along with economic activity. The two approaches served to complement each other.

Although Marx wrote extensively about the new social classes (proletariat and bourgeoisie) created by industrial capitalism, he did not believe there were only two social class groups, as is commonly thought. In his analysis of the failure of the 1848 revolution in France, Marx identified seven social class groups and discussed why each group supported (or opposed) a new government. Industrial workers and small shopkeepers in the cities might support the revolution, for example, because their economic and political interests would benefit from a change in the government, whereas farmers in the countryside and large merchants in the cities might oppose it because their economic and social interests were dependent on maintaining the current government (Marx, n.d.). In this sense, Marx's view of social classes may be seen as a precursor to modern-day thinking about many interest groups competing within the political arena, that is the current trend of the fractionalized or tribal polity.

Marx also recognized that the interests of capital and labor are not one and the same—a radical departure from the economic theory of his time, and the current liberal idea that “a rising tide lifts all boats.” Because profit results from the difference between the costs of production (raw material, machinery, and labor) and the price for which a commodity can be sold in the market, capitalist producers will look for any way possible to reduce the costs of production (Marx, 1967 [1867]). Marx's analysis is as relevant for neoliberal capitalism of the present day as it was for the industrial capitalism of his time. For example, in the last several decades, we have seen the displacement of workers by automation, a dramatic increase in immigration, and the movement of manufacturing to countries in the developing world. We are currently witnessing capital investment into Artificial Intelligence (AI) and machine learning that is threatening to displace white-collar workers, including lawyers who review legal documents and stock market traders working on Wall Street. All of these are the consequence of corporations seeking to lower their labor costs, and all are having a tremendous impact on the people and the built environment of urban and suburban settlement space across the world.

Marx wrote very little about the city in his classic *Capital* (Marx, 1967 [1867]; originally published in 1867), while Weber included some passages about the nature of the city in a much larger text, *Economy and Society* (Weber, 1968 [1880s]; originally published in separate pieces beginning in the 1880s). For Marx, the early history of capitalism was a struggle between social relations located within urban areas and those situated in the countryside within feudal manors. For Weber, the city developed because of its political powers—in particular, the independence of city residents and their local government from feudal relations of authority. In both cases, Marx and Weber showed how modes of social organization, such as feudalism or capitalism, work through a form of space—the city—and social relations situated within that spatial form. It is this perspective that informs the approach of political economy to settlement space.

Weber argued that during the feudal period in the European Middle Ages, traders and craftspeople set up towns and bargained for protection from the king against the activities of local feudal lords. In these towns, capitalism began to thrive through trade in goods and eventually overtook the feudal economy. Thus, as capitalism became the dominant economic force in Europe, it also created the modern city. Our sociospatial perspective makes these kinds of arguments, namely, the need to connect larger societal processes, such as stages in political economy and cultural shifts in social relations, to modifications in the urban landscape and the shape of settlement space.

While Marx and Weber had comparatively little to say about the industrial city of capitalism, Friedrich Engels devoted some time to the topic. We already mentioned his study of the working-class situation in nineteenth-century England and his field observations of the “great towns,” Manchester in particular. For Engels, the large industrial city was the best place to study the general aspects of capitalism as a social system, just as the factory was the best place to study the specific details of the relationship between capital and labor. Engels picked the city of Manchester because its factories and worker housing were built up as industrial capitalism developed in England, as opposed to other cities, such as London, which had a longer history that included global trade and banking.

Engels observed several aspects of capitalism at work within the urban space. First, he noted that capitalism had a “double tendency” of concentration. It concentrated capital investment, or money, and also workers. This centralizing process made industrial production easier because of the large scale and close proximity of money and people. Second, Engels noticed that as Manchester developed, investment moved away from the old center and extended farther out to the periphery. Unlike Burgess, but very much like Harris and Ullman and the sociospatial approach, Engels pictured growth as a multiplication of centers. For him this followed no particular plan, and he observed that capitalism unregulated by government planning produced a spatial chaos of multiplying minicenters.

Third, among his other important observations Engels focused on the social problems created by the breakdown of traditional society and the operation of capitalism. In Manchester, he noticed examples of extreme poverty and deprivation: homelessness, orphan beggars, prostitution, alcoholism, and violence. For him this misery was the result of exploitation at the place of work, which went largely unseen in the factory itself, along with the failure of capitalism to provide adequate housing for everyone. He thus connected conditions in the workplace with those in the living space, or what Marxists call the *extended conditions* of capital accumulation and the process that Lefebvre conceptualizes as the "reproduction of the relations of production," which involve the reproduction of social relations that ensure the continued use of the working class across the generations. For example, if problems such as poverty and homelessness become too severe, they can threaten the ability of working-class families to produce new generations of workers. This would then threaten the future of the capitalist system. Hence, neighborhood or living-space relations and the quality of daily life are just as important to the survival of capitalism as are relations at the place of work.

In addition to the problems of poverty, Engels observed that the city of Manchester was a segregated space. Rich and poor lived in segregated neighborhoods. Engels concluded that capitalism produces this spatial isolation of the classes. The sum total of all these social problems is described by the term *uneven development*, which conveys both the disparity between rich and poor and their segregation in space as a direct product of the way the system of capitalism operates in society and space.

Uneven Development

Urban and suburban settlement spaces grow and develop because of capital investment. The ebb and flow of money determines community well-being. Not only are jobs created, but economic activity also generates tax revenue. The latter is used partly by local government to fund public projects that improve the quality of community life. But spending, both public and private, is not uniformly distributed across metropolitan space. Some places receive much more investment than others. Even within cities there are great differences between those sections that are beehives of economic activity and those that seem scarcely touched by commerce and industry. Furthermore, on the national level, money from federal taxation is often channeled unequally among regions with some areas getting more financial resources than others despite all places possessing a tax burden. As we shall see in a subsequent chapter, this national uneven development helps explain the growth of the Sun Belt in the US.

Within any given business, there are also great disparities between workers who are well paid and those who receive the minimum salary. Wages are carried

home to neighborhoods, and a significant portion is spent in the local area. Hence, the well-being of a place depends not only on the amount of investment it can attract but also on the wealth of its residents.

In the metropolitan region, the variation in the affluence of particular places is called *uneven development*. It is a characteristic of our type of society with its economic system of capitalism. People with money seek to invest in places and enterprises that will bring them the highest rate of return. Profit drives the capitalist system. But this profit making is usually expected to occur in a short time period and with the largest return possible. Consequently, investors look carefully at opportunities and always try to switch to places where money will achieve its greatest return. This process also causes uneven development. As capital becomes increasingly mobile, it can shift money around more easily with corresponding effects on the quality of life. At present, capital is more mobile than ever before and has the ability to move operations from one country or region to another in search of the lowest costs or highest profit margins. This process, of course, can have immense consequences for individual places. Rapid shifts in the location of capital investment, both in business and banking, are characteristic of the currently dominant Global Capitalist System.

Silicon Valley, the high-tech showcase of California, illustrates this pattern. In the 1960s, when the printed circuit industry was first expanding, all operations, including manufacturing, research and development, and marketing, were located within Silicon Valley. By the late 1960s, one of the leading manufacturers, Fairchild, transferred its manufacturing operations to plants in Mexico, leaving thousands of US workers jobless. Soon after, other electronic assembly plants followed Fairchild's lead, and by the 1970s most of the manufacturing operations of Silicon Valley had been transferred to other countries with cheaper labor. By that time, too, owners of corporations had discovered that operating in Mexico was not as cheap as production in the Orient. Hence, many plants were shut down and work was transferred to Hong Kong, South Korea, and Singapore, then to Malaysia and Indonesia, and then to Sri Lanka and China. However, in 1970, Xerox, known primarily for manufacturing copier machines for businesses and government offices, set up an experimental research center in Palo Alto called Xerox Parc. Palo Alto was situated by Stanford University and the Hewlett Packard Campus, which at that time was known for making oscilloscopes and radar technology for the military, and benefited from a concentration of engineers and government spending. Xerox Parc, which invented Ethernet computing and digital interfaces, attracted talent from across the United States. The people who founded companies such as Apple, Microsoft, Oracle, and Atari, not only got their start there, but many of them remained. Over the course of the 1980s and especially during the tech boom of the late 1990s, Silicon Valley economy became the global mecca of high-tech computer engineers, coders, and venture capitalists, and its current

estimated net worth is over \$3 trillion. Thus, the area went from boom, to bust, and then boom again according to the global flow of capital.

Silicon Valley's "success" story is not the norm in the United States. The Rust Belt and old factory towns in the midwest have not experienced an influx of capital, nor have they ridden the tech wave to prosperity. One of the greatest "what if" questions is what would have happened if Xerox built its experimental research center in its corporate home town of Rochester, New York? As a result of the inherent desire not to invest in places that are already depressed and offer little incentive for profit, uneven development usually becomes more acute over time. This pattern increases the polarization between those places that are poor and those that are thriving. But places are made of people, so the spatial disparities result in different life chances for metropolitan residents. As Engels observed in Manchester, inequities create a problem of social justice as the less affluent members of the working class find it difficult to raise families that will acquire a reasonable, productive status in society. Now these disparities in life chances are writ large across the US, as we shall discuss in a subsequent chapter on inequality.

Metropolitan areas today are besieged by the uneven nature of capitalist development. Because of uneven development, society degenerates into a two-tiered structure, with a select group of people and places that are thriving amid a sea of poverty. Writers in the industrial towns of England also observed this clash between rich and poor in the city over a hundred years ago. What is new and different today is the global reach of such uneven development and the way in which the cyclical nature of growth affects people and places across the world. The only remedy to alleviate poverty comes from the US government in the form of its safety net of programs that tries to prop up the bottom stratum. Unemployment insurance, social welfare, and job training are but a few of the ways government agencies use tax revenues to fight the inherent tendency of capitalist activities to produce uneven development. Over the years, however, despite periods of prosperity, the problems of the poor have been little affected by government programs—the majority of which have been cut or privatized (Hohle, 2018; Jencks, 1992). New public policy that addresses the social and spatial aspects of uneven development is sorely needed.

THE REVIVAL OF URBAN POLITICAL ECONOMY: HENRI LEFEBVRE

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Marxist tradition was revived in social science. Urban analysis was affected minimally at first in the United States, but it was greatly affected in France by the philosopher/sociologist Henri Lefebvre. Lefebvre is without question the seminal source of new thinking on the city from

a critical and Marxian perspective (Lefebvre, 1991). His accomplishments can be broken down into four areas:

1. He went back to the work of Marx and Engels on the city and extracted from their writing an urban political economy. That is, Lefebvre showed how it was possible to use economic categories such as capital investment, profit, rent, wages, class exploitation, and uneven development in the analysis of cities. In effect, he argued that the city development process was as much a product of the capitalist system as anything else—the production of shoes, for example. The same operation of the economy applies in both cases.
2. Lefebvre showed how Karl Marx's work on the city was limited. He introduced the idea of the circuits of capital, particularly the notion that real estate is a separate circuit of capital. For example, we often think of economic activity as involving the use of money by an investor of capital, the hiring of workers, their production of products in a factory, and the selling of the goods in a market for a profit, which can then be used for more investment. Automobile production would be a good example of this circuit. Lefebvre called all such industrial activity the "primary circuit of capital." Much of the wealth created in a capitalist society is of this type. But for Lefebvre there was a "second circuit of capital" of real estate investment. For example, the investor in land chooses a piece of property and buys it. The land is either held on to for speculative reasons, or it is developed for some other use, such as for housing, and is then sold in the special market for land: the real estate market. The circuit is completed when the investor takes that profit and reinvests it in more land-based projects. Lefebvre argued that the second circuit of capital is almost always attractive as investment because there is usually money to be made in real estate. As we have seen in the development of the United States, investment in land was an important means for the acquisition of wealth. But it was investment in real estate that pushed the growth of cities in specific ways.
3. Lefebvre also introduced the idea that real estate is a special case of the dynamics of settlement space. For Lefebvre, all social activities are not only about interaction among individuals but about space as well. Social activities take place in space. They also produce a space by creating objects. The city-building process, for example, creates a certain space. When we visit a city, we experience particular attributes of the space that was created in that area. Other city spaces may be different, although places produced by similar social systems tend to resemble each other, such as the close resemblance of suburbs in California and Virginia or between the United States

and Australia. Lefebvre therefore introduced the idea of space as a component of social organization, as we discussed in Chapter 1. When people discuss social interaction, they are implicitly talking about behavior in space as well. Space is involved in a dual sense: as an influence on behavior and, in turn, as the end result of construction behavior because people alter space to suit their own needs.

4. Lefebvre discussed the role of government in space. The state uses space for social control and uses tax dollars to invest in select regions in an unequal manner, as we have already discussed. Government places fire stations and police departments in separate locations across the metropolis depending on how powerful the local citizens are at the voting booth. The state controls a large amount of land and utilizes it in its administration of government. It dispenses resources and collects taxes according to spatial units such as cities, counties, individual states, and regions. Government also makes decisions and relays them to individuals across the network of administrative units; that is, from the national level down to the separate regions, individual states, counties, cities, and ultimately neighborhoods. Despite capitalism being a system that emphasizes private, market decision-making, government intervention in space plays a major role in determining the relative well-being of places and their residents.

Lefebvre argued that the way capital investors or businesspeople and government think about space happens in relation to its abstract qualities of dimension—size, width, area, location—and profit. He called this *abstract space*. Individuals use the space of their environment as a place to live. Lefebvre called this interactively used space of everyday life *social space*. For him the uses proposed by government and business for abstract space, such as in the planning of a large city or suburban development of new houses, may conflict with the existing social space, the way residents currently use space. Lefebvre said that the conflict between abstract and social space is a basic one in society and ranks with the separate conflict among classes, but is often different. With this view, he also departed from Marxian analysis because the latter stresses class conflict as the basic force in the history of capitalism.

In sum, Lefebvre is responsible for a large number of the ideas that inform the sociospatial perspective used in this text. He also heavily influenced a number of critical and Marxian urbanists to develop ideas of their own. In the following sections, we will discuss some of the most contemporary urban approaches and indicate how the ideas of Lefebvre in some cases or those of the classical thinkers Marx, Engels, and Weber in other cases have influenced new theories of urban development.

Early Marxist Approaches to Urban Sociology

When sociologists discuss economics, they usually think in general terms and focus on the relations between actors and economic systems, such as the interests of wealthy businesspeople who own companies and the regulations, social and economic policy that support the business class. Class conflict theories go beyond individuals to discuss group behavior—particularly the clash between the capitalist class of owners or investors and the class of workers who sell their labor for a wage. Class conflict theorists make a mistake common in traditional Marxian analysis by trying to explain *everything* by economic factors alone (see Gordon, 1977, 1984). While the global search for low-wage labor pools may indeed explain many of the moves owners have made to outlying areas of the world since the 1960s, it cannot explain relocations during other periods, and there are certainly additional reasons for such moves, such as the structural factors we discussed in the case of suburbanization: cheap land, distribution considerations that often override the need for cheap labor, low taxes, and other government incentives that subsidize capital. In this section we consider other urbanists who use economically based ideas to explain city development, but with a great deal more detail than traditional sociologists.

David Harvey, a well-known geographer from England, started out as a mainstream member of his field, concerned with mathematical modeling techniques. During the late 1960s, however, he was greatly influenced by events in the United States, such as the ghetto riots, and by the writings of Henri Lefebvre. In the 1970s, he wrote a book and a series of articles that applied Marxian economic analysis to the condition of the cities. He was especially influenced by the earlier writings of Lefebvre on the urban analysis of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels.

Harvey, like Lefebvre, systematically applied the categories of Marxian economic analysis to the study of urban development. He asserted four things. First, he stated that the city is defined in the manner of Engels as a spatial node that concentrates and circulates capital. Second, he applied a conflict perspective to discuss the way the capitalist and the working classes confronted each other in the city (1973, 1976). According to Harvey, and unlike the general way sociologists usually speak about classes, this basic conflict takes many forms as both the capitalist and working classes split up among themselves into various groups or fractions as a consequence of protracted struggles for advantage. The capitalist class, for example, can be divided among financial investors (finance capital), owners of department stores and other marketing assets (commercial capital), and owners of factories (manufacturing or industrial capital). Workers can also be split—for example, among factory laborers, white-collar salespeople, and professional financial analysts, all of whom still work for a wage. Each of these factions may want different things from urban development, so that conflict and coalition building

are always a part of urban life. However, the basic struggle is still between capital and labor, as Gordon (1984) and Storper and Walker (1984) also suggest. As Harvey asserts following Lefebvre, "Labor, in seeking to protect and enhance its standard of living, engages in a series of running battles in the living place over a variety of issues that relate to the creation, management, and use of the built environment" (1976:268).

Third, Harvey discusses how the volatile urban mix of economic interests brings about government intervention as a means of quieting things down so that planning can take place and capitalists can get back to their principal task of profit making (1975, 1976). As Harvey suggests, "Capital, in general, cannot afford the outcome of struggles around the built environment to be determined simply by the relative powers of labor, the appropriators of rent and the construction fraction" (1976:272). Therefore, the capitalist class requires government to intervene and aid the profit making process within cities.

Sometimes, however, investment simply will not flow into districts of the city because they are so run-down or unattractive economically. In such cases, Harvey argues, government must step in to make the areas profitable again. Usually this form of state intervention involves the tearing down or destruction of existing buildings to make way for new construction, such as in the example of government-supported urban renewal programs. According to Harvey,

Under capitalism there is, then, a perpetual struggle in which capital builds a physical landscape appropriate to its own condition at a particular moment in time, only to have to destroy it, usually in the course of a crisis, at a subsequent point in time. (1982:109)

For Harvey this process of boom and bust, or new construction and urban decay, is basic to urban change in a capitalist system.

Finally, Harvey took a detailed look at the capitalist class and how it made money within the space of the city. He borrowed the concept of circuits of capital from Lefebvre and elaborated on the latter's ideas. In particular, Harvey argued that capitalists involved in the first industrial circuit are principally interested in location within the urban environment and in reducing their costs of manufacturing. Capitalists in the second circuit hold a different set of priorities relating to the flow of investment and the ability of property owners to obtain returns from their holdings. These differences are reflected in the different ways capital investment circulates within the two circuits.

While investment in factories is often located in places with cheap housing, capitalists in the second circuit often refuse to invest in poorer areas and seek out only the higher-rent districts of the city. As a consequence, areas of the city can

become run-down and abandoned not because of the actions of industrial capital, the faction that we usually think of as determining city fortunes, but because of actions taken by investors in real estate, as the sociospatial perspective suggests, when, for example, property developers stick to constructing luxury housing as their sole investment. In short, Harvey's work bears out the importance of Lefebvre's ideas on the real estate industry and of Engels's central insight into the production of uneven development under capitalism.

In sum, both the class conflict and capital accumulation approaches of the new urban sociology provide impressive improvements over more traditional perspectives. The world today is a volatile one where the predictable accommodations of work, shopping, and residential living characteristic of the industrial city have been shattered. Economic factors such as the ebb and flow of real estate investment and the changing structure of manufacturing in a global system affect the sociospatial features of daily life. So do the activities of workers involved in the struggle lying at the heart of the capital/labor relationship, and the residents of communities who are concerned about maintaining their quality of life. Each of these aspects helps determine the pattern of sociospatial organization and the particular form that an urban area takes.

Until the development of the new urban sociology, the effects of special, powerful interests (such as transnational corporations) on the pattern of urban development were ignored by the traditional approach that emphasized biological factors of species competition over territory. But the work of Lefebvre and those urbanists he inspired places greater importance on economic, political, and cultural factors than on individual interaction within markets in producing sociospatial arrangements. Nevertheless, there are several limitations to reducing all social relations to economic relations, such as the class conflict of Harvey's capital accumulation approaches suggests. In recent years, therefore, sociologists have added to the new perspective on the city by showing how social factors are also important in the production of settlement space.

THE SOCIOSPATIAL PERSPECTIVE

How can we make sense of the various ideas offered by new urban theories? This text adopts the sociospatial perspective (SSP), which is an integrated approach to urban sociology. It takes what is best from the new ideas while avoiding the endemic reductionism characteristic of both traditional ecology and recent Marxian political economy, such as the work of David Harvey. It does not seek an explanation by emphasizing a principal cause such as transportation technology (Hawley), capital circulation (Harvey), or special "rentier classes" (the false approach of Logan and Molotch, 1987) that control growth. Rather, it takes an integrated view of development as the linked outcome of economic, political, and cultural factors. At

one time, it might have been suggested that such an integrated view derives from the tradition of Weber. However, since the 1950s, even Marxists have looked for ways to advance an integrated perspective (Althusser, 1971), and this is especially important for the understanding of space (Lefebvre, 1991).

The sociospatial perspective is inspired by the work of Lefebvre and can be distinguished from other approaches by the following characteristics. First, it considers real estate development as the leading edge of changes in the metropolitan region. While other approaches tend to focus only on economic changes in industry, commerce, and services, the SSP adds to these important dimensions an interest in the way real estate molds metropolitan growth, including how real estate declines. Growth and decline are the seesaw operations of Lefebvre's second circuit of capital, and they affect the general business and economic well-being of their surroundings in periods of bust as well as boom, but in different directions.

Second, the SSP considers government intervention and the interests of politicians in growth as a principal factor in metropolitan change. Traditional urban ecology and the newer approaches of urban political economy either ignore completely the role of government in channeling growth or treat the state as simply derivative of economic interests (as does Harvey). The SSP considers the state as relatively autonomous—with officials having interests of their own—and, more specifically, considers politics as being strongly linked to the concerns of property development (Gottdiener, 1986). Lefebvre's later writings linked government intervention after the crisis of the Great Depression to what he calls the "state mode of production."

Third, the sociospatial perspective considers the role of racism and cultural orientations as critical for an understanding of metropolitan life. Because of the importance of these subjects, racism and culture will be discussed in more detail below.

Finally, the SSP takes a global view of metropolitan development. Most local areas today are tied to the activities of multinational corporations and banks. Changes in the way they invest affect each of us. By emphasizing global economic changes, however, the sociospatial perspective also seeks to understand how local and national factors interrelate with international links. All spatial levels of organization are important in understanding metropolitan development. In the following section, let us review some of these features while keeping in mind the differences between the SSP and other sociological perspectives. In particular, we will see how the sociospatial perspective is a much more sophisticated and useful approach than the traditional ecological approach of the Chicago School of urban sociology or the reductionist Marxism of urban geographers.

Real Estate and Government Intervention

George Washington was not only the first president of the country but he also participated in the innovative scheme to develop the swampland that became the

site of the nation's capital. During the 1800s, great profits were made by businesses as the country industrialized; however, they were also made through investment in land. Cyrus McCormick earned millions from the manufacture of his famous reaper, but millions more from his activities in real estate. Railroad tycoons competed with one another by building the infrastructure that opened up the great landmass of the United States to development, yet, they also established towns and developed real estate as they went along. The population shifts to suburbia and the Sun Belt were fueled in part by the phenomenal expansion of the single-family home industry and the development of lands outside the large central cities of the northeast and midwest. Many if not all of these settlement spaces resulted from the interactions between real estate elites and state actors.

The sociospatial perspective argues that other urban theories neglect the important role played by investment in real estate and the state in the process of regional development. Metropolitan growth is the outcome of negotiations and contending interests, rather than the product of some well-oiled machine without conflict (as the false approach of Logan and Molotch maintains). Developers, for example, must negotiate with a network of government planners and politicians, citizen groups voice their concerns in public forums, and special interests such as utility companies or religious organizations interject their stakes and culturally defined symbolic visions in metropolitan growth. The end result of these negotiations is a built environment that is *socially constructed*, involving many interests and controlled by the quest for profit. Traditional urban sociology or ecology, for example, overemphasizes the push factor of technology as an agent of change. Marxian political economy pays special attention to the activities of capitalists and the way changes in industrial investment patterns affect local spaces. The SSP acknowledges push factors such as changes in economic production and transportation innovations, but it also highlights the role of pull factors such as government intervention and the action of real estate—the second circuit of capital—as crucial to explanations of metropolitan growth.

The ways in which political and real estate interests converge highlights the role of structure and agency in the formation of settlement space. Agency involves people acting as part of social classes and class factions, or of gender, racial, and ethnic interests. The sociospatial perspective wants to know who the actors are and how they behave, not just the facts or figures about aggregate levels of growth and change. Looking at structure and agency does not mean moving from one level to the next; that is, from structure to agency or from the agent to social structure, or just incorporating both dimensions separately in the analysis. It means understanding how specific actors draw from and are limited from structural arrangements in their decisions and practices involved in creating social space. It means understanding that pull factors act as a causal mechanism on push factors, which itself can act as a causal agent on subsequent pull factors. By using

the sociospatial perspective (SSP), we can concretize the actions of social actors to identify where, when, and how they matter for the production of social space without necessarily reducing the study of urbanization to one dimension (the economic) or one actor (racial groups).

An example from Gottdiener's (1977) research on the real estate activities in suburban Long Island will illustrate the structure–agency dynamics involved in the relationship between real estate actors and government intervention. Gottdiener's case study of suburban Long Island, New York, identifies the following types of social roles assumed by investors in the built environment:

1. Land speculators who purchase land or buildings simply to be sold at a later date for a profit.
2. Land developers who purchase land with or without housing and then develop it by constructing housing or other built structures such as factories or malls. To this type can be added developers who restructure the uses of land and buildings, such as those who convert rental into condominium units, single-family into multi-family dwellings, and residential housing into office space.
3. Homeowners and individuals who invest in property as part of an overall scheme for the protection of income and not just to acquire shelter.
4. Local politicians who are dependent on campaign funds from the real estate industry, and lawyers or other professionals who make money from government-mandated requirements that necessitate legal services.
5. Individual companies or corporations that do not specialize in real estate but develop choice locations for their respective businesses, such as office towers or industrial plants, and a host of financial institutions, such as savings and loans, that channel investment into land through the all-important need for mortgages in order to purchase housing and property.

The preceding list of institutional and private interests involved in the development of the metropolitan region reveals that growth is not simply determined by economic push factors of production. Development is caused by the pull factor of people's activities involved in the second circuit of capital, real estate. This sector is not simply a select group of investors, as the "growth machine" approach of Logan and Molotch (1987) asserts, but is composed of both *actors* interested in acquiring wealth from real estate and a *structure* that channels money into the built environment. The latter consists of a host of financial intermediaries such as banks, mortgage companies, lawyers, and real estate investment trusts, which allow a large variety of people to put their money in land.

Because the second circuit of capital enables anyone, even individual homeowners, to invest money in real estate for profit, it is wrong to separate the people

in society into a select few who seek to make money in real estate (exploiting its exchange value) and a majority who seek only to enjoy the built environment as a staging ground for everyday life (the exploitation of space's use value), as the Growth Machine approach asserts (Logan and Molotch, 1987). Instead, space can be enjoyed for its uses and for its investment potential by both businesses and local residents in many ways that often combine use with exchange value, such as in the purchase by individuals of a private home. In fact, that's what makes the relationship of society to space so complicated. The latter is *simultaneously* a medium of use value and a source of wealth (exchange value) under capitalist commodity arrangements.

Sociospatial Inequality and Racism

The sociospatial approach examines inequality through the concentration of people and resources in specific spaces. The logic of sociospatial inequality implies that the concentration of capital in one settlement space necessitates the absence of capital investment in another place, or, what is referred to as uneven development. Although social class has historically been an important role in segregating cities and then metropolitan areas, racism has emerged as the core logic behind the distribution of populations across the metropolis in the US. For example, we find the black ghetto sitting adjacent to the affluent urban neighborhood, and the affluent white suburb embedded in the metropolitan region alongside a black suburb. We will explore the role of racism in more depth in Chapters 5, 6, and 8. For now, our focus is on integrating racism and racial discrimination into the sociospatial perspective.

The relationship between the real estate sector, the state, and racism creates residential segregation. Whereas the real estate sector and various levels of the state work together to create uneven development, the powerful effect of racism illustrates the problem of displacement and containment of minority populations. Displacement occurs when minority populations are forced to move because real estate interests and developers want the land that blacks, Hispanics, or earlier, Native Americans currently live on. For example, E. Franklin Frazier's (1937) study of how Harlem was created as a black ghetto noted that the space had already deteriorated before blacks migrated to it. Blacks were displaced uptown in Manhattan to Harlem because midtown and downtown land was very desirable for capital investment, business activity and luxury single-family homes, and because elite whites would not allow blacks to live anywhere else. Once displaced from other areas of Manhattan, they were not allowed to move out of this produced black ghetto in Harlem, and thus, faced "containment." Combined with racism, containment occurs when the minority population is forced to live in a specified area and can't move out due to their skin color rather than social class.

Containment explains the formation of the black ghetto and Hispanic barrio, where the negative effects of economic downturns are amplified, economic development is limited, housing is dilapidated, and an urban culture characterized by alienation and mistrust erodes social bonds and trust in broader social institutions (Anderson, 1999; Massey and Denton, 1993). Displacement and containment happen together, which is why racism is defined as systemic and institutional: it is a feature of all activities in a racially discriminatory society, including real estate investors, bankers, lawyers, politicians, planners, and ordinary white residents, involved in the production of space.

Racism also plays a role in defining social space, its uses, and how space represents the minority population. Racism transforms general urban problems into black urban problems. For example, the first study of the black neighborhood was W. E. B. Du Bois's *Philadelphia Negro* (1899). Du Bois did his fieldwork for the project in Philadelphia's Seventh Ward, and hoped that his approach would be expanded to Boston, Chicago, Kansas City, Atlanta, New Orleans, and Galveston in order to "have a trustworthy picture of Negro city life" (Du Bois, 1899:iv). Du Bois's empirical work found no significant differences in social problems like crime, despite whites' denying blacks jobs and educational opportunities. Nevertheless, white racism defines black areas and integrated areas in negative terms, and once *de jure* segregation was eliminated, it was simply replaced by *de facto* segregation and the privatization of social space to exclude and contain blacks in specific settlement spaces. Ghettoization today involves many of these same practices. Thus, racism in addition to economic class has affected the production of urban space for hundreds of years in the US.

Urban Culture

Culture is important for urban sociology because it allows us to understand an aspect of power irreducible to the state or the economy, how places obtain identities, and how ordinary citizens make urban life meaningful. The analysis of culture focuses on abstract symbols and concrete behaviors and practices—ideally together—to illustrate how culture exerts its own effect relative to economic and political processes. The sociospatial approach is interested in how locations use culture and symbolic resources to acquire an attractive image that appeals to tourists, real estate investors, prospective home buyers, firms, as well as how consumers and residents make sense of their lived environment.

All areas of the metropolitan region and its rural hinterland have made use of symbolic locational markers as a means of increasing value. Signs appealing to consumers denote places of retailing and attract mobile residents to distinct shopping centers. Municipal locations increasingly resort to designing images wrapped in symbols of authenticity like "historic district" that register as attractive to

developers and tourists. Areas also manufacture a sense of place for otherwise non-descript, newly built housing tracts by bestowing distinctive names on them, such as Heather Acres, Mountainview Estates, Eagles Trace, and the like. Urban neighborhoods are renamed to change their identity for increased value, such as when New York City renamed the neighborhood South of Houston as "SoHo" to designate it as an artistic and gay-friendly neighborhood. While the names themselves have no direct signifying connection to the places that are tagged, they do connote a certain symbolic value that valorizes a specific location for consumers and investors (Gottdiener, 1995). The proliferation of signs makes the urbanized, multicentered region *semiotic* in both culture and character.

Henri Lefebvre, in one of his early books (1996), discusses the French style of semiotics, which owes a great deal to the work of Roland Barthes (Gottdiener and Lagopoulos, 1986). Semiotics is the systematic study of language via signs and symbols. Symbols are divided into three parts: the sign, the signifier, and the signified. The sign is a mental image that comes from the fusion of the signifier and signified. The signifier is the actual word, object, or gesture while the signified is the cultural meaning attributed to the word. Take for example, the bohemian neighborhood. The name bohemian is the signifier. The meanings of the bohemian neighborhood, such as diversity, unique, creative, stylish, and artistic, are the signifieds. When the signifier and signified come together, the sign is experienced as desirable and trendy and an upscale place that many would like to live in. Indeed, one of the core aspects of gentrification that we discuss in Chapter 10 is how real estate agents used the bohemian sign to sell places like the Lower East Side in New York to bankers and Wall Street workers in the 1980s. They used the same sign of bohemian to sell Brooklyn to the same affluent social class starting in the late 1990s and into the present. In contrast, suburban developers and real estate agents use a different language to sell suburbia: exclusive, safe, good schools, spacious, and a place free of social problems. Although meanings differ, the structure of the sign is the same, and thus, signs can be systematically analyzed and compared across the multicentered metropolitan region (MCMR).

A cultural analysis like semiotics focuses on the how and who is involved in fusing signifiers to specific signifieds to create a sign's dominant meaning. This is an analysis of culture and power. Without a dominant meaning, the sign would theoretically be open to any meaning or multiple meanings. Therefore, social actors in a position of power, such as real estate elites, urban planners, municipal government administrators, and even community groups, fasten dominant meanings to the sign. In order to untangle all of the cultural work that goes into the metropolitan region, we must distinguish between the various aspects of how social actors talk about social space. There is the utterance of the city: what happens and takes place in the street, in the squares, on the roads, and what is said about each particular landscape. There is the language of the city:

particularities specific to each city which are expressed in discourses, gestures, clothing, in the words and use of words by the inhabitants, such as the unique patois of Pittsburgh, Houston, or Atlanta residents. Finally, there is the writing of the city, what is inscribed and prescribed on its walls, in the layout of places and their images; in brief, the use of time in the city by its inhabitants. The kinds of signs and “writing” that Lefebvre refers to above come from individuals and groups, such as gangs, who mark territory with signifiers that reflect their own meaningful narratives about space and are displays of symbolic intention about defending their area.

Signs are used to invest cultural meaning into the built environment and sell places, and are readily found in shopping districts, memorials, museums, urban neighborhoods, and the suburban housing developments to consumers. Gottdiener (2001) called this “Theming”: the increasing use of signs to sell experiences and commodities of the built environment via cultural motifs. The theming of the built environment is a global cultural phenomenon. You can find a Jimmy Buffett *Margaritaville*, a Trump hotel, or a *Hard Rock Cafe* in the United States, Europe, Egypt, China, the Caribbean, or Canada. All claim to sell an authentic experience of rock music or beach culture or luxury—your choice! You could play golf at a regular country club, or you could play golf at an “Arnold Palmer” designed course, using “Arnold Palmer” golf clubs, while drinking an “Arnold Palmer”—iced tea, lemonade, and vodka! Signs are paramount to the tourist and leisure industry. Consumer responses range between and shift from excitement to revulsion to “meh!,” so companies and developers continuously have to reinvent the theme to satisfy consumer demand and stay relevant. Thus, signs are the vehicles for the valorization of specific locations in the pursuit of profit by investors in land and developers of housing and commercial buildings. Intrinsic use of symbols in this way—to make a profit—means that meaning itself is part of the political economy of capitalism, as sign value (Baudrillard, 1981, 1993).

Narrative analysis is another form of cultural analysis that sociologists use to analyze how social meaning is emplotted in stories to create, challenge, or reconcile the meanings associated with places, identities, and social action (Polletta et al., 2011). Two structural forms of narrative that are salient with audiences are the romance and the irony narrative (Jacobs and Smith, 1997). Romance narratives refer to how social actors tell stories to arrive at a specific version of the good society through the use of utopia and the existence of an already existing collective identity. Thus, by nature they exclude some groups by emphasizing select histories to create present and future orientations. In contrast, the irony narrative refers to how social actors tell stories to subvert dominant discourses found in the romance narrative. For example, on a regional or municipal level, developers and politicians use a romantic narrative by telling stories of “urban revitalization” and “up and coming areas” to counter stories of “urban decay” to attract capital and

connect with ordinary citizens. Marginalized citizens of the same communities tell ironic stories of how they were left out of the story of the so-called “urban renaissance.” Social groups also tell stories to understand their place and their role in urbanization. Early gentrifiers in New York’s East Village tell nostalgic stories about their personal experiences with the neighborhood’s gritty past to achieve symbolic ownership over more recent gentrifiers (Ocejo, 2011). In both cases, we find social actors using specific narratives to create connections with an idealized past and with current urban symbols to achieve a sense of belonging during a transitional phase in urbanization.

Finally, there is a third reason why culture is important. The multicentered metropolitan region spreads out over an area that loses the human, pedestrian scale of the historical, compact central city. It is the automobile rather than public transportation or walking that best characterizes how we experience and how we navigate through the contemporary urban environment. In many cases, signs have replaced human interactions in how we make connections to places. Consequently, the semiotic dimension of daily life not only figures into the political economy of consumer-oriented capitalism; it is also the symbolic mechanism that makes it possible to navigate around the metropolitan region in order to provide for needs. When people lived in compact, pedestrian-oriented cities—in the previous form of urban space—they went about satisfying their needs without the kind of constant aid from giant signs, franchise cues, and themed environments that have become so necessary to the functioning of the new form of urban space—the metropolitan region—today. Yet such displays have not totally disappeared from the central city when we consider the Ginza district of Tokyo, the riot of digital signage that is Times Square in New York, or the similar burst of colored lights characterizing Piccadilly Circus in London.

The Global Economy

The sociospatial approach agrees with all other perspectives on the importance of the global economy, the new mobile or “flexible” arrangements in production, and their effects on the restructuring of settlement space. It argues, however, that the push factors of capital mobility and considerations regarding the international division of labor, discussed earlier, are not the only ones determining growth. States are also important actors. The pull factors of government policies and the second circuit of capital are also important, particularly as manifested at the local, regional, and national levels.

For example, as we noted in Chapter 1, as the US economy became integrated into the world system, development patterns of deconcentration from the city to suburbs and the Rust Belt to the Sun Belt regions had been going on for many years, even prior to the 1960s when the restructuring of the global system began

to be felt. The Sun Belt prospered as a consequence of government programs and real estate activity. Government military spending during World War II and later during the Cold War propped up the Sun Belt economy by transferring billions of dollars in tax money from the Frost Belt to this region. Real estate investment found riches in a host of Sun Belt schemes for the development of housing and industry. Suburbanization in the United States has been going on since the turn of the twentieth century. Development accelerated after World War II when the federal government initiated special loans to veterans and consolidated the income tax subsidy to homeowners, providing families with a cash incentive to invest in real estate. Suburbanization was also promoted by a variety of federal housing acts passed since the 1930s that revitalized the real estate and banking industries and by the Interstate Highway Act in the 1950s, which promoted the construction of freeways.

The shifts to the suburbs and the Sun Belt are the two most important sociospatial changes in US history, but neither was produced by the power of the global economy. They have their roots in growth trends that have been going on for years and that involve important aspects of both government intervention and the phenomenal draw of real estate investment guaranteed by state subsidized tax laws and public works projects. All of these factors fell into place long before the advent of global economic effects. Of course, since the 1970s, changes in the global economy have had a profound effect on the built environment. The decline of manufacturing in the United States and the transfer of many production activities abroad have wiped out the traditional relationship between central city working-class communities and their capitalist employers. The economy of our largest cities has restructured away from manufacturing and toward specialization in advanced services and information processing, particularly those business services required by the finance capital faction that coordinates investment activity for the global economy (Sassen, 1991). The record high of the stock market and record low in unemployment in the late 1990s and in today's post-recessionary period have not altered this longer term trend of restructuring the urban economy and the increasing economic polarization of urban space. Poverty amid wealth, the lack of affordable housing, segregation of minorities, homelessness, and inequalities in education and health care remain with us today just as they did when Engels was looking at Manchester in the 1800s.

The sociospatial changes produced by the global economy have also been important because of the new spaces that have appeared in recent years. Prior to the 1970s, neither Santa Clara County nor the peripheral areas around the city of Boston were significant employment centers. During the last two decades, they proved to be world-class economic spaces, becoming Silicon Valley and the Route 128 high-tech corridor, respectively. These new spaces produced by high-technology industries earned disproportionately large sums of money on the world market for

their employment size. Other places, such as the new spaces of consumption produced by malls in minicenters, airports that include hotels and shopping, and themed amusement parks or casinos, to name just the most obvious examples, have also been created recently as investment flows to areas other than our historical inner cities. According to the SSP, alterations and development of new spaces of production and consumption will be produced not by investment directed at the global level alone but also by the logic of real estate development and by other pull factors, such as the quality of government intervention, in addition to factors that operate locally, regionally, nationally, and globally—at all sociospatial levels.

SUMMARY

The sociospatial perspective is an integrated theory that explains urbanization and the production of space. Nevertheless, it involves ideas that distinguish it from previous approaches to urban sociology.

First, it incorporates a number of different factors, instead of emphasizing just one or two, that can account for development and change. It particularly seeks to provide a balanced account of both *push and pull* factors in metropolitan and regional growth.

Second, it considers the role of real estate in development as the combined activities of both agency and structure. Investment in land is a sector of capital accumulation with its own factions and cycles of boom and bust. The categories of political economy, such as profit, rent, interest, and value, are just as applicable to metropolitan development as to any other part of the economy, such as the production of commodities like shoes or smartphones.

Third, the sociospatial perspective strives for a detailed view of politics that emphasizes the activities of individuals and groups in the development process. The SSP focuses on the activities of certain *growth networks* that form coalitions interested in choices that must be made over the direction and effects of change, rather than the more monolithic and static conception of some urbanists that refer to pro-growth interests as a "machine" devoid of conflicting factions.

The sociospatial perspective considers cultural factors such as race, gender, and the symbolic context of space to be just as important as economic and political concerns (see the following three chapters). It also deals specifically with the special qualities of spatial forms and their role in the organization of society. At present, metropolitan life is played out within the context of an ever-expanding multicentered metropolitan region. We have discussed the historical significance of this form of settlement space in previous chapters and will discuss its significance for daily life in chapters to come.

Finally, the production of space indicates that an association exists between the stages of political economic growth and urban spatial form. Thus, we can

deduce that the political economy of industrial capitalism that created a spatial form around manufacturing centers would undergo significant changes through deindustrialization, and ultimately, then, a new spatial form would have to emerge which corresponded to the new political economy. And indeed, this is the case. The political economy that formed around global capitalism and neoliberal government policy created a new spatial form, what we call the MCMR. In contrast to other academics that draw from the early and, essentially, descriptive accounts of what Lefebvre called "The Urban Revolution," in his most mature work, *The Production of Space*, he lays out a more substantive, analytical theory that connects the patterns of spatial development with stages in the growth of capitalism. Thus, while several urban sociology approaches claim a kinship to Henri Lefebvre's ideas, this textbook is unique in its understanding of how his major work on urbanization, *The Production of Space*, is both understood and applied to the discipline itself.

STUDY QUESTIONS

- What theoretical and perspectival foci characterize the shift in sociology toward a sociospatial approach?
- How do Marx's economic considerations and Weber's cultural and political factors complement each other in explaining the general laws of social development through historical analysis?
- How do Engels's observations of Manchester's industrial urban space help explain the political, economic, and social changes brought about by multicentered development?
- What is uneven development and how does it affect contemporary urban analysis?
- What push and pull factors characterize the relationship between real estate developers and political actors of the state?
- What are the four contributions of Lefebvre to Urban Sociology?
- Explain how class conflict and capital accumulation processes affect urban life, and, also affect urban development.
- Discuss the effects of land speculation in a capitalist system and explain how government aids speculators in land according to the sociospatial approach.
- What are the causes of sociospatial income inequality? Of racial spatial inequality?
- How do these two forms of spatial disadvantages affect people's quality of life and why are they societal problems?
- What is meant by "urban culture"?

- Discuss some examples of how symbols and themes affect urban space.
- What is urban semiotics? How does it explain the symbolic side to urban development?
- How has the emergence of a global economy affected the organizing of urban space and our understanding of increasing economic and racial inequality?