



FAKULTA
SOCIÁLNÍCH VĚD
Univerzita Karlova

Course:
Lecture:

Critical Urban Sociology
Contemporary Urban Sociology and Conflictual Perspectives

Contemporary Urban Sociology and Conflictual Perspectives

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JSB421 Critical Urban Sociology



Structure of the lecture:

- 1/ Political Economy and the City: Classic Approaches
- 2/ The Revival of Urban Political Economy: Henri Lefebvre + Early Marxist Approaches
- 3/ The Sociospatial Perspective



Conceptual shifts of the new urban sociology:

- > global perspective (capitalism)
- > new social factors in the analysis of metropolitan development: class exploitation, racism, gender
- > integration of economic, political and cultural factors into spatial analysis
- > attention to the structural, pull factors of real estate investment and government intervention
- > shift of the unit of analysis: the city -> multicentered metropolitan region

⇒ **Sociospatial approach**

- Since 1970s -> important theoretical innovations in the way human environments are analyzed; numerous writers in sociology, geography, urban studies challenged the orthodox ideas of urbanization → most of them origin in the application of Weber's, Marx's & Engel's writings regarding the analysis of political economy and the city
- X ecological perspective (Chicago school) – ignores the important role of economic and political interests, racism, inequality, bad ability to explain change



- Critical urban theory developed not only through reactions on the critique of the Chicago school, but as a reaction to historical events
 - > Castells – works/researches on the urban governance and its examination partly from the order of the French government (Pickvance 1975: 1003)
 - > riots from the end of 60s (May 1968), worker strikes, students movement (ibid)
 - > protests of students, movement of workers, critique of capitalism in European cities
 - > US - race inequality, discrimination, poverty
- Movements & protests as a response to the development of capitalist economy and the political situation (change in both state and local governance) -> another point for re-thinking the urban theory (Flanagan 1993: 74 – 80)
- Changes of the structure of economic production – shift in the industry, boom of services, internalization, globalizaion
- Political dimension -> birth of modern conservatism and neoliberalism in the US & UK -> changes in political approach to social issues & social care

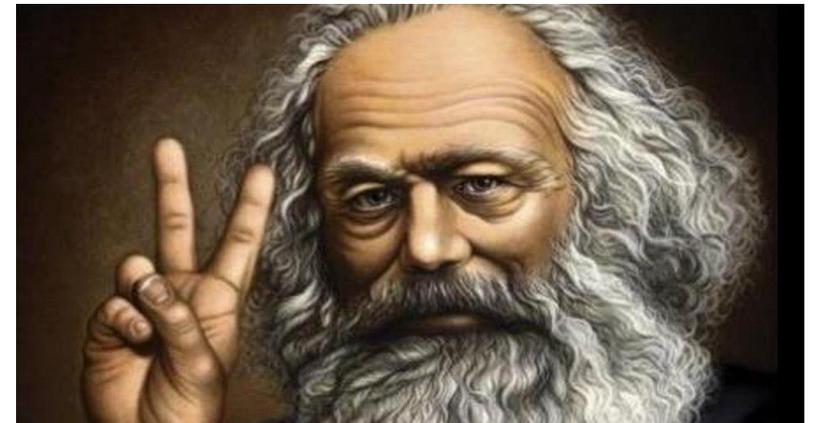


- Weber, Marx => historical analysis of society, systemic perspective
- Weber -> cultural & political factors -> individual behavior & social history
- Marx -> dominance of economic consideration in analysis (class struggle, possession of capital)
- Mutual completion of the approaches

Political economy and the city: classic approaches



- Marx -> class analysis – not only bourgeoisie & proletariat -> 1848 revolution in France analysis -> seven social class groups & identification of goals and position within the revolution process
- => Precursor to modern-day thinking about many interest groups competing within the political arena
- Distinction between the interests of capital and labor
- -> profit = price of a commodity sold in the market – costs of production (material, machinery, labor) -> necessity of maximum reducing of costs of production
- „Marx’s analysis is as relevant for neoliberal capitalism of the present day as it was for the industrial capitalism of his time“ (Gottdiener: 70).





- Reducing of costs today: displacement of workers by automation, increase of immigration, shift of manufacturing to developing countries; capital investment into artificial intelligence -> impact on the labor market
- -> impact both on the people and the built environment of urban and suburban settlement space across the world
- **Marx:** early history of capitalism was a struggle between social relations located within urban areas and those situated in the countryside within feudal manors
- **Weber:** development of the city because of its political powers – inhabitants and local government independent from feudal relations of authority
- Both showed, how modes of social organization (feudalism, capitalism) work through a form of space (the city) and social relations situated within that spatial form (=> sociospatial perspective)



- Weber – birth of the cities in the Middle ages -> traders and craftspeople set up towns and bargained for protection from the king against the activities of local feudal lords -> beginning of capitalism (eventually overtook the feudal economy)
- As capitalism became the dominant economic force in Europe, it also created the modern city
- Sociospatial perspective => need to connect larger societal processes (stages in political economy and cultural shifts in social relations) to modifications in the urban landscape and the shape of the settlement space





- F. Engels -> bigger interest in the city than Marx & Engels (study of the working class in nineteenth-century England – field observations of industrial cities -> Manchester)
- Large industrial city = 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)
- Manchester -> growth connected with the development of the industrial capitalism in England
- Aspects of capitalism at work within the urban space: 1) capitalism has a „double tendency“ of concentration -> capital investment (money) + workers -> easier industrial production 2) shift of the investment from the center to the periphery (the case of Manchester) -> growth = multiplication of centres (x Burgess -> central business district) 3) social problems created by the breakdown of traditional society and the operation of capitalism (Manchester – examples of extreme poverty and deprivation) -> misery as a result of exploitation at the place of work + failure of capitalism to provide adequate housing for everyone



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- ⇒ Engels – connection of the conditions in the workplace with conditions in the living space
- ⇒ *Extended conditions of capital accumulation*; Lefebvre: „reproduction of the relations of production“ -> reproduction of social relations that ensure the continued use of the working class across the generations
- ⇒ -> conditions of the working class deeply connected with the future of the capitalist system -> 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
- ⇒ + Manchester observed as a segregated space -> segregation of rich and poor -> conclusion of Engels -> **capitalism produces spatial isolation of classes**
- ⇒ = **uneven development** – 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

- Capital investment -> development of urban and suburban settlement space; flow of money determines community well-being (jobs, tax revenue, public projects...)
- Both public and private spending not uniformly distributed across metropolitan space -> some places receive much more investment than others, great differences even within cities + disparities between well paid and low paid workers -> significant portion of wages spent in the local area => well-being of a place depends also on the wealth of its residents
- => uneven development is a characteristic of our type of society with capitalist economic system





Investors (people with money) → investment in places and enterprises → profit (the largest possible)

- Cause of uneven development (always seek for the largest return possible)
- Increasing mobility of capital (compare w. Sassen 1991) – possibility to move operations from one country or region to another in search of the lowest costs or highest profit margins -> immense consequences for individual places
- Example -> Silicon Valley
- -> 1960s manufacturing, research and development located there -> shift to Mexico (cheaper labor) -> shift to Asia
- -> loss of jobs in the US
- -> 1970 Xerox set up an experimental research center in Palo Alto -> attraction of talents across the US -> 1980s & 1990s tech boom
- -> boom – bust – boom again according to the global flow of capital

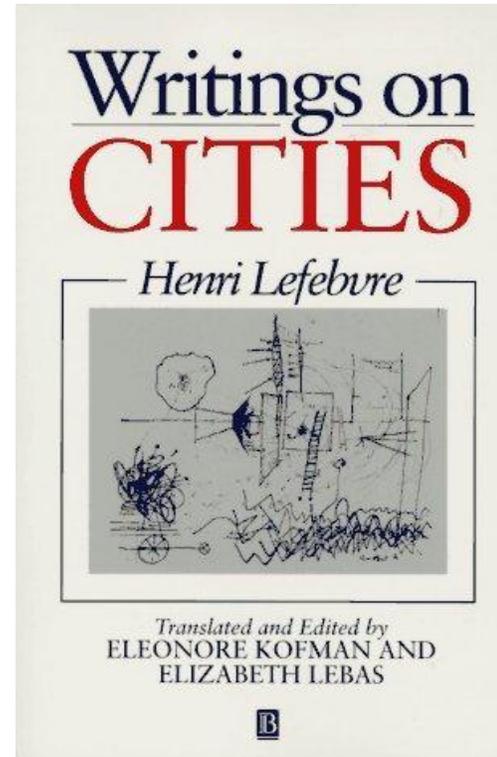
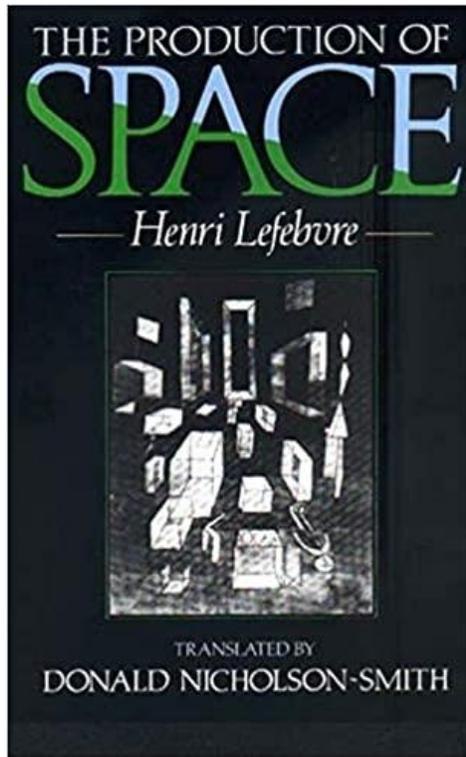




The Revival of Urban Political Economy: Henri Lefebvre



- 1960s/1970s -> revival of the Marxist tradition in social science





4 accomplishments of Lefebvre in the urban theory (Gottdiener):

- 1) he **extracted** from the writings of Marx and Engels an **urban political economy**; showed how it was possible to use economic categories such as capital investment, profit, rent, wages, class exploitation, uneven development in the analysis of cities
- City development process was as much a product of the capitalist system as anything else (any kind of goods)
- 2) He showed limitations of Karl Marx's work on the city; Lefebvre introduced the **circuits of capital** – real estate as the „second circuit of capital“;
- All industrial activity (investment, hiring of workers, production of products in a factory, selling of the good in a market for a profit, investment) -> primary circuit of capital
- Real estate investment -> investor chooses a piece of property and buys it -> holds it on for speculative reasons/develops for some other use (housing, offices...) + sells -> profit reinvested in more land-based projects
- Second circuit of capital always attractive – real estate as a powerful source of money



- 3) interaction between social actors and space; real estate is a special case of the dynamics of settlement space – social activities not only as an interaction among individuals but about space as well (+ take place in space); actors produce a space by creating objects (f. e. the city-building process) + they experience particular attributes of the space that was created => **spatial dialectics**
- space as a component of social organization, social interaction connected with behavior in space; space involved in a dual sense: as an influence on behavior and as the end result of construction behavior because people alter space to suit their own needs
- 4) the role of government in space; space used for social control from the state + uneven development (use of tax money to invest selected regions in unequal manner)
- The state controls a large amount of land; resources & taxes distributed and collected according to spatial units (cities, counties, individual states & regions)
- Government intervention as another major actor in determining the relative well-being of places and their residents (aspect of power)



- Lefebvrian distinction of space:
 - 1) *Abstract space*
 - Way of thinking about space in relation to its abstract qualities of dimension – size, width, areal, location and profit (f. e. maps, spatial plans, but in general any form of abstract thinking about space); used by the government, capital investors, (experts)
 - 2) *Social space*
 - Interactively used space of everyday life – a place to live, space of the individual's environment
 - Conflict between the two spheres; „basic conflict in society“, ranks with the separate conflict among classes
- Lefebvre = big influence of critical and Marxian urbanists



The production of space

- Social organizations and social relationships produce the space -> the space is a basis for the „reproduction of society“
- Investments into space (construction of housing, speculations, development of space) are another way to increase the value of the capital (second circuit of capital) -> capital as a crucial element in the production of space
- Harvey -> urban construction and cities as a „rational product of the capital accumulation process“ (Flanagan 1993: 89); second circuit of capital less lucrative, but at the same time a way to pump off the capital, which is being created by overproduction in the industrial sector
 - > investment into development of space and construction helps to use and invest the capital, which is not possible to invest that well in the primary circuit and also to reduce unwanted consequences of overproduction (f. e. decrease of prices)(Harvey 2008)
 - > process of re-construction of Paris or after-war development of american cities -> example of this process (pumping off the surplus value)



Critical urban theory is...

“...analysis that flows from the experience of practice in developing the potentials of existing urban society and urban space, and critical theory is intended to illuminate and inform the future course of such practice”. (Marcuse, 2009: 186)

Early Marxist Approaches to Urban Sociology

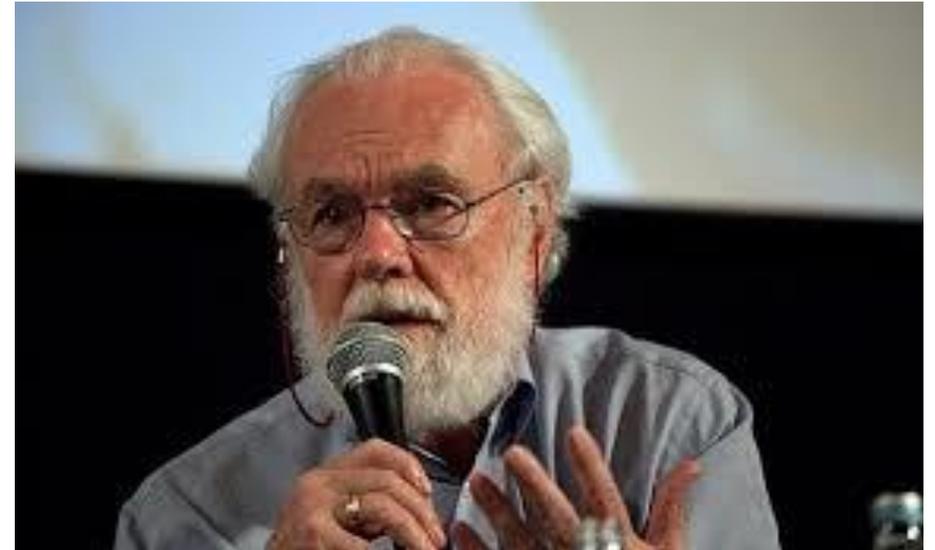


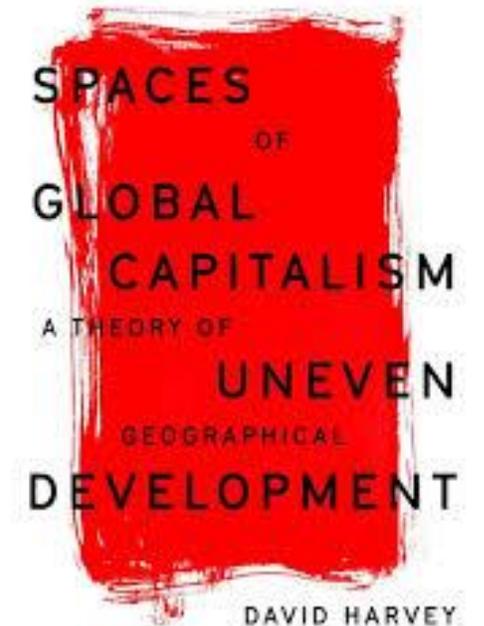
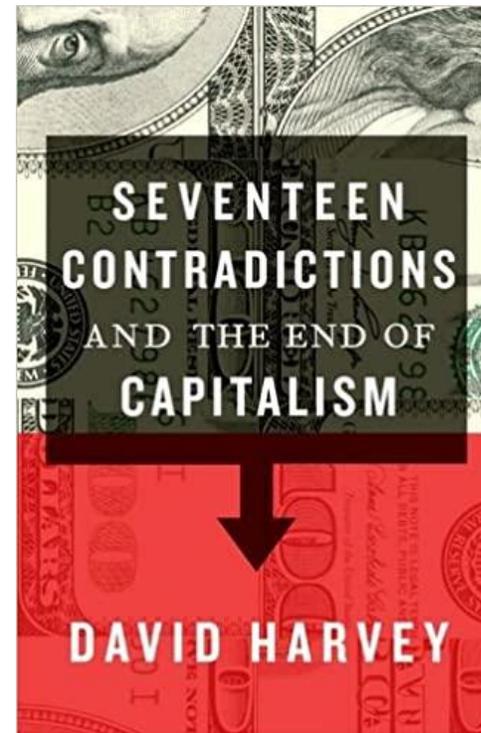
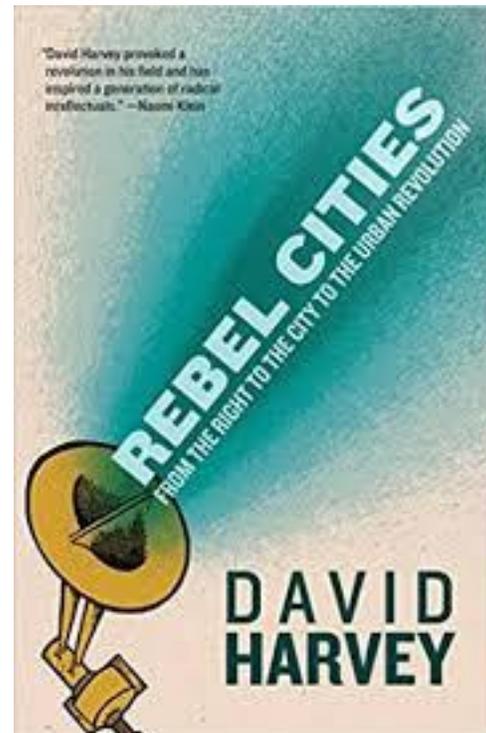
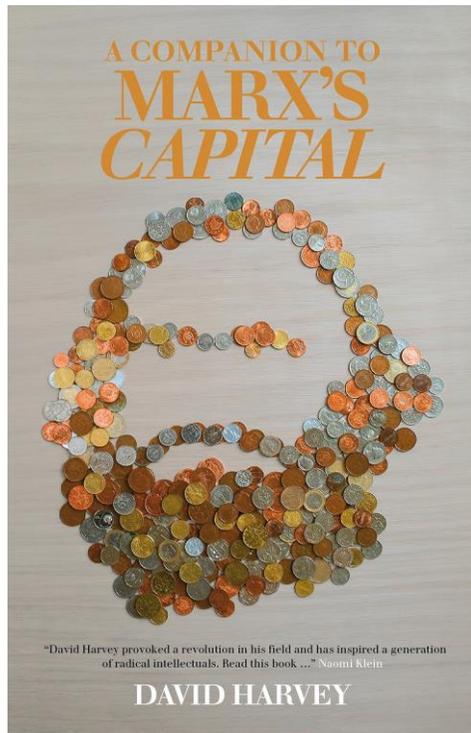
- 3 circuits of urban questions important for the early marxist approaches (Ferenčuhová 2013: 133)
- 1) Developed a critique of the urban theory based on the re-thinking of the urban sociology and theory as embedded in a historical, cultural, political and ideological context
 - 2) Offered a new approach to the city and explanation of the relationship between the capitalist economy and the space and also formulated new definitions of space, which influenced both sociological and geographical research
 - 3) Some of the strongest subjects of examination were social movements, understanding the city as a place of social change and also the question of social justice and right to the city



David Harvey

- UK/US geographer
- Influenced by the ghetto riots in the 60s + Lefebvre's writings
- 70s -> application of Marxian analysis to the condition of cities







Key definitions & ideas:

- 1) The city is defined in the manner of Engels as a spatial node that concentrates and circulates capital
- 2) Application of a conflictual perspective to discuss the way the capitalist and the working class confronted each other in the city (1973, 1976); divisions both in the *capitalist* (financial investors, owners of department stores, owners of factories...) and *working* classes (factory laborers, white-collar salespeople, professional financial analysts...) => different claims on urban development -> conflict x coalitions as always present part of urban life; basic struggle still between capital and labor
- 3) Role of government interventions -> caused by the volatile urban mix of economic interests, 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); the capitalist class requires government to intervene and aid the profit making process within cities; process of boom and bust (urban renewal – urban construction and urban decay) is basic to urban change in a capitalist system

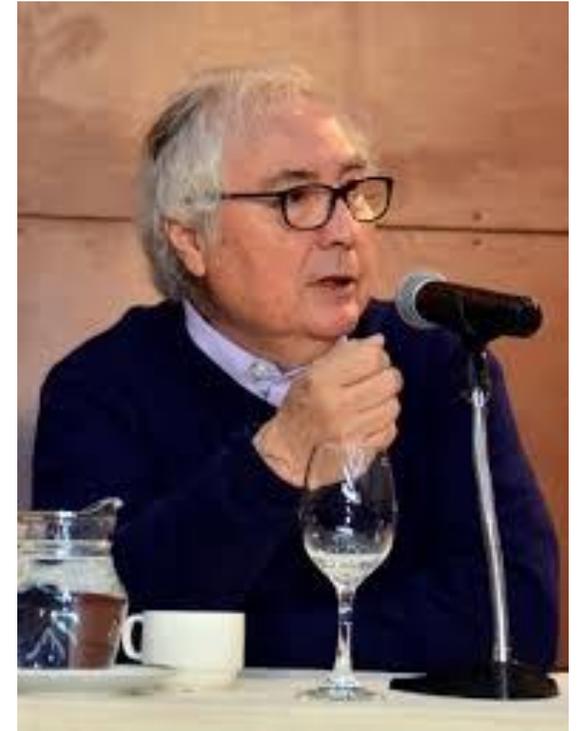


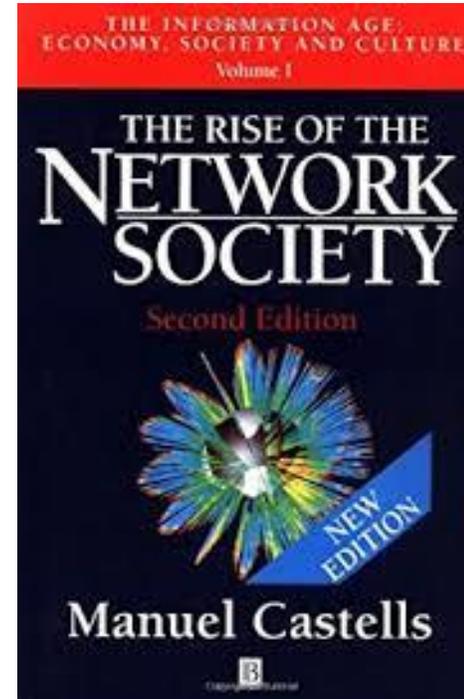
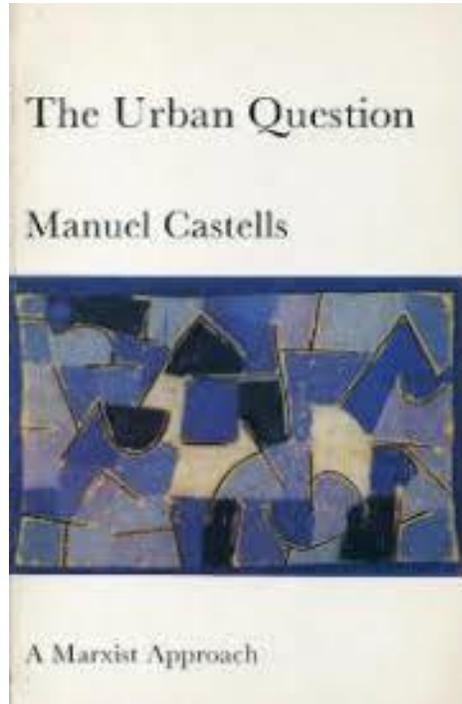
- Detailed analysis of the profit making process of the capitalist class within the space of the city -> concept of *circuits of capital* (Lefebvre):
 - **1st circuit (industry)** -> interest in location within the urban environment and in reducing the costs of manufacturing
 - **2nd circuit (real estate)** -> interest related to the flow of investment and the ability of property owners to obtain returns from their holdings
 - => different ways of capital circulation within the two circuits
 - => investment in factories often located in places with cheap housing x capitalists in the 2nd circuit often refuse to invest in poorer areas, seek out only higher-rent districts of the city (pursuit for profit) => areas of the city can become run-down and abandoned because of the actions of investors in real estate (not because of the actions of industrial capital)



Manuel Castells

- Big role in developing the critique of the urban theory:
- 1) critique of Wirth's urban theory and Burgess' concentric model of the urban growth
- 2) critique of ideologization of sociological thinking about the city (esp. Castells 1968, 1976)







- Critique of ideologization (epistemologic perspective):

-> knowledge is scientific, when there is a real or theoretical object of the study; the object consists from concepts developed to analyze the real object, which is claimed to be examined by science (Castells 1976: 60)

-> if there is no such object, it's neither a scientific examination -> such science produce only mistakes or deflected knowledge (relates to different objects) => produces ideology, not science

-> ideology and science are mixed in many disciplines; urban sociology is a real *ideology*, which has several social functions -> absence of both specific *theoretical* and *real* object of examination (neither the „urbanism“ of Wirth nor the ecological perspective system)

-> critique of Wirth -> the approach is an ideology of social integration to „modern“ society

-> problem of the exact definition of a city in the urbanized society – urban defined more as a „modern way of living“ rather than characterized by a certain type of space

-> contribution of this critique to increased reflexivity and development of the urban theory as a „critical science“



What is the real subject of examination?

- 1976: „sociology of urban planning“ – planning as a social practice embedded in social systems
 - Sociological analysis of the production of space & sociology of the collective consumption
 - > space as a real object – material element of the social life, which should become the subject of sociological science
 - > space is shaped in the relationship to the technical-social complex, the space is a part of this complex (AGAIN: dialectical perspective of the relationship social – spatial)
 - > space is a part of the social formation, space is a part of the social structure of relationships -> it is created by important social processes and is also elementary embedded in these processes
- ⇒ the social structure is (somehow) reflected and expressed in space, and hence in urban agglomerations. Thus urban agglomerations are said to represent a particular "specification" of the social structure.
- ⇒ Urban sociology should be replaced by a sociology of space (spatial sociology)
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Classical authors of critical urban theory – summary:

- > new approaches to class conflict and capital accumulation within the city (L + H) -> improvements over more traditional perspectives
- > greater importance on economic, political, cultural factors than on individual interaction within markets in producing sociospatial arrangements
- > limitations of reducing social relations to economic relations -> today's authors stress importance of social factors in the production of settlement space (-> sociospatial perspective)

2 problems common for Lefebvre, Harvey, Castells (Ferenčuhová 2013: 137):

- > tension and conflict within the space
- > role of the political system – questions of local administration, political decision making about space and its regulation (+ connection with the *abstract space*)
- > not much attention to individual actors and their motivations (x Pahl & new Weberian perspective)



John Logan & Harvey Molotch

- Inspired by Harvey, stressed the increase of capital value through investments in space & place (land) as a commodity
- The concept of „growth machine“ -> focus on various actors and interests in the process of negotiation about the urban development (investments, construction, re-construction, planning etc.)
 - > cities are controlled by *growth coalitions* – elites with interest on urban development, as it brings profit of different kind; actors with economical interests (both individuals or institutions) or rather political interests
 - > common interest in enforcing growth, which is considered as positive and inevitable & brings profit through spatial change





Right to the City

- Lefebvre: right to „urban life“, encounter, creation (need of individual creativity), space (use value over exchange value)(Lefebvre 2006: 158); this right was taken away; the social change through performance of the right to the city should be carried by the working class
- Harvey: right to get involved in the decision making; this right is suppressed in favor of right to private ownership and right to profit (Harvey 2008: 23); realized at the expense of poor, depriviledged and those, who has no acces to power both in local and global scale (2008: 33)
- Used by social movements (squatting, affordable housing, rent strikes...)





„Right to the city is far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city. It is, moreover, a common rather than an individual right since this transformation inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power to reshape the processes of urbanization. The freedom to make and remake our cities and ourselves is, I want to argue, one of the most precious yet most neglected of our human rights.,,

David Harvey (2008: 23)

Note: Similar approach to the right to the city and its transmission to socio-spatial movements can be found f. e. in the approach of Naomi Klein (1999; 2001)



- The early marxist approaches to the city inspired many authors across the academic production and fields
 - > gender analysis and feminist theory (Jarvis et al. 2009; Kern, Mullings 2013; Löw 2006; Vaiou 2013)
 - > culture and cultural economy of cities (Zukin 1989; 1995; Amin, Thrift 2007)
 - > global perspective (Sassen 1994, 2001; Massey 2007)
 - > conception of a post-modern city (Harvey 1990, 1989; Cooke 1990; Soja 1989; Dear 2002)

- Critique:
 - -> way of work (Elliot 1980: critique of Castells' argumentation and insufficient work with data)
 - -> generalization and lack of focus on the differences between cities (Cooke 1990: 331)
 - -> lack of focus on individual actors and their perception of space (Flanagan 1993: 97 – 101)
 - -> too big emphasis on economical processes and overrating of big theories (Walton 1993: 318)
 - -> sociospatial perspective (Gottdiener: 79)



The Sociospatial Perspective (SSP)



- Criticizes the reductionism of both traditional urban ecology and recent Marxian political economy
- Takes an integrated view of development as the linked outcome of economic, political and cultural factors -> derived both from Weberian and Marxist perspective
- Inspired by the work of Lefebvre



Characteristics of the SSP:

- 1) Considers real estate development as the leading edge of changes in the metropolitan region (Lefebvre: second circuit)
- 2) Considers government intervention and the interests of politicians on growth as a principal factor in metropolitan change (x ignored by urban ecology x treated as simply derivative of economic interests – Harvey); the SSP considers the state as relatively autonomous + considers politics as strongly linked to the concerns of property development
- 3) Considers the role of racism and cultural orientations as critical for an understanding of metropolitan life
- 4) 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 the local environment and life -> the SSP also seeks to understand how local and national factors interrelate with international links



Real Estate and Government Intervention

- 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 (x Logan & Molotch) -> developers must negotiate with a network of government planners and politicians, citizens groups voice their concerns in public forums, influence of utility companies or religious organizations in metropolitan growth
- Result => built environment that is *socially constructed*, involving many interests and controlled by the quest for profit



Agency and structure 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
- -> SSP: who are the actors? How they behave?
- -> SSP: influence of structural arrangements on the decisions and practices involved in creating social space (created by actors)
- -> SSP: where, when and how matter the actions of social actors in the production of social space



Sociospatial inequality and racism

- Inequality examined through the concentration of people and resources in specific spaces/places
- Differences in concentration of capital in space => uneven development
- Social class & racism as the core logic behind the distribution of populations across the cities (racism very crucial in the US)
- Relationship between the real estate sector + the state + racism = *residential segregation*
- *Displacement* -> minority populations are forced to move mainly because of the real estate interests or state interventions (also the case of Native Americans)



Urban Culture

- Culture allows 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
- SSP: how locations use culture and symbolic resources to acquire an attractive image that appeals to tourists, real estate investors, prospective home buyers, firms + how consumers and residents make sense of their lived environment
- Important role of language -> Lefebvre (rhythm analysis, power, French style of semiotics – Saussure, Barthes – sign, signifier, signified -> important for imagination of the city -> connection to power, decision making, place attachment, perceiving) + important in creation of dominant culture and ideology (the more power the bigger influence in creation and fastening of dominant meanings to the sign sign)



The Global Economy

- SSP agrees with the importance of the global economy, however, push factors of capital mobility are not the only ones determining growth (state, local actions of the real estate...)



Sociospatial perspective – summary:

- Integrated theory that explains urbanization and the production of space
- Incorporates number of different factors
- Considers the role of real estate in development as the combined activities of both agency and structure
- Strives for a detailed view of politics that emphasizes the activities of individuals and groups in the development process
- Considers cultural factors such as race, gender, and the symbolic context of space to be just as important as economic and political concerns
- The production of space indicates that an association exists between the stages of political economic growth and urban spatial form



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Audio summary of Right to the City: <https://youtu.be/fZU2urqDKbE>