Urban Sociology

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Preface

Urban sociology is the sociological study of the various statistics among the population in cities. Chiefly the study of urban areas where industrial, commercial and residental zones converge. This practice sheds light on the influence of the city scape environment in burghal areas of poverty in response to several different languages, a low quality of life, several different ethnic groups and a low standard of police guardianship that all amount to social disorganisation.

During the first half of 20th century, the study of cities was at the heart of sociology. Since then urban sociology has gradually lost this privileged role as a lens for the discipline, as producer of key analytic categories. But now, at the down of the 21st century, the city is once again emerging as a strategic site for understanding major new trends that are reconfiguring the social order.

The present volume provides a comprehensive introduction to urban sociology, urban anthropology, and urban studies. While fundamentally sociological, this book uses a multi-disciplinary approach to explore all facets of urban living. It provides a balanced framework for the study of the field by evaluating and integrating both ecological and political economic perspectives and examining the experiential aspect of political and economic life in cities.

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Status of Urban Sociology

In the first half of twentieth century, the study of cities was at the heart of sociology. Since then urban sociology has gradually lost this privileged role as a lens for the discipline, as producer of key analytic categories. But, in this twenty-first century, the city is once again emerging as a strategic site for understanding major new trends that are reconfiguring the social order. Can urban sociology seize the moment and once again produce path-breaking scholarship that will give us some of the analytic tools for understanding the broader social transformation under way?

The challenges arise out of the intersection of major macro-social trends and their particular spatial patterns. The city and the metropolitan region emerge as strategic sites where these macrosocial trends materialise and hence can be constituted as an object of study. Among these trends are globalisation and the rise of the new information technologies, the intensifying of transnational and translocal dynamics, and the strengthening presence and voice of socio-cultural diversity. Each one of these trends has its own specific conditionalities, contents and consequences for cities, and for theory and research.

Cities are also sites where each of these trends interacts with the others in distinct, often complex manners, in a way they do not in just about any other setting. All three trends are at a cutting edge of actual change that sociological theory and urban sociology in particular need to factor in to a far greater extent than they have. By far the best developed and most studied is socio-cultural diversity as it lends itself to the micro-sociological treatments that prevail in much urban sociology. There is a strong emerging literature on the first two trends, but mostly in disciplines other than urban sociology.

These trends do not encompass the majority of social conditions; on the contrary, most social reality probably corresponds to older continuing and familiar trends. That is why much of urban sociology's traditions and wellestablished sub-fields will remain important and constitute the heart of the discipline. Further, there are good reasons why most of urban sociology has not quite engaged the characteristics and the consequences of these three trends: current data sets are quite inadequate for addressing these issues at the level of the city. Yet, although these three trends may involve only parts of the urban condition and cannot themselves be confined to the urban, they are strategic in that they mark the urban condition in novel ways and the latter is, in turn, a key research site for their examination. In thinking about the challenges facing urban sociology at the millennium, it is necessary to confront these strategic developments.

Among the dominant forces reconfiguring the social, the economic, the political, and the subjective at century's end are globalisation and the new information technologies. The implications for the urban of these three trends are pronounced: globalisation and telecommunications are about dispersal, transnational and translocal networks cut across the boundaries of cities, and much of the new cultural diversity is

embedded in new subjectivities and narratives, not common foci for urban sociology. If one were to take the traditional tools of urban sociology and social science one could factor in some aspects of these trends. But theorisation is lagging, even though there are important exceptions.

Economic geography and cultural studies have contributed rather more. 'Embedded statism', which has marked the social sciences generally, is one obstacle to a full theorisation of some of these issues. We can characterise this in terms of the explicit or implicit assumption about the nation-state as the container of social processes and the national as the appropriate scale for studying major social, economic and political processes. These assumptions work well for many of the subjects studied in the social sciences. But they are not helpful in elucidating a growing number of situations when it comes to globalisation and to a whole variety of transnational processes now being studied by social scientists.

Nor are those assumptions helpful for developing the requisite research techniques. Further, while they describe conditions that have held for a good part of this century in much of the world, we are now seeing their partial unbundling. Their unbundling demands the introduction of additional qualifications to the major assumptions described above. Of particular interest here is the implied correspondence of national territory with the national, and the associated implication that the national and the non-national are two mutually exclusive conditions. We are now seeing their partial unbundling.

One of the features of the current phase of globalisation is that the fact a process happens within the territory of a sovereign state does not necessarily mean that it is a national process. Conversely, the national (such as firms, capital, culture) may increasingly be

located outside the national territory, for instance, in a foreign country or in digital spaces. This localisation of the global, or of the non-national, in national territories, and of the national outside national territories, undermines a key duality running through many of the methods and conceptual frameworks prevalent in the social sciences, that the national and the non-national are mutually exclusive.

This partial unbundling of the national has significant implications for our analysis and theorisation of cities, especially major cities where the forces of globalisation and telecommunications come together. The city as an object of study has long been a debatable construct, whether in early writings or in very recent ones. But the unbundling of urban space and of the traditional hierarchies of scale we are seeing today further raises the ante in terms of prior conceptualisations. Major cities can be thought of as nodes where a variety of processes intersect in particularly pronounced concentrations.

In the context of globalisation, many of these processes are operating at a global scale. Cities emerge as one territorial or scalar moment in a trans-urban dynamic. This is, however, not the city as a bounded unit, but the city as a node in a grid of cross-boundary processes. Further, this type of city cannot be located simply in a scalar hierarchy that places it beneath the national, regional and global. It is one of the spaces of the global, and it engages the global directly, often by-passing the national. Some cities may have had this capacity long before the current era; but today these conditions have been multiplied and amplified to the point that they can be read as a qualitatively different phase. Pivoting theorisation and research on the city might be a fruitful way of cutting across embedded statism and capturing the rescaling of some major social, economic and political processes at the level of the city.

Besides the challenge of overcoming embedded statism, there is the challenge of recovering place in the context of globalisation, telecommunications, and the intensifying of transnational and translocal dynamics. Large cities around the world are the terrain where a multiplicity of globalisation processes assume concrete, localised forms. These localised forms are, in good part, what globalisation is about. Recovering place means recovering the multiplicity of presences in this landscape. The large city of today has emerged as a strategic site for a whole range of new types of operations -political, economic, 'cultural,' subjective. It is one of the nexi where the formation of new claims materialises and assumes concrete forms.

The loss of power at the national level produces the possibility for new forms of power and politics at the subnational level. Further, in so far as the national as container of social process and power is cracked it opens up possibilities for a geography of politics that links sub-national spaces across borders. Cities are foremost in this new geography. One question this engenders is how and whether we are seeing the formation of a new type of transnational politics that localises in these cities.

Immigration, for instance, is one major process through which a new transnational political economy and translocal household strategies are being constituted. It is one largely embedded in major cities in so far as most immigrants, certainly in the developed world, whether in the USA, Japan or Western Europe, are concentrated in such major cities. One of the constitutive processes of globalisation today, even though not recognised or represented as such in mainstream accounts of the global economy.

This configuration contains unifying capacities across national boundaries and sharpening conflicts within cities. Global capital and the new immigrant

workforce are two major instances of transnationalised
actors that have unifying properties internally and find
themselves in contestation with each other inside cities.
Researching and theorising these issues will require
approaches that diverge from the more traditional studies
of political elites, local party politics, neighbourhood
associations, immigrant communities, and so on, through
which the political landscape of cities and metropolitan
regions has conventionally been conceptualised in urban
sociology.

URBAN CENTRALITY

The concept of the city is complex, imprecise, and
charged with specific historical meanings. A more
abstract category might be 'centrality', one of the
properties cities have historically provided and produced.
Such a focus would not concern matters such as the
boundaries of cities or what cities actually are. These are
partly empirical questions: each city is going to have a
different configuration of boundaries and contents. The
question is, rather, what are the conditions for the
continuity of centrality in advanced economic systems in
the face of major new organisational forms and
technologies that maximise the possibility for geographic
dispersal, at the regional, national and indeed, global
scale, as well as simultaneous system integration?

Historically, centrality has largely been embedded in
the central city. One of the changes brought about by the
new conditions is the reconfiguring of centrality: the
central city is today but one form of centrality. Important
emerging spaces for the constitution of centrality range
from the new transnational networks of cities to
electronic space. A second major issue consider essential
for thinking about the future of the city concerns the
narratives that we have constructed about the city and
their relation to the global economy and to new
technologies.

The understandings and the categories that dominate mainstream discussions about the future of the advanced urban economy signal that the city has become obsolete for leading economic sectors. We need to subject these notions to critical examination. There are instantiations of the global economy and of the new technologies that have not been recognised as such or are contested representations. In a theorised level, there are certain properties of power that make cities strategic. Power needs to be historicised to overcome the abstractions of the concept, it is actively produced and reproduced.

Many of the studies in urban sociology focused on the local dimensions of power have made important contributions in this regard. Beyond this type of approach, one of the aspects today in the production of power structures has to do with new forms of economic power and the re-location of certain forms of power from the public political realm to the private economic realm. This brings with it questions about the built environment and the architectures of centrality that represent different types of power. Does power have spatial correlates, does it have a spatial moment? In terms of the economy this question could be operationalised more concretely: Can the current economic system, with its strong tendencies towards concentration in ownership and control, have a space economy that lacks points of physical concentration?

One way of framing the issue of centrality is by focusing upon larger dynamics rather than beginning with the city as such. For instance, we could note that the geography of globalisation contains both a dynamic of dispersal and one of centralisation, the latter a condition that has only recently begun to receive recognition. Most of the scholarship on these issues, and it is vast, has focused on dispersal patterns. The massive trends towards the spatial dispersal of economic activities at the

metropolitan, national and global levels that we associate with globalisation have contributed to a demand for new forms of territorial centralisation of top-level management and control operations.

The fact, for instance, that firms world-wide had half a million affiliates outside their home countries by 1997 signals that the sheer number of dispersed factories and service outlets that are part of a firm's integrated operation creates massive new needs for central co-ordination and servicing. In brief, the spatial dispersal of economic activity made possible by globalisation and telecommunications contributes to an expansion of central functions if this dispersal is to take place under the continuing concentration in control, ownership and profit appropriation that characterises the current economic system.

It is at this point that the city enters the discourse. Cities regain strategic importance because they are favoured sites for the production of these functions. National and global markets as well as globally integrated organisations require central places where the work of globalisation gets done. Finance and advanced corporate services are industries producing the organisational commodities necessary for the implementation and management of global economic systems. Cities are preferred sites for the production of these services, particularly the most innovative, speculative, internationalised service sectors.

Further, leading firms in information industries require a vast physical infrastructure containing strategic nodes with hyper-concentration of facilities; we need to distinguish between the capacity for global transmission/ communication and the material conditions that make this possible. Finally, even the most advanced information industries have a production process that is at least partly placebound because of the combination of

resources it requires even when the outputs are hypermobile. The tendency in the specialised literature has been to study these advanced information industries in terms of their hypermobile outputs rather than the actual work processes which include top level professionals as well as clerical and manual service workers.

Further, when we start by examining the broader dynamics in order to detect their localisation patterns, we can begin to observe and conceptualise the formation, at least incipient, of transnational urban systems. The growth of global markets for finance and specialised services, the need for transnational servicing networks due to sharp increases in international investment, the reduced role of the government in the regulation of international economic activity and the corresponding ascendance of other institutional arenas with a strong urban connection - all these point to the existence of a series of transnational networks of cities.

To a large extent it seems that the major business centres in the world today draw their importance from these transnational networks. There is no such thing as a single global city, and in this sense there is a sharp contrast with the erstwhile capitals of former empires. These networks of major international business centres constitute new geographies of centrality. The intensity of transactions among these cities, particularly through the financial markets, trade in services, and investment has increased sharply, and so have the orders of magnitude involved. There has been a sharpening inequality in the concentration of strategic resources and activities between each of these cities and others in the same country.

This has consequences for the role of urban systems in national territorial integration. Although the latter has never quite been what its model signals, the last decade

has seen a further acceleration in the fragmentation of national territory. National urban systems are being partly unbundled as their major cities become part of a new or strengthened transnational urban system. But we can no longer think of centres for international business and finance simply in terms of the corporate towers and corporate culture at their centre.

The international character of major cities lies not only in their telecommunication infrastructure and foreign firms: it lies also in the many different cultural environments in which these workers and others exist. This is one arena where we have seen the growth of an enormously rich scholarship. Today's major cities are in part the spaces of post-colonialism and indeed contain conditions for the formation of a post-colonialist discourse. It seems to me that this is an integral part of the future of such cities.

TRANSNATIONAL POLITICAL GEOGRAPHY

The incorporation of cities into a new cross-border geography of centrality also signals the emergence of a parallel political geography. Major cities have emerged as a strategic site not only for global capital, but also for the transnationalisation of labour and the formation of translocal communities and identities. In this regard cities are a site for new types of political operations. The centrality of place in a context of global processes makes possible a transnational economic and political opening for the formation of new claims and hence for the constitution of entitlements, notably rights to place. At the limit, this could be an opening for new forms of 'citizenship'. The emphasis on the transnational and hypermobile character of capital has contributed to a sense of powerlessness among local actors, a sense of the futility of resistance. But an analysis that emphasises place suggests that the new global grid of strategic sites is a terrain for politics and engagement.

This is a space that is both place-centred in that it is embedded in particular and strategic locations; and it is transterritorial because it connects sites that are not geographically proximate yet are intensely connected to each other. Is there a transnational politics embedded in the centrality of place and in the new geography of strategic places, such as is for instance the new world-wide grid of global cities? This is a geography that cuts across national borders and the old North-South divide. But it does so along bounded 'filières'. It is a set of specific and partial rather than all-encompassing dynamics. It is not only the transmigration of capital that takes place in this global grid, but also people—both rich—the new transnational professional workforce, and poor, most migrant workers. And it is a space for the transmigration of cultural forms, the re-territorialisation of 'local' subcultures.

If we consider that large cities concentrate both the leading sectors of global capital and a growing share of disadvantaged populations—immigrants, many of the disadvantaged women, people of colour generally and in the megacities of developing countries, masses of shanty dwellers—then we can see that cities have become a strategic terrain for a whole series of conflicts and contradictions.

One way of thinking about the political implications of this strategic transnational space anchored in cities is in terms of the formation of new claims on that space. The city has indeed emerged as a site for new claims: by global capital which uses the city as an 'organisational commodity', but also by disadvantaged sectors of the urban population, frequently as internationalised a presence in large cities as that of capital. The 'de-nationalising' of urban space, and the formation of new claims by transnational actors, raise the question Whose city is it?