

JOHN R. SHORT

AN INTRODUCTION TO
URBAN
GEOGRAPHY



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Routledge & Kegan Paul
London, Boston, Melbourne and Henley

*First published in 1984
by Routledge & Kegan Paul plc
39 Store Street, London WC1E 7DD, England
9 Park Street, Boston, Mass. 02108, USA
464 St Kilda Road, Melbourne,
Victoria 3004, Australia and
Broadway House, Newtown Road,
Henley-on-Thames, Oxon RG9 1EN, England*

*Set in Press Roman 10/11 by Columns of Reading
and printed in Great Britain by
The Thetford Press Ltd, Thetford, Norfolk*

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Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Short, John R.

An introduction to urban geography.

Bibliography: p.

Includes index.

1. Cities and towns. 2. Anthro-po-geography.

I. Title.

GF125.S56 1984 307.7'6 83-21176

British Library CIP available

ISBN 0-7102-0372-1

ISBN 0-7100-9892-8 (Pbk)

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By the same author

Housing and Residential Structure (with Keith Bassett,
RKP, 1980)

An Introduction to Political Geography (RKP, 1982)

Urban Data Sources (Butterworths, 1980)

Housing in Britain: The Postwar Experience (Methuen,
1982)

The Urban Arena (Macmillan, 1984)

The Human Geography of Contemporary Britain (co-editor
with Andrew Kirby, Macmillan, 1984)

Preface

This book is written for first- and second-year students at universities, colleges and polytechnics taking courses in urban geography. The book was written for many reasons, but it primarily arose from my dissatisfaction with existing texts which seemed to be both parochial in concern and limited in outlook. Too few textbooks seemed, at least to me, to combine an awareness of the urban picture outside of North America with an appreciation of the social context of urban living. The emphasis was on urban structure, often at the expense of social process. This book is an attempt to make students aware of the variety in the urban condition and to introduce them to some of the relationships operating between space and society.

The book draws upon some of my previous work. Those seeking a fuller discussion of the range of approaches to cities should consult *Housing and Residential Structure*, while those wishing a more explicit account of the core-periphery model constantly used in the text should read *An Introduction to Political Geography*. For students wishing, or more likely being forced, to undertake project work, *Urban Data Sources* aims to provide an introduction to some source material. The work presented here is thus in one sense a survey of past work. But by pointing to important areas it also hopefully points to future lines of enquiry. The aim of all textbook writers should be to generate enough interest so that their work is eventually surpassed.

In writing this book my greatest debt is to my colleagues at the Department of Geography, University of Reading, who have provided a tolerant and supportive atmosphere in which I was given time and institutional space to develop my ideas. Andrew Kirby, Sophie Bowlby, Dave Foot, Mike Breheny, John Whittow and Peter Hall have all given me material and ideas which I have incorporated in this text. In particular a number of colleagues gave me access to their slide collections. The generosity was much appreciated and the specific debts are mentioned in the acknowledgments section, where the bland list conceals the sincerity of my gratitude. A special thanks to Chris and Tony Holland. Chris typed most of the manuscript and Tony kindly gave me access to his excellent picture collection.

Acknowledgments

To illustrate the text I have used a number of photographs from my own and my colleagues' slide collections. For taking the time and effort, and for allowing me to use their prints, I am grateful to the following: Dr Erlet Cater (plates 4, 5, 16, 17, 23, 24, 29, 52); Dr Stephen Fleming (48); Brian Goodall (12, 28, 36, 37, 40, 45); Professor Peter Hall (7, 13, 20, 21, 22, 32, 33, 38, 39); Tony Holland (2, 3, 8, 19, 46); Andrew Millington (9); Dr Russell Thompson (15); and Dr John Whittow (6, 18, 49, 50, 51); plates 43 and 47 were taken from Jill Posener's *Spray It Loud*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982.

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search for spatial regularities in Australian seaports, *Geografiske Annaler*, 1967, by permission of Professor Claeson; figure 4.10, from D. Barker, *Area*, vol. 9, no. 4, by permission of the Institute of British Geographers; figures 4.12 and 11.8, from D. N. Parkes and H. J. Thrift, *Times, Spaces and Places*, John Wiley & Sons Ltd, 1980; figure 4.13, from D. Janelle, Central place development in a shrinking network, *Professional Geographer* 20, 5-10, by permission of the Association of American Geographers; figure 5.2, from D. E. Keeble, Models of economic development, in R. J. Chorley and P. Haggett (eds), *Models in Geography*, Methuen, 1967; figure 5.3, from K. Warren, *North East England*, Oxford University Press, 1973; figure 6.2, from D. M. Smith, *Human Geography: a Welfare Approach*, Edward Arnold, 1977; figure 6.3, from OECD, *The Impact of the Newly Industrializing Countries*, 1979; figure 6.4, from M. Frost and N. Spence, Policy responses to urban and regional change in Britain, *Geographical Journal* vol. 147 (3), 1981; figure 6.5, from J. R. Short, Urban policy and British cities, *Journal of the American Planning Association*, vol. 48, no. 1, 1982; figure 7A, from E. W. Burgess, *The City*, University of Chicago Press, 1925; figure 7.2, from D. Harvey, The political economy of urbanization, in G. Gappert and H. M. Rose (eds), *The Social Economy of Cities*, *Urban Affairs Annual Review* 9, Sage Publications, 1975; figure 7.3, from Harold Wolman, Housing and housing policy in the U.S. and U.K., in L. S. Browne, *The Geography of Housing*, Edward Arnold, 1981; figure 7.4 is loosely based on a figure from R. Morril, The negro ghetto, *Geographical Review*, 55, 1965; figure 7.6, from Robert Murdie, Factorial ecology of metropolitan Toronto, *Research Paper* 116, Department of Geography, University of Chicago; figure 7.7, from J. Patrick, *A Glasgow Gang Observed*, Eyre Methuen, 1973; figure 8.2, from P. Hall, *Urban and Regional Planning*, 1975, by permission of A. D. Peters Ltd and Penguin Ltd; figure 8.3, from J. M. Thompson, *Great Cities and their Traffic*, Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1977; figures 8B-8F, from K. Jones and A. M. Kirby, Provision and wellbeing, *Environment and Planning*, by permission of Dr J. H. Ashby; figure 8G, from P. Hall, *Great Planning Disasters*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1980, by permission of Weidenfeld & Nicolson Archives; figures 9.2 and 9.6, from D. Harvey, The urban process under capitalism, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 2, 1, 1978, published by Edward Arnold; figure 9.3, from J. S. Adams, Residential structure of mid-western cities, *Annals of The Association of American Geographers*, 60, 1970; figure 9.5, from P. Ambrose, Who plans Brighton's housing crisis?, *Shelter Land Report* no. 1, 1976; figure 10.2, from R. Bennett, *The Geography of Public Finance*, Methuen & Co., 1980; figure 11.1, from K. Lynch, *The Image of the City*, MIT Press, 1960; figure 11.2, from P. Orleans, Differential cognition of urban residents, *Science, Engineering and the City*, no. 1498, by permission of the National Academy of Engineering Press, Washington, 1967; figure 11.3, by permission of Florence V. Thierfeldt; figure 11A, from James D. Harrison and William A. Howard, The role of meaning in the urban image, *Environment and Behaviour*, vol. 4, no. 4, copyright © 1972 Sage Publications Inc., with permission; figure 11.4, from D. Ley, *The Black Inner City as Frontier Outpost*, Association of American

Geographers, monograph series, no. 7, 1974; figure 11.5, from S. Weir, Red line districts, *Roof*, July 1976; figure 11.6, from BBC Audience Research Department, *What the People are Doing*, 1965; figure 12C, from F. Sandbach, *Environment, Ideology and Policy*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1980.

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Part 1

Setting the Scene



1 Introduction

DEFINING TERMS

The aim of this book is to introduce you to the field of study known as urban geography. There is no one accepted definition of urban geography. It is a shorthand notation for a set of concepts, techniques and theories applied to a particular area of reality we call urban. This introductory chapter affords us the opportunity to consider each of these two main elements in some detail.

Changing approaches

The body of theories which have been applied by geographers to urban areas has varied over time, indeed it varies by geographer. We can identify four distinct approaches:

- 1 **The ecological approach** grew out of the work of the Chicago-based sociologists in the early part of this century. The work of Burgess and Park was concerned with applying the principles of ecology to the urban area. Particular emphasis was placed on the study of specific neighbourhoods and on identifying the spatial patterns of urban social structure. The best-known example of this approach is the concentric model formulated by Burgess. The elaboration of the ecological principles outlined by the early workers has all but ceased as a major academic exercise. Most people no longer take the ecological principles as anything more than extended metaphors. Subsequent work in the ecological tradition has concentrated on identifying different sub-areas of the city. There has been a growing sophistication in the techniques used to identify the different fragments of the urban social mosaic. But much of the contemporary work on identifying residential neigh-

bourhoods of the city owes a great deal to the early human ecologists and subsequent commentators.

- 2 **The neo-classical approach** takes its basic orientation from neo-classical economics which pictures the economy as a harmonious system in which firms seek to maximise profits and households maximise their net benefits (termed utility). The neo-classical approach seeks to understand how the distribution of different land uses in social groups comes about in the city with reference to profit maximisation on the part of firms and utility maximisation on the part of households. This approach focuses on the choices open to households and firms rather than the constraints. For this reason it has been criticised and many have argued that the neo-classical approach ignores too much of contemporary urban reality.
- 3 **The behavioural approach.** Discontent with the grand generalisation of the previous approaches has led to the emergence of an explicitly behavioural approach which stresses the behavioural basis to aggregate social processes and urban spatial patterns. This approach focuses on human perception of the city and individual decision-making in urban areas.
- 4 **The structuralist approach** is not one approach but a number of different strands. The broad emphasis is on treating cities and urban phenomena as part of the wider view of society. Individual decisions are seen to arise from an environment structured by broader-scale social and economic processes. Thus, in the structuralist approach, it is considered impossible to understand individual households' housing

decisions without reference to the structure and functioning of the housing market.

Within each of the broad approaches outlined there are variations. In the ecological approach there is a difference between the early workers who stressed ecological principles and the later work of urban social geographers who were and are much more aware of the individual decision-making processes which underlie aggregate spatial patterns and the social processes which structure the urban environment. In the structuralist approach we can identify the two strands (a) the institutional variant, which seeks to identify the main agents and institutions which shape the city, and (b) the more recent emergence of an explicitly marxist interpretation which seeks to draw out the connections between economic structure, social classes and the production and consumption of urban space. The four approaches outlined are broad terms which cover a variety and diversity of work.

These different approaches have sometimes been associated with different methods of analysis. The neo-classical approach, for example, has long used mathematical models while the behavioural approach has often been reliant on questionnaires. This methodological division has sometimes led to the erroneous belief that some methods are only consistent with certain approaches. This is incorrect. Just because your theoretical adversaries monopolise a certain method does not invalidate its wider use. This book is firmly based on the belief that in order to understand the complex urban world a variety of methods are needed. An understanding of the city is a difficult prize to attain, and one which is not won by any single line of attack.

This book aims to provide you with an indication of the range of approaches. Some of the chapters draw heavily on some approaches rather than others while the general flavour of the book is to show the ways in which elements of the behavioural and structural approaches can be combined in order to understand the city. Less emphasis is placed on the neo-classical approach, while the ecological approach is mentioned only at a number of key points.

The city

The field of enquiry of urban geography is urban areas, what we generally call towns and cities. The treatment of the urban has varied. Nineteenth- and early twentieth-century commentators, perhaps overwhelmed by the scale and pace of urbanisation, tended to view the city as an independent unit of enquiry. They thought it legitimate to append the adjective 'urban' to all manner of things. Habits still persist and we thus have 'urban' problems, 'urban' issues, 'urban' geography, 'urban' sociology and 'urban' studies. There were exceptions. Henry George, Thorstein Veblen, Frederick Engels and Karl Marx were amongst those who sought to relate an understanding of societies to an understanding of cities. This has also been the aim of much recent work in urban geography which sees the separation into the different disciplines and subsequent sub-disciplines as merely a convenient division of academic labour but not a reflection of the way society is structured. This book shares that belief. In this text the city will be identified as a useful object of analysis but not one independent from the nature of the wider society. A guiding principle of this book will be to integrate the study of cities and urbanism to a wider view of how society works. I will seek to show how wider social theories can be brought to bear on the analysis of the city and how an understanding of cities can enrich our view of society.

RECURRING THEMES

From the broad aim of seeking to show the relationships between urbanism and society flows a number of sub-themes. These reappear in slightly different forms throughout the exposition.

- 1 **The importance of cross-cultural comparisons and contrasts.** Most urban geography textbooks have a degree of parochialism which for geography textbooks is very disturbing. The rich diversity of world urbanism, the subtle nuances in the urban process in different societies and the noticeable differences of the city as lived experience in various countries seem to be reduced by most textbooks to either intellectual insignificance or to

the chauvinistic status of variations on a North American theme. The purpose of this book is thus twofold; to present an urban geography textbook which by virtue of its structure and exposition provides a fresh insight into that generator of economic, social and political change, the city, and which also allows cross-cultural contrasts to be made. Of course great care has to be taken in using a cross-cultural approach since it is all too easy to slip into a tourist-guide style which breathlessly surveys topics of local interest. The rich diversity of world urbanism cannot be covered in a book of this kind. However, by judicious selection of case studies it is hoped to highlight patterns of urbanisation in third-world countries and socialist countries. The main co-ordinates of the contemporary world order are a north-south dimension, to use the terminology of the Brandt report, although it is also termed core-periphery and an east-west dimension between centrally planned economies and capitalist economies. Most urban geography textbooks would thus seem to be concentrating on only one quadrant of these co-ordinates, the rich capitalist countries. But it is important to consider patterns of urban life in other societies in order to avoid the parochial view that cities of the world are merely variations on the basic theme found in Chicago. In most chapters, therefore, cross-cultural material will be presented at the appropriate points. The terms core and developed will be used interchangeably with reference to rich countries, such as USA and UK, while the terms periphery and third world will be used with reference to the poor countries of the world.

- 2 **Re-distributional consequences.** The city can be seen as an arena in which groups bargain, compete and come into conflict over scarce resources. It is important to make assessments of the outcomes. Thus a major element of this book will be to assess the re-distributional consequences of social processes and spatial patterns. We need to identify urban winners and urban losers. Often, the conflict expresses itself in the general form of a tension between equity considerations and those of efficiency. Efficiency can be measured in various ways: in capitalist countries profit maximisation is the

general criterion while in centrally planned economies minimisation of costs is important. There is often a tension between the efficiency of individual firms or of public sector institutions and equity considerations. While it may be efficient for a firm to locate its manufacturing base in a suburban location, this denies job opportunities to central city residents unable to travel long distances to work. These considerations need to be borne in mind when looking at social processes and spatial structure.

- 3 **The role of government.** One of the most important actors in the urban scene is the government. Even in the capitalist countries the role of the government is large and it has been growing. An analysis of their role, form and function of government should thus play a central role in our analysis. In much of the geographical literature the study of public policy has been weak. But public policy impacts have a huge role in shaping urban areas. Although the role of the local government is examined in detail in chapter 10, throughout all of the book the role of the government is considered a key element in the analysis. The state is seen as an arena for struggle; in some instances the arena is held by one dominant group, but throughout most of the time, however, there are competing groups. The laws define the rules of the game while the legislation indicates the outcome of the struggles. The state's role is *regressive* when, as in the case of the urban renewal programmes of the 1960s and 1970s, public policy aids the rich and disadvantages the poor; *progressive* policies are those which re-distribute income from rich to poor.

Presented in this general form the major sub-themes of the book lack historical depth and explanatory width. In the subsequent pages life is breathed into these categories by analysis of actual events.

A NOTE TO THE READER

Each author when writing a book has a particular type of reader in mind and a broad aim in sight. Since I am no exception, readers may find it useful if I make the following points. My ideal reader

is one who comes to this book with an enquiring mind eager to learn and unwilling to accept easy answers. When writing this book I did not assume that readers had taken any specific courses, although a general background in the social sciences as a whole is relevant. Through reading the book I hope the reader will become more interested in the work done and the work that needs to be done in this area. I hope I have presented enough food for thought and stimulated curiosity. Ultimately my ideal reader should end up dissatisfied with the book. All textbooks are only partial because they attempt to cover existing knowledge at one point in time, but reality is constantly changing. The book is a battle report not a victory salute. The campaign continues.

GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

There are a vast number of textbooks on urban geography. Amongst the general readers see:

- Blowers, A., Brook, C., Dunleavy, P. and McDowell, L. (eds) (1982), *Urban Change and Conflict*, Harper & Row, New York.
- Bourne, L.S. (ed.) (1982) (second edition), *Internal Structure of the City*, Oxford University Press, London.
- Bourne, L.S. (ed.) (1978), *Systems of Cities*, Oxford University Press, London.
- Brunn, S.D. and Wheeler, J.O. (eds) (1980), *The American Metropolitan System: Present and Future*, Edward Arnold, London.
- Dear, M. and Scott, A.J. (1981), *Urbanisation and Urban Planning in Capitalist Society*, Methuen, London.
- Knox, P.L. (1982), *Urban Social Geography*, Longmans, London.
- Ley, D. (1983), *A Social Geography of The City*, Harper & Row, New York.
- and the successive volumes of *Geography and The Urban Environment* edited by D.J. Herbert and R.J. Johnston, published by John Wiley.
- General introductions to the different approaches in human and urban geography include:
- Bassett, K.A. and Short, J.R. (1980), *Housing and Residential Structure: Alternative Approaches*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London.
- Gregory, D. (1978), *Ideology, Science and Human Geography*, Hutchinson, London.
- Johnston, R.J. (1983) (second edition), *Geography and Geographers: Anglo-American Human Geography Since 1945*, Edward Arnold, London.
- Johnston, R.J. (1983), *Philosophy and Human Geography*, Edward Arnold, London.
- Different views of the city are discussed in:
- Saunders, P. (1981), *Social Theory and the Urban Question*, Hutchinson, London.
- Smith, M.P. (1980), *The City and Social Theory*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford.
- Regular papers on urban geography appear in a variety of journals. The following is a sample of the range:
- Environment and Planning A, (and D), Progress in Human Geography, International Journal of Urban and Regional Research, Economic Geography, Antipode, Urban Studies, Urban Geography, Urban Affairs Quarterly, Cities, Built Environment.*