

Geography and Inequality

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Geography and Inequality

Preface

This book on geography and inequality is an introductory text, written for students and others who wish to understand some of the spatial aspects of the development, maintenance, and possible solutions to one of the world's major problems. In writing it, we have aimed at a wide audience, eschewing technical detail in favour of substantive interpretation. Much of the work to which we refer is based on statistical arguments, the validity of which can be investigated from the original source. Although we recognize that some of our discussion may be based on analyses which are rather cryptic, we feel that only by bringing these together in a general review can their relative importance be appreciated.

At least one of the words in our title is a highly emotive one. Inequality is difficult to define and measure; its converse, equality, even more so. Concepts such as economic development and underdevelopment, civilization, and advanced industrial economies abound in the literature which we have surveyed. In portraying what we feel to be the salient features in that literature, we too have undoubtedly fallen into traps of value judgement and unwarranted synonyms. Most of our terminology is that of others, however, and we have preferred not to try and develop a standard vocabulary.

In the preparation of this book, our initial debt is to Dick Lawton, whose idea it was. Although circumstances beyond his and our control meant that he was not involved in the entire publication process, we would like to record our thanks to him for the initial stimulus. For helping us get our ideas into press and for much encouragement, we are grateful to Andrew Schuller and to the Staff of Oxford University Press. In more detail, we are indebted to Ann Barham for her efforts in correcting our English and ensuring that our bibliography is correct, to Verity Brack for her help in checking the proofs, to Joan Dunn for the wonders she has worked in producing a type-script from our three very different types of handwriting, to Stephen Frampton and Sheila Ottewell for drawing all of the illustrations, and to Peter Morley, John Owen, and David Maddison for their photographic work.

Our major debt is undoubtedly to each other, for our mutual tolerance and the ready assistance each has given the others. This book has been produced jointly and is not a collection of essays, although each of us was responsible for the initial drafts of certain parts (we

leave the spotting of individual authorship for some geographical party game!). And associated with this debt is that which we each owe to our family, for 'all that could be expected, and much else besides'.

March 1976

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Introduction

We live in an unequal world. All of us know of some people who are 'better off' than we are ourselves, and of others who are 'less well off' — however we define these emotive terms. Occasionally, the mass media bring to our attention groups who are extremely different from us, either in their degree of suffering, such as the inhabitants of drought-stricken areas in Africa, or in their extreme affluence. And most of us are concerned in some way about these inequalities. Compared to those who we know have a better 'quality of life', we feel deprived and often envious; compared to those who have a lower 'quality of life' we feel concerned and anxious that something should be done to help them. Often, we may be motivated to redress these inequalities, perhaps by supporting the activities of charitable organizations and by insisting on more inter-government aid in the case of poorer people, or by joining a militant trade union which will advance our claims relative to those who get more than us. These, we realize, are not solutions to the problems of inequalities that we perceive, but only remedies for assumed ills, and so occasionally our thoughts turn to the search for more permanent solutions to the world's inequalities.

There is awareness of inequalities among most people, but in almost every case this is very limited relative to the total extent of variations in health and wealth, happiness, and satisfaction. There are many inequalities of which we are totally ignorant, because they do not impinge directly upon our daily lives and are not brought to our notice by the mass media to which we pay attention. A lot of these may be in other countries, but many may well be in the very town or city in which we live — in parts of it which we never visit and with whose residents we have no contact. Indeed, our perceptions of inequalities may be greater at the international than at the local scale: the shantytown dweller on the edge of a Latin American city may be more aware, through the American programmes he sees on TV, of the affluence in other countries than he is of similar affluence in other parts of his home town. Thus our perceptions of inequalities, their nature and extent, depend on the 'known world' which we live in, which is probably very small relative to the external 'terra incognita' which only occasionally impinges on our livelihood.

Although as individuals we may be unaware of many of the world's inequalities, official bodies — governments and their agencies, the United Nations, and similar organizations — ought not to be ignorant of these facts, since many of them aim explicitly at the production of a more equitable society. But in fact they are surprisingly

ill-informed. In 1974 the British government established a Royal Commission whose standing reference began: 'To help to secure a fairer distribution of income and wealth in the community there is a need for a thorough and comprehensive inquiry into the existing distribution' (Royal Commission on the Distribution of Income and Wealth 1975, I, p. v.). Despite the great range of official statistics, the government was unable to commence a distribution of incomes policy without such an inquiry, and indeed its Commissioners pointed out that 'there is much to be done to obtain satisfactory information on (various aspects of) . . . income patterns' (p. 150). In addition to our own relative ignorance, therefore, it seems that official bodies are far from comprehensive sources of information on the kinds and amounts of inequality in the world, and within particular countries. Thus the data with which we can describe the patterns of inequality are far from perfect, and we must proceed at present with 'best estimates' only.

Once we have described the patterns our next task is to try and understand them, how they came about, how they are changing, and what their effects are. Clearly our approach to this task can vary enormously, since the causes are manifold and the changes complex. Our cultural backgrounds, our moral philosophies, and our political ideologies will all, directly or indirectly, influence how we tackle the problem. Of major importance, too, will be the reason why we are tackling it at all. If we are disinterested academics, our purpose may be very different from that of a social activist with a particular ideological axe to grind. But if our ultimate aim is to remove, or at least to reduce very considerably, the inequalities which we perceive, then we will want to ensure that we uncover the true causal relationships in the system, rather than the correlates: malaria may be characterized by a fever, but treatment of the fever alone will not cure the malaria. Solution requires understanding, therefore.

The three consecutive processes of description, understanding (or analysis), and policy present a daunting task when they relate to a problem as massive as social and economic inequality. We make no attempt at essaying such a task in this book. Rather, our focus is on a single component of inequality, its spatial distribution, both because this is our particular academic interest and because it is an aspect which is frequently overlooked. And even within this restricted focus, our areal coverage is limited to capitalist countries of the 'Western' and 'Third Worlds'.

Our first task, then, is to describe the spatial pattern of inequalities, and this occupies Chapters 1, 2, and 3. The initial problem is to decide what to measure and how to measure it, and so we begin with a

discussion of the concepts of social well-being, equity, and need. How well-off we are may, in a capitalist society, be largely dependent on our monetary income and assets, but our real income and wealth depends not only on what money we receive but what we can do with it (what we can buy, and at what price), as well as on those goods which we do not purchase directly, such as fresh air and a view, a water supply, and an educational system. In looking at spatial patterns, we almost invariably look at the conditions of populations as a whole, but must always remember that in most areas, above a minimum size, there is likely to be considerable diversity as a quick trip through any city will indicate. And so we present examples of various inequalities at different scales in Chapter 2, before turning, in Chapter 3, to attempts to find general indices of well-being which can illustrate the over-all patterns of inequality.

Given our evidence of clear spatial variations in levels of social well-being, we then try to explain why these occur, which occupies Chapters 4, 5 and 6. As indicated above, we are not presenting a full explanation of the inequalities, but only one for their spatial patterning; this does not mean a neglect of other causes, but merely indicates that our focus is on the spatial element. Three sets of reasons are suggested, and each of these is given a separate chapter. In the first, we argue that the division of labour, which has proven a vital component of the development of advanced civilizations as we know them, has a clear spatial pattern. Its original focus was in a few parts of the world and these, by and large, have remained the centres of economic power, so that, just as within a particular society one has a 'working class' and a 'ruling class', so one can recognize dominant and dominated countries in the world system, with some 'middle-class' nations, like Switzerland, who aid the system's operation. Similarly, within particular countries there are 'command centres' and 'workhouses'. Since the rewards of an economic society — wealth, status, and power — are differentially distributed, with the 'working class' generally the underprivileged, so this spatial division of labour produces a spatial pattern of inequalities.

A number of academic geographers believe that their contribution to the understanding of societies is to focus on what is termed the spatial variable. Societies occupy territories, and they must organize them, which involves the production of spatial structures. Two aspects of this spatial variable are recognized here. The first involves the time involved in moving within and between territories which, because time is a limited resource which societies wish to conserve, is a cost. Thus the costs of movement are an element in real incomes: the less travel involved in moving you to what you want and/or in moving what you

want to you, the more of your income you can spend on goods and on services other than travel. Others will have similar aims to reduce travel costs, however, so spatial patterns of supply and demand are initiated, which affect prices. Thus where one lives relative to a wide range of other places can be an important influence on one's real income, as we illustrate in Chapter 5.

The second way in which societies manipulate the spatial variable is by the creation of autonomous or semi-autonomous territories. The most immediately relevant example of these for most of us is our home, a bounded area which we defend and over which we have certain rights. But there is a wide range of such territories, both informal — such as the 'turfs' of city gangs — and formal, such as the school and electoral districts, the counties and boroughs, which influence so many aspects of our livelihood. Chapter 6 focuses on these formal territories, discussing how our levels of social well-being can be influenced by which we live in, and why.

Having presented our threefold explanation for spatial inequalities, and found evidence in support of our hypotheses concerning these influences, the next stage is clearly to suggest how we could manipulate them in order to remove the inequalities. This is the theme of Chapter 7, in which we look in turn at how the spatial division of labour might be reorganized, how relative distances could be restructured to reduce variations in accessibility, and how administrative territories might be revised in order to remove their contribution to the inequalities. Evidence is presented of relevant policies in operation, and of their effects, but in virtually every example we show that the 'spatial engineering' does not remove the symptoms completely, and in many cases never gets to the cause of the disease itself. This leads us, in our conclusions, to the view that spatial solutions to inequalities are, in themselves, insufficient. They may be ideal for reducing some inequalities, and for bringing relatively rapid relief to suffering, but they do not attack the causes. Thus our purpose in this book is not to present a panacea to the problems of inequality. But spatial planning is a necessary component of any over-all policy, since we are able to demonstrate the role of spatial variables in the development and continuation of place-to-place differences in social well-being. Recognition of this fact should assist in the production of a more equitable world.

1 The dimensions of differentiation

GEOGRAPHY AND SOCIAL INEQUALITY

Although the subject matter of this book is essentially concerned with the spatial dimensions of social inequality, it must be recognized at the outset that many of the causes, consequences, and manifestations of inequality are dominantly structural rather than spatial in nature. Nevertheless, the phenomena involved are complex, operating together as mutually reinforcing variables whose origins and effects may be seen at once in social, economic, political, and spatial terms. Although the substantive interest of geographers in social problems and social inequality will understandably be based on a perspective which places spatial variations before structural variations, this should not be regarded as the minority viewpoint of an academic discipline. Identifying the spatial component of social inequalities is crucial not only to the study of human geography but also to the improvement of social conditions within society as a whole. Indeed, it has been suggested that, in Britain at least, 'the dilemma of the "two nations" has shifted from being a class to being to an important degree a spatial problem' (Chisholm and Manners 1971, p.3). Whatever the basic causes of inequality, it is clearly a problem which affects locational, as well as occupational, social and demographic groups, and if we do not expect to discriminate against people on the bases of race, religion, colour, or social class, neither should we discriminate against people on the basis of location (Smith 1973a). In investigating inequality it is, therefore, insufficient to demonstrate that manual workers or fatherless families, for example, suffer disproportionately from poor housing conditions, dietary deficiencies, and low wages. It is also necessary to establish the extent to which these inequalities are dependent upon locational considerations and reflected in spatial patterns.

Unfortunately, geographers have traditionally ignored social problems such as these almost completely, preferring to study the production of goods and services and the distribution of resources rather than the conditions in which people live. Despite a long involvement in research into urban and regional planning, the implicit attitude in many geographical studies has been that poverty and deprivation are of little concern so long as they are spread fairly evenly and not concentrated in ghettos, distressed regions, or individual countries:

few recognized the possibility that changing spatial systems could alter over-all levels of well-being. Even in recent years there has been some resistance within the discipline to the pursuit of social relevance (see, for example, Berry 1972b, Trewartha 1973), although it continues to engage the bulk of the social sciences. The result is that geographers, in comparison with sociologists and political scientists, have paid little attention to social inequalities. Nevertheless, geography should, by definition, be concerned with inequalities, since inequality represents differences and the focus of geography is surely spatial differentiation. Thus the incidence of poor people or hungry children provides as conceptually sound a topic for the geographer as the incidence of raised beaches or the distribution of place names; and a regional geography based on the quality of people's lives is potentially as informative as one based on the characteristics of the industries in which they are employed. This long neglect of social problems by geographers seems to have been rooted in academic inertia and a reluctance to become involved in issues which are both politically and morally sensitive (Smith 1972).

The inertia of academic social consciences received a substantial jolt, however, with the United States' race riots in the mid/late 1960s, and it is probably no coincidence that geographical writing since then shows some welcome signs of overcoming earlier inhibitions. Studies of the geography of poverty in the United States by Morrill and Wohlenberg (1971), of the geography of health care by Shannon and Dever (1972), and of the distribution of real income within the spatial system of the western city by Harvey (1973) are examples which reflect a general awakening of interest in social well-being which is paralleled in the professional journals by a growing number of welfare-oriented articles.

In many ways, this interest in social well-being is a product of the serious public concern over social deprivation and environmental despoliation of all kinds generated throughout Western society in the late 1960s and early 1970s by the official rhetoric of planners and politicians, by the 'revelations' of the mass media, and, finally, by the evidence of people's own eyes. Underlying this concern is the realization that industrial expansion and economic growth — major goals of most nations — are, at best, mixed blessings, so that although most societies still opt for increased production and the advance of technology at the expense of some pollution and loss of amenity, economic development is now at least recognized as a process which brings qualitative changes as well as quantitative growth (Mishan 1967). It is no longer acceptable to shrug off second-order consequences of

development such as the structural unemployment resulting from technological innovation and the degradation of the countryside resulting from the spread of industrialization as 'the price of progress'.

Of particular relevance to geographers and planners are the findings of research which have shown that economic growth and technological change can lead to markedly increased spatial disparities through the natural processes of national, regional, and local development. The chief exponent of such work is Myrdal, who has shown how free-market forces tend to increase inequalities between regions through 'backwash effects' resulting from a process of cumulative causation in which new increments of activity and growth are concentrated disproportionately in already-expanding regions because of their attraction to investment capital, thus depriving other regions not only of much of their locally-generated capital, but also of many of their skilled and enterprising workers and of their share of tertiary activity and welfare services (Myrdal 1957a, Hirschman 1958, Hicks 1959). Similar cyclical arguments have been applied at other spatial scales (Keeble 1967). Increasing international inequality, for example, can largely be explained by the pattern of international economic relationships: the tendency for the consumption of rich manufacturing nations to grow more rapidly than the consumption of primary producers, combined with the tendency for populations to grow faster in poor countries, produces international inequalities in average incomes which, as Seers (1973) has demonstrated, aggravate income inequalities *within* poor countries. This internal inequality hampers the development of home-based manufacturing activity and so reinforces the international trading relationships responsible for the initial international inequality.

At smaller scales, spatial inequality can often be seen as the result of second-order or 'externality' effects of the activities of producers, consumers, and public authorities. An externality effect exists if the behaviour of one individual, group or institution affects the welfare of others, and can be positive or negative. The pollution resulting from the use of rivers as dumps for industrial effluent is a negative externality effect of the industrialist's behaviour in seeking a least-cost solution to his waste-disposal problems. Similarly, the residential displacement, social disorganization, and increased costs of living which befall inner-city residents as a result of urban renewal are negative externality effects attached to corporate decisions aimed at improving the quality of urban life. The economist Mishan (1967) believes that as societies grow in material wealth the incidence of these externality effects grows rapidly. Furthermore, Harvey (1971) argues that much of the residential competition and socio-political conflict within cities can be

interpreted as attempts to organize the distribution of externality effects to gain income advantages. This theme has been elaborated by Cox, who points out that even positive externalities tend to reinforce or initiate spatial disparities, simply because their intensity is a function of relative location. Thus, 'employment opportunities obviously are more available the closer one resides to such opportunities; and indirect benefits provided by a city park decline with decreasing accessibility to the park' (Cox 1973, p. 3).

The cumulative result is the localization of disadvantage in slums, shanty-towns, and ghettos. As Sherrard (1968, p.10) says: 'the slum is the catch-all for the losers, and in the competitive struggle for the cities' goods the slum areas are also the losers in terms of schools, jobs, garbage collection, street lighting, libraries, social services, and whatever else is communally available but always in short supply'. Harvey concludes that the redistributive effects of the urban system are leading 'towards a state of greater inequality and greater injustice' (Harvey 1971, p.229). Moreover, the problem is not exclusive to the free-market economy of the West. Konrad and Szelényi (1969), for example, attribute the failure of attempts to allocate resources in favour of less-skilled workers in Hungary to the redistributive effects of urban systems which appear to be creating even deeper patterns of inequality.

In some countries, the formal resolution of certain locational and allocational decisions within the political process has been aided by the use of highly sophisticated cost-benefit analyses which attempt to take externality effects into account. The Roskill Commission's deliberations (1969-72) over the siting of a third airport for London, for example, centred on an extensive cost-benefit approach, as did the London Traffic Survey (Greater London Council 1966). Such analyses essentially seek to specify alternatives and then attempt to evaluate their likely effects on the well-being of the community in financial terms. In practice, however, major methodological difficulties arise from our inability to measure many aspects of social well-being in terms of money. This is a recurring problem in applied economics and welfare economics, and its intractability has led to the pursuit of alternative approaches such as the social indicators movement discussed in Chapter 3. But however we attempt to quantify social well-being, it is clear that the whole is a complex product of many interrelated and sometimes conflicting parts. The following section of this chapter is therefore intended to outline the major dimensions of social well-being and to highlight some of their important interrelationships at both individual and aggregate (or territorial) levels.

SOCIAL WELL-BEING: AN ATTEMPT TO DECOMPOSE THE DEPENDENT VARIABLE

Social well-being is used here as a generic term for the family of overlapping concepts which includes level of living, the quality of life, social satisfaction, social welfare, and standard of living. As aggregate expressions of well-being, all are in common use, but few people have faced up to the problem of defining them and measuring them. Indeed, difficulties of definition have been recognized at least since the time of Aristotle, who observed that: 'both the general run of men and people of superior refinement say that [the highest of all achievable goals] is happiness [later translated as well-being], but with regard to what happiness is they differ, and the many do not give the same account as the wise' (quoted by McKean 1947, p.47). In practice, of course, all concepts are instrumental or pragmatic, being invented or adapted for some particular purpose, so that the elaboration of concepts like social welfare and social satisfaction must depend to some extent on the period, region, and context of their use. Any search for conclusive or universal definitions is therefore futile. It is pertinent, however, to make a few general observations by way of differentiation between the concepts.

To begin with, level of living is clearly established as the factual circumstances of well-being (the actual degree of satisfaction of the needs and wants of a community), whereas standard of living relates to the circumstances aspired to by that community (Knox 1975). A distinction must also be made between economic welfare and social welfare: 'the former usually refers to what people get from the consumption of goods and services purchased by money, or available as public provision, while the latter embraces all things contributing to the quality of human existence' (Smith 1973b, p.6). The notion of the quality of life is also a broad expression of well-being, but generally suggests an emphasis on the amount and distribution of impure public goods such as health care, education and welfare services, protection against crime, the regulation of pollution, and the preservation of fine landscapes and historic townscapes (Hall 1972). Similarly, although covering the whole spectrum of social well-being, the notion of social satisfaction is particularly concerned with the collective psychological response to the objective conditions of reality.

Despite these shades of emphasis, it is possible to achieve some consensus as to the main components of social well-being. Here the literature contains many suggestions. Miller *et al.* (1967), for example, propose six dimensions: money income, assets, basic services, education