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Inside the City: On Urbanisation, Public Policy and Planning

Allen J. Scott

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Abstract

A basic frame of reference for reconsideration of the urban question is presented, with an emphasis on the city as a collectivity whose character is derived from a spatially organised system of increasing returns effects and social needs. The logic of the city as a locus of accumulation and social reproduction in the modern economy is then discussed. Here, special attention is paid to the dynamics of intraurban production space and social space, and to the complex interrelations between the two. The concomitant shape and form of urban public policy are subject to investigation. Three major dilemmas and their underlying etiology are subject to scrutiny. These are: the fragility of localised competitive advantage in a globalising world; the widening social divide with its many-sided negative consequences on urban life; and, the growing mismatch between the internal geography of the city and the institutions of urban governance. The paper concludes with a comment on the implications of the new cognitive-cultural economy for understanding urban dynamics and problems.

Urbanisation and the Urban Question

My goal in this paper is to lay out a composite theoretical statement about the form, functions and evolutionary tendencies of the city and, on this basis, to attempt to rearticulate the urban question in contemporary capitalism. My motivation for this exercise comes in part from what I take to be a growing loss of focus in much that currently passes for urban analysis and from a dissatisfaction with the increasingly frequent conflation of social issues in general with urban issues in particular. A point of special concern in this regard, as Cochrane (2007) has affirmed, is the apparently endemic confusion about just what constitutes the domain of urban as opposed to non-urban policy. Some attempt to clarify this confusion is important not only in its own right, but also as a guide to strategic mobilisation in the interests of urban reform. Part of the motivation behind the paper can also be accounted for by the rise

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of a quintessentially urban cognitive-cultural economy over the past couple of decades. The new cognitive-cultural economy is not only concentrated in major cities in many different parts of the world, but also appears to be ushering in a number of important shifts in the organisation and layout of intraurban space.

I proceed at the outset by stressing the ontological status of the city as a dense, polarised system of interacting social and economic phenomena (transport facilities, factories, offices, shops, houses, workers, families, ethnic groups and so on). This system is energised by myriad individual decisions and actions, but it is also—and of necessity—a major site of policy initiatives and collective co-ordination. What imbues this nexus of phenomena with a distinctively *urban* character cannot be discovered by focusing attention on its aliquot parts, but only by investigating their peculiar form of spatial integration—i.e. the variable geometry of their expression as socio-geographical outcomes (land use patterns, locational events, linkage structures and so on) jointly organised around a common centre and dependent subcentres of gravity. I shall argue, as well, that while it may be possible to identify a minimal urban problematic that is more or less applicable across the history and geography of capitalism, the urban is nonetheless subject to marked conjunctural peculiarities and that the investigation of correspondingly localised urban questions in time and space therefore also constitutes a crucial moment in urban research.

Every major phase of capitalist development, it seems, generates its own peculiar kinds of urban problems and corresponding formulations of the urban question. In the 1920s, the Chicago school of urban sociology put forth what subsequently came to be a leading view of the city that combined a powerful sense of the massive growth of the large industrial metropolis with a Darwinist conception of the struggle between different social groups for living space (Park *et al.*, 1925). In the late 1960s and early 1970s, this hegemonic account was challenged both implicitly and explicitly by seminal urban analysts like Castells (1972), Harvey (1973) and Lefebvre (1970), who were then engaged in the codification of what was rapidly to become a widely accepted concept of the city within the broader theory of political economy, one that focused specifically on urban outcomes within a web of Fordist production relations and Keynesian welfare-statist policy arrangements. At the core of these new descriptions of the urban, despite their individual differences, lay a concern with the disparities and injustices of 'urban society' and with the unequal socio-spatial allocation of the collective consumption goods (public housing, transport infrastructures, educational facilities, etc.) that compose much of the physical groundwork of modern cities. Above all, the city was seen as a site of basic distributional struggles played out through public investment and planning activities in the built environment and as an arena in which issues of social justice and the democratic right to urban space were continually at stake. In more recent years, much of urban studies has veered towards an emphasis on cultural issues with a particular focus on everyday life, identity, landscape and spectacle (see for example, Amin and Thrift, 2002; McDowell, 1999; Soja, 2000; Watson and Gibson, 1995), although sometimes in ways that either implicitly or explicitly depreciate the essential economic foundations of urban growth and development in capitalism.

Each of these approaches to urban theory and the urban question provides useful insights into how cities work in the advanced capitalist world, but none, I believe, offers a definitive understanding of the essential mainsprings of the urban process at the beginning of the 21st century. While the achievement of any such understanding obviously requires the work of many hands, the

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present paper is a modest attempt to push the discussion forward by means of an inquiry into the general structure and dynamics of intraurban space and its concrete forms of expression at the present time. In particular, I attempt to capture something of an emerging synthesis based on a reformulated political-economic approach to urbanisation that simultaneously acknowledges the importance of socio-cultural dynamics in the working out of life inside the city. This synthesis is deeply coloured by three major overarching developments in the contemporary world. First, since the early 1980s, a so-called post-Fordist order (or better yet, a new cognitive-cultural economy) has come steadily to the fore and is now giving rise to major rounds of growth and internal social differentiation in the world's large metropolitan areas (Scott, 2007). Secondly, an overriding turn to neoliberalism in governmental policy stances has ushered in a climate of increasing fiscal austerity and is associated, among other things, with massive public withdrawal from all forms of redistributive policy, both national and local. Thirdly, globalisation is advancing apace, bringing cities all over the world into new configurations of competition and collaboration with one another and, at the same time, stimulating many different experiments with new forms of institutional response at the local level. These three points are essential to any reconsideration of urbanisation and the urban question at the present time, both because of their implications for the character of urbanisation in the sense given earlier and because they betoken a number of profound shifts in the geography and balance of political power in contemporary society generally.

Thus, my overall objective in this paper is not only to recover a specifically urban problematic, but also to pinpoint the evolving nature of the urban question (*qua* scientific undertaking and political project). My comments will reflect a primary concern with the situation in the US today, but reference will also occasionally be made to conditions in other parts of the world, and my overall objective in the end is to reach for a fairly general conceptual synthesis.

Towards a Framework of Inquiry

In the year 2004, 73.6 per cent of the 293.6 million residents of the US lived in metropolitan areas of 250 000 or more. With such a massive absolute and relative concentration of population in the country's large cities, it is tempting to equate the urban with 'modern society' *tout court* and, in fact, this slippage occurs repeatedly in the literature. As I will argue, however, the urban, which is certainly a social phenomenon, is something very much less than society as a whole and, if we are to make sense of its internal logic, we must distinguish unambiguously between that which is merely contingently urban and that which is intrinsically so. In short, and to echo a now largely forgotten refrain originally expressed by Castells (1968), the urban, if it has any sense at all, must be carefully distinguished as an object of inquiry from society at large.

The need for these distinctions is easy to state in principle, but making them clear is extraordinarily difficult in practice. Raymond Williams (1976) says that 'culture' is one of the two or three most difficult words in the English language, but I would add that 'urban' must surely also rank close to the top. There is perhaps a natural tendency in any attempt to define a phenomenon as complex, multifaceted, changeable and omnipresent as the city, to curtail the search for basic abstractions and to seize on those empirical features that are currently most obviously in view in terms of both their empirical weight and political implications (ethnicity, for example, or gender, or the built environment). Still, some baseline point of departure is eminently desirable as a way of sorting out the essentially

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urban properties of the endless substantive contents of the city. My own starting position here is to ask: what minimal identification provides us with a useful analytical purchase on the phenomenon of the urban while being able to accommodate its numerous empirical variations in space and time (although my references to space and time will be confined in the present context to the geography and history of capitalism)? With this standard of performance in mind, I suggest that we initiate the argument with a provisional three-tiered concept of the urban as: a dense assemblage of diverse socioeconomic phenomena (of which units of capital and labour are of primary importance) organised around a common spatial centre (and associated sub-centres) of gravity; tied together both directly and indirectly in relations of functional interdependence (interfirm input–output relations, the journey to work, interindividual networks of various sorts, and so on); and, forming a systematically differentiated arrangement of spaces or land uses.

I shall elaborate upon this rather bare characterisation of the urban with very much more conceptual and empirical detail at a later stage in the discussion. What is essential for now is that this basic definition already commits us to an intrinsically spatial concept of the form and function of the city (in the concrete context of capitalist social and property relations). Hence, a given event or process, such as industrial production, technological research, ethnic differentiation, crime or education, is relevant to urban analysis to the degree that it makes a difference in terms of the kind of spatial structure identified earlier. Curriculum changes in elementary schools are not very likely to be relevant to an urban problematic in my sense, but the allocation of schools to neighbourhoods is assuredly so. Certainly, other possible perspectives of the urban are conceivable in principle and evident in practice—not least, the poetics-*cum*-semiotics of the city as celebrated by writers like Aragon, Baudelaire or Benjamin—but the particular formulation offered here is of particular interest and significance because it codifies in distilled form the roots of a unique syndrome of interconnected social outcomes and political dilemmas (see Vigar *et al.*, 2005). Note that I refrain in this discussion from any engagement with one of the more common but surely one of the least interesting problems posed in the quest for a definition of the urban—namely, how and where should the boundaries of the city be drawn? In functional terms, the city's gravitational field extends asymptotically outward across the whole of geographical space, which suggests, in fact, that our definition is really a subset of a wider problematic about society and space at large, and therefore should be ultimately generalisable to include *inter*city relations as well. In view of this observation, the best course of action to follow when practical delimitation of any given urban area is required (such as for statistical purposes) is no doubt simply to follow established practice, which is to ignore the pseudo-problem of the 'real' boundaries of the city and to settle for some convenient administrative or governmental unit.

The latter point suggests, indeed, that our initial definition is still not quite as pregnant as it might be, given its silence in regard to any sort of governance, policy-making or planning activity relevant to the city. The sphere of intraurban space is constantly subject to direct and indirect policy interventions by many different tiers of government, from the municipal through county and state to the federal level. Sometimes these interventions are addressed directly to urban issues in the meaning already adumbrated, as in the case of urban renewal programmes or local economic development initiatives. On other occasions, they may have a hybrid character in that they have both explicitly urban and non-urban components, as illustrated by Keynesian welfare-statist policy in the post-war decades

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(see later). For the rest, much policy-making activity, especially at the federal level, has no directly urban objective in my sense, but has important secondary impacts on the city. In fact, there are few public policies or actions of any kind that do not have some ultimate urban effect. This is especially so given that local governments function not only as arrangements for dealing with purely internal problems in their jurisdictions, but also as administrative devices for relaying national and state policy down to the sub-national level. In these circumstances, we may ask, what is urban policy *as such* and does it make sense to attempt to distinguish it from the wider policy environment? Cochrane (2007) tends to the view that no real lines of demarcation can be established in this regard. While this view has much to commend it, the problem still remains that we must build into any viable conception of the urban its status not just as a domain of individual decision-making and action but also as an organic collectivity that intrinsically poses a variety of *sui generis* administrative and political dilemmas (Scott, 1980).

In one sense, we can answer the question posed earlier by saying that urban public policy is simply policy directed to the urban as defined. This way of handling the issue, however, evades a more acute part of the question—namely, what is it *in the nature of cities* (as distinct from society as a whole) that generates public policy imperatives and that shapes the substantive content of policy-making activities? From the perspective of hard-core neo-classical theory, this latter question is for the most part nugatory, for in an ideal market individual decision-making and behaviour alone will ensure a Pareto-efficient equilibrium outcome. The urban arena, however, is structurally and chronically resistant to general competitive equilibrium, not only because of disruptions due to market failure in the narrow technical sense, but also, as we shall see in some detail later, because the political tensions and latent synergies that reside in intraurban space call forcefully for strategic as well as remedial collective decision-making and action. The viability of the city, in terms of its efficiency, workability and livability, depends therefore on the existence of policy-making infrastructures capable of carrying out corrective programmes of intervention and regulation. These infrastructures may be constituted by a diversity of governmental and non-governmental institutional forms, but their modes of operation always reflect the structure of underlying urban realities. On the one side, the logic of urbanisation itself generates collective action imperatives and imposes definite constraints on the potential achievements of any such action. On the other side, public regulation of the urban sphere is also shaped in part by political pressures reflecting various social constituencies and their interests. These remarks, ultimately, are echoes of the general principle that public policy, like urbanisation, is a concrete social phenomenon and is therefore comprehensible only in relation to the pressures and possibilities that characterise the circumstances out of which it springs, including the governance and collective action capacities of society as a whole.

This essentially social-realist view of the policy process, even at this initial stage of discussion, goes against the grain of certain mainstream theoretical advocacies to the effect that policy-making can best be understood as a predominantly procedural exercise in pursuit of abstracted normative goals, and whose powers of accomplishment depend primarily on curbing human or organisational failure, rather like the "eight-step path of policy analysis" proposed by Bardach (1996). There are, of course, procedural and normative elements in all policy-making efforts. That said, and irrespective of human or organisational failure, the policy-making process is always organically embedded in a wider social and

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political milieu that fundamentally shapes its substantive content and meaning (even if we can sometimes only seize the logic of these matters in *a posteriori* terms). In the same way, the special version of urban public policy more familiarly known as planning can also best be understood as a set of socially and politically determinate practices directed to the remediation of specific forms of dysfunctionality in urban space. By contrast, those theories of urban planning that radically abstract the planner from the realities of everyday planning practice in concrete urban situations (for example, by positing a concept of planning as the search for 'rational-comprehensive' solutions to urban problems, or as a means of reaching towards some socially decontextualised idea of the 'good city,' or as an exercise in hermeneutics or social empowerment, or even as an unmediated reflection of the psychic dispositions of planners[1]) are necessarily either radically unfinished or vacuous as descriptions of what urban planners actually do and what they can realistically accomplish in their practical day-to-day engagements (Roweis, 1981).

Economy, Society and Urbanisation

Urbanisation on a significant scale is a ubiquitous feature of modern society and, as will be maintained in due course, a tangible expression of the efficiency-seeking drives of capitalism (Scott, 1988). Yet cities are by no means simply microcosms of society as a whole—even though they *are* peculiar condensations of broader economic, social and property relations—and they are marked by many unique and distinctive emergent effects. Moreover, just as economy and society assume different guises at different times and in different places, so also do the forms of urbanisation that they engender. The industrial revolution in England in the 19th century saw the emergence of the classical factory town. The rise of mass production in the US in the first half of the 20th century gave us the great metropolitan regions of the Manufacturing Belt. Today, a rapidly mounting cognitive-cultural economic order appears to be inducing a number of dramatic shifts in urban form and function, and is helping to drive forward an urban renaissance in many different countries.

This opening salvo rather bluntly and unfashionably emphasises the economic as a motive force of urbanisation. I now want to argue more vigorously on behalf of this initial line of emphasis, first of all by providing a highly generalised account of what I shall call *proto-urban forms* and their origins in processes of locational agglomeration and then, secondly, by showing how this account takes on historical and geographical specificity in the context of contemporary economic realities. Processes of locational agglomeration themselves are largely reflections of the economic logic of production, work and exchange in geographical space—although not exclusively for, as the argument continues, I shall show how they are also intimately intertwined with a number of critical social and political variables. More specifically, the proto-urban domain can be seen as a basic driver of localised growth and development, although it takes on the character of something approaching a full-blown city only as various non-economic phenomena coalesce around it and restructure it. My argument suggests, by implication, that in the absence of this economic dynamic, cities as we know them would probably be little more than, say, basic service hubs, or simple aggregations of like-minded individuals, or specialised centres of administrative activity, but in any case, strictly limited in size and overall complexity. As it is, the dense spatial concentration of human activity that is the essence of the modern city can principally be ascribed to two mutually reinforcing moments of genesis. One involves the locational clustering of many

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different but interrelated units of capital and labour as a strategy for reducing the spatially dependent costs of their joint interactions, both traded and untraded. The other resides in the increasing-returns effects that are set in motion as clustering proceeds and that endow the emerging agglomeration with multiple competitive advantages and social benefits (see, among others, Cooke and Morgan, 1998; Duranton and Puga, 2004; Scott, 2006b; Storper, 1997).

These moments of genesis reside principally in a tissue of relationships involving: networks of specialised but complementary units of production; overlapping local labour markets; and, learning and innovation effects emanating from the multiple socioeconomic interactions that occur within the local economic system. The specific forms of interplay between these relationships are apt to vary greatly from city to city. All of them, however, are spatially extensive in nature and, in selected segments of the economy, they tend to encourage the geographical coalescence of firms and workers around common centres of gravity. The intensity of this coalescence is all the greater where the system is subject to uncertainty and instability, for individual levels of risk can often be greatly reduced where conditions of social aggregation prevail (see Jayet, 1983). Coalescence is yet further compounded by the savings that can be gained by concentrating infrastructural investments in a relatively limited number of areas and by the emergence of institutional arrangements designed to regulate different aspects of the local economy. The transactional efficiencies and increasing-returns effects (more specifically, *agglomeration economies*) generated in these ways continually buttress one another and establish the conditions under which processes of cumulative causation come into being so that, as firms and workers mass together, yet further massing ensues, and so on, in successive rounds of growth. These processes may be so strong that firms in particular sectors, or groups of sectors, form sub-clusters (i.e. industrial districts) within the primary cluster of proto-urban space.

These dynamics represent a first brief analytical expression of the role of capital and labour in the formation of modern cities. Moreover, under conditions of advancing globalisation, the productive clusters that come into being in this way function increasingly as nodes within a far-flung network of competitive and collaborative relations and in which comparative advantage as a reflection of natural endowments becomes progressively overridden by socially and politically constructed competitive advantages rooted in the logic of urbanisation itself. Indeed, the developmental dynamics of most active clusters of firms and workers in the contemporary economy are such that as their external (i.e. extraurban) economic linkages ramify, so their internal complexity and dynamism frequently become more and more robust. This remark, incidentally, offers an important corrective to the opinion of Amin and Thrift who claim that

> Once we consider the growth of economic organization—corporate and virtual—the city breaks down as a place of strong local interdependencies, as a site of economic power (Amin and Thrift, 2002, p. 67).

Once all this has been said, the idea of the city in any more complete meaning of the term can only be realised after we add to this initial formulation a further series of social and political variables that act back upon and reshape the diverse phenomena of proto-urban space. The constitution of family life is of the first importance in this regard, for individuals play a critical role not only as workers but also as actors within a domestic milieu and, more broadly, in processes of social reproduction. This role is obviously of great complexity, although in at least some degree it would appear to reflect various needs and preferences that flow from workers' positions in the

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workplace. Lefebvre expresses this idea in the following terms

> [Urban] space contains more or less appropriately located *social relations of reproduction*, that is, bio-physiological relations between the sexes and different age-groups in the specific context of the family—and *relations of production*, that is, the division of labour and its organisation, and hence hierarchised social functions. These two sets of relationships, production and reproduction, cannot be separated: the division of labour is reflected and sustained in the family; conversely, family organisation influences the division of labour (Lefebvre, 1974, p. 41).

In the absence of magic carpets, this twofold process of production and reproduction must be played out within the spatial compass of a feasible daily activity system. This means that the production space of the city is necessarily interwoven with another type of space (i.e. social space) devoted above all to residential and domestic functions. The two spaces are then selectively integrated together by local labour market processes and commuting patterns, which in their turn are sustained by infrastructural networks that potentiate mobility and interconnection (Graham and Marvin, 2001). Moreover, just as the production space of the city is susceptible to internal differentiation, so too is social space, which consistently decomposes into distinctive neighbourhoods, some of them directly reflecting divisions of labour in the urban economy (such as white-collar and blue-collar neighbourhoods), some of them rooted in other dimensions of social fragmentation (such as race, ethnicity and religion).

The continuing pervasiveness of socio-spatial segmentation in urban areas is testimony to the essential and ever-increasing human diversity of cities in contemporary society. I say essential here because much of this diversity can be traced back directly to the developmental trajectory of cities in capitalism and the labour market dynamics that ensue. On the demand side of the process, expanding metropolitan areas are almost always unable to satisfy their labour market needs by internal demographic growth, so that deficits can only be made up by inward flows of migrants. On the supply side, workers in relatively underdeveloped areas typically face high opportunity costs and these are often sufficient to trigger significant migration to more highly developed—and above all urban—areas. More concretely, the intensifying ethnic and cultural diversity of large cities can be largely accounted for by their voracious demands for labour, and especially cheap labour for deployment in the low-grade workshop, factory and service activities that are integral to the modern urban economy (not to mention the burgeoning reliance of high-wage urban workers on hired domestic help). Thus, wherever we find poverty and its associated misfortunes—which is to say, above all, in the world periphery—there we almost always observe outward streams of migrants directed to major metropolitan areas all over the globe and prepared to work in them at the most menial tasks available. This trend has of course intensified in recent decades as barriers to international travel have declined. As one type of minority group in the metropolis becomes assimilated through upward mobility into mainstream society, so other minorities from other areas move in, leading to continual renewal and intensification of urban social and spatial fragmentation. However, rates of assimilation vary greatly from one minority to another, depending both on the socio-cultural assets specific to the minority itself and the prejudices-*cum*-rigidities of the wider host society.

The discussion thus far identifies two of the basic elements that constitute the inside of the city—namely, a proto-urban production space and an associated social space (with subjacent spaces devoted to transport, shopping, leisure, etc.). A third analytical manoeuvre is now

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called for in order to bring this material into a reasonably full portrayal of the city as a whole. This involves explicit consideration of the collective order of the city and the formation of pertinent institutions of governance. As a preliminary to this manoeuvre we need to re-emphasise and re-express the concept of the city as a specifically *geographical* phenomenon—i.e. as a dense spatial fabric of social and economic *relata* tied together and structured by their mutual interdependencies. As we have observed, these interdependencies also involve multiple externalities, increasing returns effects, agglomeration economies and other social costs and benefits that are produced and consumed by all individual participants in the urban system but that lie outside the system of individual ownership rights and market exchange. To this degree, their production and allocation is devoid of any overall optimising rationality. A sort of socioeconomic commons thus intrinsically emerges as a permanent and powerful attribute of urban space and is liable to persistent inefficiency and failure in the absence of internalisation by the collectivity. It is precisely this status of the modern city as *res publica* that now brings us back to the question of public policy and planning as necessary constituents of the urban process *in the strict sense* in contemporary society.

Collective Order and Policy Imperatives in the City

As the central function of accumulation and its associated processes of social reproduction are projected through the medium of urban space they assume peculiar tangible forms of expression and evoke equally peculiar forms of policy attention. A more conventional way of making essentially the same point is to say that cities are arenas within which multiple opportunities are always available for public effort to shore up the efficiency and workability of urban society as a whole. My focus here is on public policy specifically targeted to the management and reordering of urban space as identified earlier. It goes without saying that any attempt to draw a strict line between urban and non-urban policies still remains a rather thankless task—although, in view of all that has gone before, we would doubtless have little hesitation in consigning, say, federal deficit-reduction measures to the domain of the non-urban (notwithstanding the asseverations of President Clinton's national urban policy report (HUD, 1995)), while readily acknowledging that, say, legislation regarding community investment banks, suburban sprawl or the construction of rapid-transit systems is immediately and intrinsically an element of the urban question. The first example reflects the play of practical circumstances and political debates that lie for the most part far outside the realm of the urban as I have identified it (even if they have many indirect urban impacts); the latter is bound up directly with definite articulations of urban space. Notwithstanding this distinction, we do need to keep in mind two important provisos as expressed earlier. The first is that urban public policy, in the strict sense, can indeed flow from institutions of governance at many different levels of scale and not just the local (Uitermark, 2005). The second is that public policy can be very much a hybrid affair that operates in both urban and non-urban dimensions simultaneously. We shall encounter a dramatic case of this kind of hybridity later in the discussion of Keynesian welfare-statist policy.

The practical tasks of urban public policy and planning, then, can be typified as being directed to collective action problems in regard to the mobilisation of resources, the consolidation of latent benefits and the coordination of urban life in general, but always with the qualification that they are infused in various ways by the logic of urban space (and more generally by the logic of capitalism at large). Right from the beginnings of industrial

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urbanism, collective action has been necessary to deal with the technical breakdowns in large cities that stem from their dynamics of growth and internal readjustment, such as congestion, pollution, public health crises, land use conflicts and neighbourhood decay (see Benevolo, 1971). These breakdowns are essentially diseconomies of urbanisation that in the absence of at least partial remedial action would rapidly impose barriers to further urban expansion and hence accumulation in general. Yet in addition to clearing away physical impediments to growth and social viability, urban public policy is also frequently directed to the search for strategic outcomes that would simply fail to materialise, or would appear only in stunted form, if competitive market order alone prevailed. Here, a plethora of possibilities might be enumerated, ranging from the cultivation of competitive advantages on the economic side to communal development projects on the social side. The tasks of public regulation are made yet more urgent by the structures of cumulative causation that underlie urban growth patterns and by the relatively slow convertibility of urban land uses. These dynamic properties of cities mean that they are endemically subject to path-dependent trajectories of evolution, which means in turn that some further degree of policy oversight is desirable in the effort to guard against negative lock-in effects. The more general point can be advanced to the effect that a purely market-driven *optimum optimorum* of urban outcomes is impossible; the best that can be achieved under market arrangements alone is some local equilibrium of a few fast-acting variables, leaving the rest of the urban system locked into market failure, systematic underperformance and recursive inertia over time. In these circumstances, urban growth and development are likely to be severely handicapped in the absence of adjunct frameworks of policy-making and planning. At this stage, it is well to recall one of the essential messages conveyed earlier in the discussion—namely, that these frameworks never operate on a purely technocratic basis (even though they may have strong technocratic elements), for policy-makers and planners are continually subject to a tug-of-war between many different priorities resulting from both the vertical and horizontal stratification of urban society and the consequent contestation that occurs between opposing social and spatial constituencies over the direct and indirect distributional effects of public action.

The policy and planning problems posed by the internal crises of modern cities have both recurrent and conjunctural rhythms, just as they have both local and national dimensions, and these different time–space registers leave distinctive marks on policy-making and policy-implementation arrangements. On the one hand, generic types of management and control measures are required to deal with the chronic problems (such as congestion, disorderly land use and neighbourhood decline) of the urban environment. On the other hand, many urban policy and planning initiatives are more episodic in character in that they are specific to a certain historical moment and the particular ways in which its associated social and political stresses intersect with the urban process. A striking illustration of this point is provided by the Keynesian welfare-statist policy apparatus that was put into effect by the government of the US in the decades following World War II. Keynesian welfare-statism was in the first instance a national policy designed to alleviate the malfunctions of Fordist mass-production society as a whole. However, it was in significant degree translated into practical outcomes by means of explicitly *urban* projects not only because so much of the mass-production system itself was deeply embedded in the large cities of the manufacturing belt, but also because the increasingly ill-adapted infrastructures and inadequate housing arrangements of the same

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cities were themselves a significant part of the problem (Brenner, 2004). Thus, intra-urban highway construction programmes, urban renewal and the expansion of the suburban housing stock, among other planning initiatives undertaken over the 1950s and 1960s, functioned as both expressions of national policy imperatives and as localised instruments of urban regeneration.

From all of the foregoing, we may propose that the formulation and implementation of public policy and planning measures in the modern city can best be understood in terms of two main interrelated lines of force. First, they function as remedial responses to determinate forms of urban disorder brought on by the very logic and dynamics of urbanisation itself. Secondly and concomitantly, they are instruments for proactive intervention, as represented, for example, by the establishment of co-ordinating mechanisms to secure economic gains that would fail to emerge in the absence of collective action. In any case, they respond to problems and opportunities that occur in the urban system and that impinge on overall processes of economic accumulation and social reproduction. By the same token, their range of operation is circumscribed by and channelled through a complex network of political norms, expectations and pressures in society as a whole. It is precisely the absence of disciplined attention to these indicative moments that explains why so many of the more prophetic statements about the role and functions of urban policy and planning must be taken with a grain of salt. Yet once this judgment has been advanced, where, we might ask, does it leave us in terms of normative recommendations and the possibility of a progressive politics of the urban today?

Urban Dynamics and Policy Dilemmas Today: Some Key Issues

The core of the urbanisation process in modern society flows from the basic (but certainly not all-encompassing) phenomena of production and work as structured at the macro level by prevailing capitalist economic, social and property relations. At an earlier moment of history when Fordist mass production and its large growth-pole industries dominated the economic order of large American cities, urban policy, as noted, was deeply interwoven with the national Keynesian welfare-statist measures that so successfully underpinned this particular regime. Over the past few decades, three great transformations of this previous order of things have occurred. First, modes of economic production in the more economically advanced countries have now shifted radically away from a dominantly Fordist pattern—a circumstance that is also associated with increased general levels of economic competition as a well as uncertainty and risk (Piore and Sabel, 1984). Secondly, globalisation continues to expand apace, leading to many new threats and positive possibilities for cities, and steadily destabilising the boundaries of the national economy as a frame of reference for economic organisation and policy-making. Thirdly, in today's predominantly neo-liberal policy environment, national governments are increasingly unable or unwilling to provide policy services to all the sectional and regional interests that find themselves under stress as a result of these changing economic and social winds. Accordingly, many cities are experiencing major internal transformations in their economic and social character, and are under unprecedented pressures to take the initiative in building local institutions to secure their own future prosperity and social stability.

The world's most advanced economies today are moving rapidly towards a massive concentration on cognitive-cultural forms of production (Cohen, 2006; Scott, 2007). The leading edges of economic growth and innovation in the current conjuncture coincide increasingly with sectors in which intellectual and human capital, complemented by digital

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technologies, is becoming the key ingredient of the production process and a prime requisite of competitive success (Levy and Murnane, 2004). Intellectual and human capital is here understood in its widest sense to include scientific knowledge, technological expertise, design know-how, cultural sensibility, behavioural skills, discretionary decision-making capabilities and so on. The economic activities that constitute these leading edges comprise technology-intensive manufacturing (including biotechnology), cultural-products sectors (such as motion pictures, television-programme production and musical recording), fashion- and design-intensive activities (such as clothing or jewellery) and service industries of all kinds (from personal services to financial and business operations). These forms of cognitive-cultural production and work occur in cities of many different sizes, but above all in major metropolitan regions, where they often form strikingly dense and specialised clusters in the wider tissue of urban space. Clusters like these are based on the usual kinds of agglomeration economies that are to be found in urban areas, although their centripetal pull is much reinforced by their persistently transactions-intensive nature and by the high levels of economic competition and uncertainty that typify them (Scott, 1988; Storper, 1997). In addition, the products flowing from such clusters are quite frequently marked by place-specific attributes embedded in the urban environment that add to their cachet and that enhance their capacity to compete not only in terms of price but also in terms of quality. Above all, many of the more important clusters of the cognitive-cultural economy function as intense foci of localised learning and innovation, thereby helping their products to maintain a dur-able leading edge on global markets. Silicon Valley semiconductors, Hollywood films, Paris fashions and the international financial services of London exemplify this point with some force.

In view of the growth and employment capacities of the new cognitive-cultural economy, it is scarcely surprising to note that urban policy-makers have recently seized enthusiastically on its promise as an instrument of local economic development. One of the first major segments of the new economy to be seen in this light was high-technology industry in the 1980s and much was made of its potentials for stimulating regional expansion, even if, in many cases, the claims about its miraculous powers of economic revitalisation were greatly exaggerated (see Miller and Côte, 1987). In more recent years, policy-makers all over the world have also been turning their attention to creative or cultural-products industries as possible avenues to urban prosperity.[2] Cognitive-cultural sectors of all varieties are clearly now rising to the top of the agendas of local economic development agencies, not only because they offer skilled, high-wage jobs, but also because they are in numerous (but not all) instances both environmentally friendly and fountainheads of community-wide prestige. Not least of their attractions to urban policy-makers is their partiality for locations in dense metropolitan areas and their job-creating capacities at a time when so many other kinds of economic activity are fleeing from these areas to more peripheral parts of the world. As a consequence, various experiments are now going forward in many different cities in the effort to work out effective policy measures for sustaining local competitive advantages in these and other sectors. These experiments entail, in particular, more or less sophisticated efforts to reinforce collective assets in such domains of local economic activity as value-added networks, labour market development and the regional innovation system, to mention only some of the most obvious (see for example, Bianchi, 1992; Cooke and Morgan, 1998; OECD, 2001; Storper, 1997). A number of cities have also sought to advance their ambitions in this matter by means of

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lavish public spending on large arts and leisure projects and, in this manner, not only to promote a new cognitive-cultural economy, but also to enhance their role as key centres of global cultural influence. Many cities, particularly in North America, Europe and Asia, are now moving rapidly in this direction. To cite just one example, several of the urban regeneration companies that have been promoted in recent years by the British Labour government and established by local partners have put a high degree of reliance on the local economic development capacities of cognitive-cultural sectors. Even many cities in the erstwhile world periphery—Beijing, Shanghai, Hong Kong, Seoul, Rio de Janeiro and Buenos Aires come readily to mind—are gearing up for similar major initiatives. Singapore, for example, now brands itself the "global city of the arts" (Chang, 2000).

Small wonder, then, that the notion of the 'creative city' as formulated by Florida (2004), its foremost policy advocate, has recently attracted the attention of mayors and city councillors all across the world. Florida's notion of the creative city turns around the basic proposition that, by means of judicious expenditure on urban amenities, policy-makers can actively draw members of what he calls the 'creative class' into given urban areas and keep them there. Once these individuals are in place, many positive economic effects are then presumed to follow on as a matter of course. I have commented at length elsewhere on the notion of the creative city (Scott, 2006a) and I shall not repeat my arguments here except to look briefly behind the cheerful outer façade of the new economy and to remark on some of its less appealing features in modern cities. In fact, the bright side of the new economy is complemented by a much darker side comprising large numbers of low-wage, low-skill jobs, many of which remain submerged in the informal and underground economy of the city. Modern cities have always been characterised by a glaring divide between upper- and lower-income groups, but the divide has tended to widen significantly in large cities over the past couple of decades as the new economy has moved forward (Fainstein, 2001, Hamnett and Cross, 1998). The social tensions that crystallise around this phenomenon are exacerbated by the fact that so many of the workers in the low-wage, low-skill segment of the contemporary urban economy are immigrants—frequently undocumented—from other parts of the world. A large proportion of these workers constitute a socially marginalised and politically disenfranchised mass of individuals whose position on the fringes of urban society is further underlined by the high risks of unemployment and underemployment that they face. Periodically, the stresses inherent in this situation break out in explosions of rioting and unrest, as manifest most recently by the disturbances that racked the immigrant quarters in the Paris suburbs in the latter part of 2005, and that then spread out into more affluent parts of the city. Emergency policing and stop-gap measures may well bring spontaneous disturbances of this sort under short-term control, but the situation from which they stem nevertheless represents a simmering, long-term and multifaceted problem that urgently requires very much more deeply rooted corrective measures.

This problem of the underclass in modern cities raises fundamental questions that lie far beyond any immediate questions about technocratic procedures of social restraint. Above and beyond the issue of jobs, these questions go directly to three pressing concerns at the heart of contemporary urban society—namely, political representation, distributional equity and the democratisation of urban space. Concerns of this sort are always in play in any settled community, but they are of special urgency in the increasingly polycultural, polyglot and socially divided cities of the contemporary world (Holston, 2001, Mouffe, 1992, Sandercock, 2003); and they

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point immediately to the persistent failures of democratic practice and to the severe shortfall of organised popular political participation in most large cities today. These urban ills are exacerbated by the formal segmentation of urban space as manifest in the proliferation of so-called common-interest developments, such as gated communities, and the fragmentation of the political geography of the metropolis into scores of independent municipalities. Developments like these help to shield élite groups from the rest of urban society while in no way curtailing the access of the same groups to the city as a whole. These forms of segmentation represent a fundamentally inequitable and undemocratic organisation of urban space and reform of this situation has been identified by Orfield (1997) as one of the necessary foundations of a revivified urban politics in America today. Enlargement of the sphere of democratic association in the city is important not only in its own right and for its own sake, but is also a crucial element of the groundwork needed for any attempt to register and deal with many of the social tensions of contemporary urban areas. This observation in turn is based on the idea that the disciplined mobilisation of voice (not so much in contrast with exit, but as distinct from impulsive outbursts of accumulated frustration) is an essential preliminary step in the constructive treatment of dysfunctional communities. The right to the city, in short, remains very much a work in progress (Amin *et al.*, 2000). Large metropolitan areas, with their rising levels of social disorder and cleavage, are confronted with a series of particularly crucial policy challenges in this regard, not only because their internal livability and sociability are in jeopardy, but also because any failure to act is liable to sap away at the sources of the very creativity that is potentially one of their chief competitive assets in the 21st century.

A final word is in order here about the policy challenges posed by the continued rapid growth of cities in the context of globalisation, and the rise of a 'new regionalism' reflecting the emergence not only of new kinds of local economic complexes and forms of political identity, but also new kinds of governance imperatives in the interests of competitiveness (MacLeod, 2001). I have already mentioned the balkanisation of urban administrative activities and its reflection in metropolitan-wide patchworks of independent municipalities. This state of affairs has always presented managerial challenges in cities, but it has assumed expanded significance in the main city-regions of the contemporary world where problems of socioeconomic co-ordination and growth are rife. The complexity of this situation is compounded by two further developments. For one thing, national restraints on urban growth and development in the advanced economies have relaxed considerably by comparison with conditions in the 1960s and 1970s when territorial equalisation was very much on the agenda. For another, the application of subsidiarity principles is leading to increasing devolution of much social and economic regulation to the urban level, with the consequence that city administrations are more than ever before confronted with enormous burdens in regard to the formulation and implementation of policy. Large cities everywhere are struggling to face up to these circumstances, above all, perhaps, in regard to the pressing need for institution-building in support of localised competitive advantages. As Jonas and Pincetl (2006) have intimated, however, the growing mismatch that is observable between the internal social and economic organisation of the metropolis on the one hand and its fragmented political geography on the other, puts barriers in the way of decisive and concerted action.

More effective policy-making and institutional arrangements at the intrametropolitan level are, of course, essential given the interdependencies that run through the internal

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organism of the city. They are more particularly imperative in a globalising world where cities are open to the gales of international competition and where so much of their ability to react to and rise above these gales depends on an enhanced capacity both to manage their economic fortunes and to strike out with initiatives that take ever more accurate aim at the idiosyncratic potentials for positive action within their own jurisdictions. Nowhere is this need more pressing than in those cities that now play an increasing role as 'national champions' (Jessop, 2004) and as motors of the new global economy.

Conclusion

In the present paper, I have revisited the urban question by means of an extended commentary on the internal organisation and policy dilemmas of cities in general and by then assimilating into this commentary an overview of some of the dramatic urban shifts now going on as a result of the rise of a cognitive-cultural socioeconomic order and the steady intensification of globalisation. I have suggested that cities in contemporary society can be comprehended in the first place by approaching them as dense polarised spatial systems overlain by a web of indivisibilities and synergistic outcomes. At the same time, and in the second place, we always need to contextualise these matters by relating them to the role of cities as engines of accumulation and as sites of social reproduction keyed in to specific conjunctures of capitalist development. The tense forcefield of relationships set in motion by these phenomena is replete from end to end with quandaries and opportunities that trigger continual streams of public policy responses, although not, of course, in any necessary one-to-one relationship, depending in part on the alignment of political forces existing at any given moment in time.

The recent rise of a broadly based cognitive-cultural economy, in combination with globalisation, is evidently triggering a number of major new directions in the evolution of cities and the form of the urban question. As the sectors that constitute the core of the cognitive-cultural economy—above all, technology-based manufacturing, services and cultural-products industries—move to the leading edges of growth and development, cities that participate in this trend are functioning more than ever before as dynamic foci of creative and innovative production. Equally, however, cities where these developments are most pronounced are also places where a broad social divide exists between the upper and lower segments of the labour force and this divide has actually tended to widen in recent years as neo-liberal ideology and practice have taken deeper and deeper hold in both the economic and political spheres. Despite neo-liberal claims as to the universal efficacy and benevolence of markets, the negative consequences of the current dispensation are further discernible on the landscape in the guise of the extraordinary contrasts between the luxury and squalour that are so evident in many large American cities today. To be more specific, even when markets are working normally, cities are places where massive inequalities, breakdowns, social conflicts and inefficient forms of lock-in appear incessantly on the horizon. Accordingly, three main types of policy and planning initiatives are of special importance in many large cities at the present time. These revolve around: the social drive for co-ordinating agencies to harvest localised competitive advantages in the new urban economy; the need to build mechanisms for mitigating the democratic deficit in large urban communities; and, the strategic imperative of overcoming the mismatch between the structure of intraurban space and the institutions of urban governance.

Despite my negative assessment of neo-liberal ideology as a guide to solving these and all the others ills that plague contemporary cities, any operationally effective conception

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of urban policy and planning must no doubt maintain a pragmatic respect for the virtues of markets alongside a due sense of the necessity for collective action as a means of confronting the relevant issues of urban failure and social inequity. Social democracy, despite its imperfections, would appear to be one of the few coherent bodies of political principles capable of winning meaningful electoral support at the present time and of reinvigorating policy processes along the lines suggested. The tensions of the current situation suggest that social democratic concepts, marked as they are by concern for order and efficiency in the economic sphere and for fairness and justice in the social sphere, are peculiarly well equipped to guide policy-making processes, not just at the intraurban level, but at every scale of analysis, right up to the global. I should add that if the analysis presented here has any meaning at the end of the day, the search for the way forward can never be reduced simply to a matter of abstract norms or procedures, much less to chiliastic visions of ideal states of the world, but must be constructed in the context of a clear feel for the possibilities and limitations of collective action in relation to prevailing social realities and frameworks of political mobilisation.

Notes

1. For example, Hooper (1998, p. 246) writes of planning in 19th-century Paris as “a masculinist fantasy of control”. This formulation patently fails to deal with the vastly more central issues that revolve around the mounting economic and political problems of central Paris in the mid-19th century and the social imperative of reordering the internal space of the city in response to the pressures of modernisation and economic growth.
2. Representative policy statements about the local economic development possibilities of cultural-products industries can be found, for example, in the UK’s Department of Culture Media and Sport (DCMS, 2001), Hong Kong Central Policy Unit (2003), IAURIF (2006) and STADTart (2000).

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