



## Social geography and the sociospatial dialectic

### Key questions addressed in this chapter

- ▶ Why are geographers interested in city structures?
- ▶ What are the distinctive contributions that geographers can make to understanding these structures?
- ▶ In what ways do city structures reflect economic, demographic, cultural and political changes?

Why do city populations get sifted out according to race and social class to produce distinctive neighbourhoods? What are the processes responsible for this sifting? Are there any other characteristics by which individuals and households become physically segregated within the city? How does a person's area of residence affect his or her behaviour? How do people choose where to live, and what are the constraints on their choices? What groups, if any, are able to manipulate the 'geography' of the city, and to whose advantage? These are some of

the key questions that we will be examining in this book. As many writers now acknowledge, the answer to most of these questions is ultimately to be found in the wider context of social, economic and political organization. It follows that a proper understanding of any city requires a very broad approach. In the city, everything is connected to everything else; cause and effect are often difficult to sort out. Within geography as a whole, there are several different approaches to understanding cities. Four main approaches have been identifiable in the recent literature.

### 1.1 Different approaches within human geography

#### The quantitative approach

First there is the quantitative approach, which attempts to provide descriptions of the spatial organization of cities using statistical data represented in the form of maps, graphs, tables and mathematical equations. Much

of the inspiration for this approach has come from neo-classical economics and functionalist sociology. These approaches aim to be ‘scientific’, providing objective descriptions of cities in such a way that the values and attitudes of the observer do not influence the analysis. This attempt to separate the observer from the observed is often termed the **Cartesian approach** (after the philosopher Descartes). However, many have questioned whether such neutrality is possible, since the values of the researcher will inevitably be reflected in the data that are chosen and the theoretical frameworks, words and metaphors which are used to represent this data.

### The behavioural approach

Second is the so-called behavioural approach, which initially emerged as a reaction to the unrealistic **normative assumptions** (i.e. theories concerning what *ought* to be, rather than what actually exists) of neoclassical-functional description. The emphasis here is on the study of people’s activities and decision-making processes (where to live, for example) within their perceived worlds. Many of the explanatory concepts are derived from social psychology although phenomenology, with its emphasis on the ways in which people experience the world around them, has also exerted a considerable influence on behavioural research. Geographers have for a long time been interested in the relationships between urban settings and certain aspects of people’s behaviour. This sort of approach can easily fall into a deterministic frame of thinking, where ‘space’ is a cause. In fact, the relationships between environments and behaviour are *reciprocal*: ‘a neighbourhood takes its character from the values and life-styles of its residents; however, reciprocally, its personality is also a context that acts to reinforce and narrow a range of human responses’ (Ley, 1983, p. 23). The emphasis of most research in this area, though, has been on the way in which the ‘personality’ of urban settings influences individual and group behaviour and, in particular, the way in which ‘deviant’ behaviour is related to urban settings.

### The structuralist approach

Third, there is the approach generally known as **structuralism**. Unlike the quantitative and behavioural

approaches, structuralists are very suspicious of everyday appearances and people’s subjective reactions to, and interpretations of, the world. Instead, they argue that to understand society one needs to probe beneath the obvious external world to apprehend the underlying mechanisms at work. Since these mechanisms cannot be observed directly, they must be studied through processes of abstract reasoning by constructing theories. This structuralist approach was initially used to study ‘primitive’ societies. Despite the diversity of cultural forms that can be found throughout the world, it was argued that there were underlying universal cultural structures that govern all human behaviour (such as prohibitions on incest). However, most geographers have allied structuralist approaches with Marxian theories, rather than anthropology. These attempt to update the ideas devised by Karl Marx in the context of the nineteenth-century industrial city (sometimes termed **classical Marxism**) in the light of developments in the twentieth century. These updated Marxian theories are also sometimes termed **neo-Marxist approaches**.

Marx argued that the key underlying mechanism in a capitalist society was a conflict between two major classes over the issue of value: first, the class made up of owners of capital and, second, the class of workers who owned little but their labour power. Of course, much has changed since Marx was writing in the nineteenth century. In particular, both the class structure and the role of the state have become much more complex. Nevertheless, at root, Marxian perspectives attempt to relate contemporary societal developments to the class struggle over value. Thus, structuralist approaches stress the constraints that are imposed on the behaviour of individuals by the organization of society as a whole and by the activities of powerful groups and institutions within it.

Critics have argued that, in playing down the perceptions of people, Marxian theorists ignore the fact that there are many different conflicts in society in addition to those based around class, such as those based around gender, ethnicity, age, sexuality, religion, disability, nationality, political affiliation, location of neighbourhood, and so on. There is growing recognition that there are many different interests in the city, many different ‘voices’ and different theories that can represent these interests.

It is also argued by critics that Marxian theories also have a poor sense of **human agency** (i.e. the capacity of people to make choices and take actions to affect their destinies). Nevertheless, it is undoubtedly true that many people *are* relatively defenceless in the face of economic forces. Furthermore, it is important to note that Marxian theories are diverse in character and many scholars have tried to overcome these limitations in recent years. As we will see later in this book, the basic principles of structuralist thinking provide us with powerful tools for understanding contemporary social change (see also Box 1.1 on David Harvey – the key exponent of Marxian approaches in human geography).

## Poststructuralist approaches

Poststructuralist approaches are strongly opposed to the idea that the world can be explained by a single, hidden, underlying structure, such as class-based conflict. Instead, it is argued that there are numerous shifting and unstable dimensions of inequality in society. In addition, it is argued that these inequalities are reflected in various forms of representation, including language, intellectual theories, advertising, popular music and city landscapes. All of these forms of representation involve sets of shared meanings – what are called **discourses**. Poststructuralism therefore argues that there is no simple undistilled experience – all our experiences are filtered through particular sets of cultural values. It follows that the method by which we represent reality is as important as the underlying reality itself. Clearly, then, words are not neutral but have powerful underlying assumptions and meanings. This means that analysis of **culture** is crucial to understanding language and discourse. The effect of poststructuralist thinking on urban social geography has been substantial, to the point where the subdiscipline has taken a clear ‘cultural turn’.

## The study of urban social geography

The implications of these differing perspectives will be highlighted in greater detail at various stages throughout this book. For the present we should note that cities are not just physical structures – they are also products

of the human imagination. The plural, *geographies*, is commonly used to reflect the fact that different people have widely differing notions of geographical areas. And, of course, our own visions of these spaces can change over time. This means that there can be no *one* urban social geography. The crucial point is that these imaginative geographies shape the physical structures of cities and the ways in which we are, in turn, shaped by these structures.

For example, suburbs have often been portrayed as socially homogeneous, relatively safe, female-dominated domestic and *private* spheres. In sharp contrast, the central city has been portrayed as a socially heterogeneous, male-dominated, relatively dangerous *public* space. As will be described in subsequent chapters, there is undoubtedly a great deal of truth in this characterization. However, there is a growing body of research that highlights the limitations and simplifications of the public/private, male/female distinctions. Nevertheless, these ideas or stereotypes have formed a powerful ideology (i.e. a dominant set of ideas) that has affected urban planning and design. As we will see in greater detail in Chapter 3, the material dimensions of the city therefore reflect our cultural values and at the same time help to shape them.

Central to these imaginings of cities is the use of various metaphors. A metaphor is a way of describing one thing in a figurative sense by reference to another thing that is not literally appropriate (e.g. as in the term *urban jungle*). Many of the metaphors that have been used to describe, analyse and comprehend cities have negative overtones, reflecting the anti-urban feelings that underlie a great deal of Western thinking about cities (the city as ‘labyrinth’, ‘nightmare’ or ‘jungle’). However, the ambiguous role of urban settings is illustrated by those metaphors that portray cities as places of excitement, liberation and enlightenment (the city as ‘theme park’, ‘theatre’ or ‘melting pot’). This complexity is revealed in descriptions of inner-city ghetto areas occupied by ethnic minorities; on the one hand they are often presented as crime-ridden, decaying zones but on the other hand they are also often envisaged as spaces of cultural resurgence. It follows, therefore, that these metaphors are not just artistic licence; they are used to understand cities and can justify different approaches to urban policy.

## Box 1.1

### Key thinkers in urban social geography – David Harvey

The career of David Harvey illustrates the enormous methodological changes that have taken place in geography since the 1970s. Indeed, it is difficult to think of anyone who has had more influence upon human geography during this time.

Harvey began his career in the late 1960s as an advocate of a 'scientific' approach, positivism and quantitative methods, and he made a strong case for these approaches in his book *Explanation in Geography* (1969). However, during the early 1970s he began to feel that geographers were paying insufficient attention to the numerous social issues that were manifest during those troubled times. His next major text, *Social Justice and the City* (1973), charts his shift from a liberal position (the first half of the book using mainstream social science to analyse problems) towards a Marxian approach (updating classical Marxism to explain recent changes). Cities appear to have played an important part in Harvey's radical shift in perspective. His move in 1969 from the University of Bristol in the United Kingdom to Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore made him conscious of the enormous scale of poverty endemic in many US cities that were suffering from extensive job losses at that time.

David Harvey has continued to be a staunch advocate of Marxian interpre-

tations of changes in cities, resisting the widespread adoption of poststructuralist perspectives. His defence is expressed in one of the best-selling social science textbooks of recent years – *The Condition of Postmodernity* (1989b). Harvey's work has been criticized for concentrating on class-based economic sources of conflict and for downplaying other sources of inequality in cities related to factors such as gender, ethnicity and sexuality (Deutsche, 1991). Harvey (1996) argues that while there are many sources of 'difference' in society, underpinning all of these are basic economic processes that lead to exploitation.

#### Key concepts associated with David Harvey (see Glossary)

Commodity fetishism, neo-Marxism, 'spatial fix', structured coherence, time-space compression, urban entrepreneurialism.

#### Further reading

- Castree, N. (2004) David Harvey, in P. Hubbard, R. Kitchin and G. Valentine (eds) *Key Thinkers on Space and Place* Sage, London  
 Castree, N. and Gregory, D. (eds) (2006) *David Harvey: A Critical Reader* Blackwell, Oxford

Deutsche, R. (1991) Boy's town, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 9, 5–30

Harvey, D. (1996) *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference* Blackwell, Oxford

Harvey, D. (2006) *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* Oxford University Press, Oxford

#### Links with other chapters

Chapter 2: Marx and the industrial city, Fordism and the industrial city, Neo-Fordism

Chapter 5: Structuralist interpretations of the political economy of contemporary cities, The local state and the socio-spatial dialectic, The question of social justice in the city

Chapter 6: Builders, developers and the search for profit, Manipulating social geographies, Blockbusting and gentrification

Chapter 9: Constructing place through spatial practices, Box 9.4 Henri Lefebvre

Chapter 10: Alienation, Structuralist theory

Chapter 13: Urban Change and Conflict, The aggregate effects of aggregate patterns

Chapter 14: Box 14.3 *The Wire*

Related to this is a further crucial point – the metaphors, theories, concepts and modes of representation we use to analyse cities cannot be regarded as neutral, objective and value free. Instead, they tend to represent particular theoretical perspectives and interest groups. These interests are not always immediately obvious. What might appear to be a neutral theory

depicting inequalities in a city as some natural, inevitable outcome might serve to support existing conditions in society. For example, few studies have been more influential than that of the Chicago School of Urban Sociology (see Chapter 7), whose theorists used a biological metaphor. Although they sought to produce a 'scientific' view of the city, their choice of metaphor

helped to make the existing social order seem natural and inevitable. All ideas and theories or ‘claims to knowledge’, then, should be viewed critically.

## 1.2 The sociospatial dialectic

Urban spaces are created by people, and they draw their character from the people that inhabit them. As people live and work in urban spaces, they gradually impose themselves on their environment, modifying and adjusting it, as best they can, to suit their needs and express their values. Yet at the same time people themselves gradually accommodate both to their physical environment and to the people around them. There is thus a continuous two-way process, a *sociospatial dialectic* (Soja, 1980), in which people create and modify urban spaces while at the same time being conditioned in various ways by the spaces in which they live and work. Neighbourhoods and communities are created, maintained and modified; the values, attitudes and behaviour of their inhabitants, meanwhile, cannot help but be influenced by their surroundings and by the values, attitudes and behaviour of the people around them. At the same time, the ongoing processes of urbanization make for a context of change in which economic, demographic, social and cultural forces are continuously interacting with these urban spaces.

Space, then, cannot be regarded simply as a neutral medium in which social, economic and political processes are expressed. It is of importance in its own right in contributing both to the pattern of urban development and to the nature of the relationships between different social groups within the city. Space and distance are undeniably important as determinants of social networks, friendships and marriages. Similarly, territoriality is frequently the basis for the development of distinctive social milieux which, as well as being of interest in themselves, are important because of their capacity to mould the attitudes and shape the behaviour of their inhabitants. Distance also emerges as a significant determinant of the quality of life in different parts of the city because of variations in physical accessibility to opportunities and amenities such as jobs, shops, schools, clinics, parks and sports centres.

Because the benefits conferred by proximity to these amenities contribute so much to people’s welfare, locational issues often form the focus of conflict within the city, thus giving the spatial perspective a key role in the analysis of urban politics. The partitioning of space through the establishment of *de jure* (formal, legal) territorial boundaries also represents an important spatial attribute that has direct repercussions on several spheres of urban life. The boundaries of school catchment areas, for example, have important implications for community status and housing prices, while the configuration of electoral districts is crucial to the outcome of formal political contests in the city.

## 1.3 The macro-geographical context

This book is concerned with cities in developed countries that have ‘postindustrial’ societies (i.e. societies in which industrial employment has been in decline and employment in advanced service industries has been growing). The term postindustrial can be misleading, in that there are still substantial manufacturing industries in these cities. However, the ‘post’ label alludes to the fact that these cities have experienced various changes which distinguish them from the classic industrialized cities of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The societies in which these changes are most advanced are in Europe and North America, where levels of urbanization are among the highest anywhere. References to cities elsewhere are included not to redress this bias but to provide contrasting or complementary examples and to place arguments within a wider setting.

Even within the relatively narrow cultural and geographical realm of Europe and North America, however, there are important differences in the nature of urban environments. These will be elaborated in the body of the text but it is important to guard against *cultural myopia* from the beginning of any discussion of urban geography (i.e. assuming that the arrangements in one’s own country or culture are the only possible set of arrangements or that these are a superior approach).

It is, therefore, important to acknowledge the principal differences between European and North American cities. For one thing, European cities are generally much

older, with a tangible legacy of earlier modes of economic and social organization embedded within their physical structure. Another contrast is in the composition of urban populations, for in most of Europe the significance of minority groups has generally been much less than in North America until recently. A third major difference stems from the way in which urban government has evolved. Whereas North American cities tend to be fragmented into a number of quite separate and independent municipalities, European cities are less so and their public services are funded to a significant level by the central government, making for a potentially more even-handed allocation of resources within the city as a whole. This is not unrelated to yet another important source of contrast – the existence of better-developed welfare states in Europe. This not only affects the size and allocation of the *social wage* within cities but also has profound effects on the social geography of the city through the operation of the housing market. Whereas fewer than 5 per cent of US urban families live in public housing, over 20 per cent of the families in many British cities live in what can be termed ‘social housing’ (i.e. dwellings rented from public authorities or housing associations operating in the not-for-profit sector).

It is worth noting that in Europe, where the general ideology of *privatism* is less pronounced and where there has for some time been an acute awareness of the pressures of urban sprawl on prime agricultural land, the power and influence of city planning is much more extensive. As a result, the morphology and social structure of European cities owe much to planning codes and philosophies. Thus, for example, the decentralization of jobs and homes and the proliferation of out-of-town hypermarkets and shopping malls has been much less pronounced in Europe than in North America, mainly because of European planners’ policy of urban containment. The corollary of this, of course, is that the central business districts (CBDs) of European cities have tended to retain a greater commercial vitality than many of their North American counterparts.

Finally, it should be noted that there are important *regional* and *functional* differences in the social geography of cities. The cities of the American north-east, for example, are significantly different, in some ways, from those of the ‘sunbelt’, as are those of Canada and the United States.

## A changing context for urban social geography

Cities have become impossible to describe. Their centers are not as central as they used to be, their edges are ambiguous, they have no beginnings and apparently no end. Neither words, numbers, nor pictures can adequately comprehend their complex forms and social structure.

(Ingersoll, 1992, p. 5)

Just when we’d learned to see, and even love, the peculiar order beneath what earlier generations had dismissed as the chaos of the industrial city . . . along came a tidal wave of look-alike corporate office parks, mansarded all-suite hotels, and stuccoed town houses to throw us for another monstrous, clover-leaf loop.

(Sandweiss, 1992, p. 38)

It is now clear that cities throughout the developed world have recently entered a new phase – or, at least, begun a distinctive transitional phase – with important implications for the trajectory of urbanization and the nature of urban development. This new phase has its roots in the dynamics of capitalism and, in particular, the globalization of the capitalist economy, the increasing dominance of big conglomerate corporations, and the steady shift within the world’s core economies away from manufacturing industries towards service activities. Yet, as this fundamental economic transition has been gathering momentum, other shifts – in demographic composition, and in cultural and political life – have also begun to crystallize.

## Economic change and urban restructuring

Since the 1970s the economies of Europe and North America have entered a substantially different phase – often referred to as a *neo-Fordist* regime of production (see Chapter 2) – in terms of *what* they produce, *how* they produce it, and *where* they produce it. In terms of *what* they produce, the dominant trend has been a shift away from agriculture and manufacturing industries towards service activities. There have been, however, substantial differences in the performance of different

types of services. Contrary to the popular view of retail and consumer services as a driving force in advanced economies, they have not in fact grown very rapidly. Rather, it has been producer services (i.e. business services), public sector services and non-profit services (mainly higher education and certain aspects of health care) that have contributed most to the expansion in service-sector employment. As we shall see in subsequent chapters, these economic shifts have been written into the social geography of contemporary cities in a variety of ways as labour markets have been restructured.

In terms of *how* production is organized, there have been two major trends. The first has been towards oligopoly as larger and more efficient corporations have driven out their competitors and sought to diversify their activities. The second has been a shift away from mass production towards flexible production systems for niche markets. This trend has had much greater significance for urban social geography, since the flexibility of economic activity has imprinted itself on to the social organization and social life of cities, creating new cleavages as well as exploiting old ones.

In terms of *where* production takes place, the major trend has been a redeployment of activity at metropolitan, national and international scales – largely in response to the restructuring of the big conglomerates. As the big new conglomerates have evolved they have rationalized their operations in a variety of ways, eliminating the duplication of activities among regions and countries, moving routine production and assembly operations to regions with lower labour costs, moving ‘back office’ operations to suburbs with lower rents and taxes, and consolidating head office functions and R & D laboratories in key settings. As a result, a complex and contradictory set of processes has recast many of the world’s economic landscapes.

One of the major outcomes in relation to urban social geography has been the deindustrialization of many of the cities and urban regions of the industrial heartlands in Europe and North America. Another has been the accelerated decentralization of both manufacturing and service employment within metropolitan regions. A third has been the transformation of a few of the largest cities into world cities (also termed **global cities**) specializing in the production, processing and trading of specialized information and intelligence (see

Chapter 2). And a fourth has been the recentralization of high-order, producer-service employment.

Meanwhile, economic globalization and the influence of new digital telecommunications technologies have drawn individual cities and parts of cities into different – and rapidly changing – roles in ever-broadening and increasingly complex circuits of economic and technological exchange of neo-Fordism (see Chapter 2). Traditional patterns of urbanization began to be overwritten by a very new dynamic dominated by enclaves of superconnected people, firms and institutions, with their increasingly broadband connections to elsewhere via the Internet, mobile phones and satellite television and their easy access to information services. The uneven evolution of networks of information and communications technologies began to forge new urban landscapes of innovation, economic development and cultural transformation while at the same time intensifying social and economic inequalities within cities, resulting in what Stephen Graham and Simon Marvin (2001) termed **splintering urbanism**. These changes have inevitably led to major changes in the social geography of every city, affecting everything from class structure and community organization to urban service delivery and the structure of urban politics. Meanwhile, economic restructuring and the transition to neo-Fordism has produced some important changes in the composition of urban labour markets, not least of which is a tendency toward economic polarization. One conspicuous outcome has been a decisive increase in unemployment in the cities of the world’s industrial core regions. Another significant outcome has been that the shift away from manufacturing has resulted in a substantial decrease in blue-collar employment and a commensurate increase in white-collar employment. White-collar employment itself has been increasingly dichotomized between professional and managerial jobs on the one hand and routine clerical jobs on the other.

Within the manufacturing sector, meanwhile, advances in technology and automation have begun to polarize employment opportunities between those for engineers/technicians and those for unskilled/semi-skilled operatives. Within the service sector, retailing and consumer services have come to be dominated by part-time jobs and ‘secondary’ jobs (jobs in small firms or in the small shops or offices of large firms, where few skills are

required, levels of pay are low and there is little opportunity for advancement. Government services, on the other hand, tend to have increased the pool of 'primary' jobs (jobs with higher levels of pay and security).

One key consequence of these changes, from the point of view of urban social geography, is that a growing proportion of both working- and middle-class families find it increasingly difficult to achieve what they had come to regard as an acceptable level of living on only one income. One response to this has been the expansion of the two-paycheque household; another has been the growth and sophistication of the informal economy, which in turn has begun to create new kinds of house-

hold organization, new divisions of domestic and urban space, and new forms of communal relations.

Finally, it is important to bear in mind that many of the changes emanating from economic transformation are taking place simultaneously within most large cities. Thus we see, side by side, the growth of advanced corporate services and the development of sweatshops operated by undocumented workers; the emergence of newly affluent groups of manager-technocrats and the marginalization of newly disadvantaged groups. As a result, the emerging geography of larger cities is complex. It is creating distinct new social spheres, yet it has to link these spheres within the same functional unit.

## Box 1.2

### Key debates in urban social geography – what is the impact of the Internet?

One of the most important debates in the social sciences in recent years concerns the impact of the emerging new socio-economic and cultural practices associated with the Internet (or more generally what is termed the *networked information society* (Benkler, 2006), e.g. all the new telecommunications technologies such as mobile phones, electronic organizers and videoconferencing, together with software permitting social networking, online shopping, gambling, open-source programming, etc.). Geographers are of course interested in the impact of these factors on things such as industrial organization, city life and residential forms. A big difficulty in evaluating the impact of the Internet arises from the fact that some of the effects are recent, little studied, and the subject of unsubstantiated hype. An additional problem is that other effects are likely to be long term. For example, while electricity and the internal combustion engine were invented in the late nineteenth century, it was only in the later part of the twentieth century that their impacts were fully realized in the form of mass suburbanization and

global warming. Thus, while the pace of technological change seems to be accelerating, it will be some years before the full impact of the networked information society is fully appreciated. What is clear already is that some of the early speculation and futurology associated with the Internet proved to be far off the mark. For example, the reports of 'the death of distance' were, in the words of novelist Mark Twain on his own (premature) obituary, 'greatly exaggerated'. While some forms of codifiable knowledge are now easily spread throughout the world by electronic means (e.g. instruction manuals), other types of knowledge (sometimes termed tacit knowledge – e.g. how to really get new gizmos or computer programs to work!) are increasingly reliant upon face-to-face contact. Thus we find that economic sectors which require the exchange of complex sets of knowledge, such as high-tech industries, cluster in industrial suburbs (such as the famous Silicon Valley in California). Similarly, the creative industries such as film, music, design and advertising, which critically depend on being 'in the know', often flourish in

downtown 'cultural quarters' (such as the Northern Quarter in Manchester). Consequently we find that in recent years, far from being made redundant by new telecommunications technologies, cities have made something of a comeback.

Also exaggerated were sensationalist claims that the Internet would lead to less intimate social relations, community life and social capital. With regard to community and sociality, we now know the following. First, instant messaging technologies are enabling parents to keep a closer eye on their offspring and there is a general thickening of relations between family members. At the same time both children and younger adults are seeing the rival influence of increasing links with their peer groups. Distant family and friends are also able to keep in closer touch through email that avoids the expense and coordination needed to communicate by telephone. In addition, individuals are able to join increasing numbers of loose-knit 'virtual communities' related to work, leisure and consumption. Thus, new forms of highly fluid but still meaningful social

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networks are beginning to emerge (increasing numbers of people are finding partners online for example). The bulk of current evidence to date indicates that while individuals who use the Internet have more distant ties, these have not diminished the number of their local ties (e.g. DiMaggio *et al.* 2001). Other factors seem to be more important in determining the latter including those such as personality and length of time in the neighbourhood.

Nevertheless, many other impacts of the networked knowledge society are beginning to emerge:

- Many industries that depend upon the appropriation of certain types of knowledge, intellectual or artistic property, are facing competition from non-marketed networked distribution systems (e.g. illegal music downloading is threatening the music industries; online blogs are undermining newspapers).
- New software is being developed by loosely networked individuals (e.g. LINUX).

- The voluntary efforts of numerous individuals led to the development of Wikipedia (although the intellectual value of this endeavour can lead to strong emotions on both sides!).
- The success of Barack Obama's 2008 presidential campaign was in no small part the result of his electoral team's success in appropriating new telecommunication technologies.

Big questions still remain:

- Will these new technologies lead to a new era of democratic accountability and decentralized cultural production by an empowered populace?
- Or, will they lead to a 'dumbed-down', 'post-print' generation disempowered by superficial levels of 'amateur' knowledge?
- Will the increasing difficulties of enforcing copyright and proprietary knowledge distribution undermine the industries upon

which much of the growth of Western economies has depended in recent years?

### Key concepts related to network analysis (see Glossary)

Community, cyberspace, distanciation, information economy, neighbourhood, network society, spaces of flows, splintering urbanism, weightless world.

### Further reading

Benkler, Y. (2006) *The Wealth of Networks* Yale University Press, New Haven, CT

DiMaggio, P. *et al.* (2001) Social implications of the Internet, *Annual Review of Sociology* 27, 307–36

Hippler, E. Von (2005) *Democratizing Innovation* MIT Press, Cambridge, MA

### Links with other chapters

Chapter 2: Box 2.4 Manuel Castells

Chapter 7: Box 7.4 How useful is social network analysis?

## The imprint of demographic change

In the past 30 or so years some important demographic changes have occurred that have already begun to be translated into the social geography of the early twenty-first-century city. The story book family in Dick-and-Jane readers (with an aproned mother baking cakes for the two children as they await father's return from a day of breadwinning) has by no means disappeared, but it is fast being outnumbered by other kinds of families. In the United States, for instance, most people live in households where there are two wage earners. The single-parent family is the fastest-growing of all

household types, and almost one in every three households consists of a person living alone (Table 1.1). Similar changes are occurring in most other Western societies in response to the same complex of factors.

Central to all these changes is the experience of the generation born after the Second World War (the baby boomers). The baby boom generation – those individuals born between 1946 and 1964 – has been one of the most powerful and enduring demographic influences on European and North American societies. The post-war baby boom was not about women having more children. It was, instead, based on more people marrying overall and having at least two children early in the marriage. During the 1950s and early 1960s

**Table 1.1** Household composition, United States, 1950–2000 (percentages)

	Married couples					
	Home-making wife	Working wife	Headed by wife	Persons living alone	Other	Total
1950	59.4	19.6	8.4	10.8	1.8	100
1955	54.2	21.7	8.8	12.8	2.5	100
1960	51.2	23.3	8.5	14.9	2.5	100
1965	47.0	25.6	8.7	16.7	2.0	100
1970	41.6	28.9	8.8	18.8	1.9	100
1975	36.6	29.2	10.0	21.9	2.3	100
1980	30.3	30.6	10.8	26.1	2.2	100
1990	23.0	32.2	11.6	29.8	3.4	100
2000	17.5	34.2	12.2	31.9	4.2	100

Source: US Census Bureau.

young women also married earlier than the previous generation and had children earlier. The result is that there is a very large cohort of individuals, currently in their mid-40s to their early 60s, who have had, and will continue to have, tremendous impacts on the rest of the population.

The advent of reliable methods of birth control in the mid-1960s fostered the postponement of childbearing in the baby boom generation just as its first cohort reached marriageable age. Meanwhile, the demise of the ‘living wage’, noted above, prompted still more women to take up full-time employment and to postpone childbearing or to return to work soon after childbirth. The reduced birth rates resulted in a ‘baby bust’ generation. Meanwhile, as their boomer parents began to reach their peak earning years, they were instrumental in an important cultural shift: a change in lifestyle preferences away from familism towards consumerism.

These trends have some important consequences for urban social geography. In addition to the implications of an increasingly consumerist urban lifestyle, the effects of reduced birth rates on many aspects of **collective consumption**, and the effects of higher proportions of working women on the demand for child-care facilities, there are the implications of the ageing of the boomers. The baby bust generation will, of course, be the generation that has to ‘mop up’ after the flood of boomers moves up their career ladders towards retirement and beyond. The tremendous size of the baby boom cohort is likely to affect the career and job mobility of the busters,

and as more and more of them reach retirement age so the burden of financing pension funds will fall increasingly on the busters. Perhaps the most important change of all is the general, if gradual and incomplete, change in attitudes towards women that has accompanied consumerism, birth control and increased female participation in the labour market. Already, changing attitudes about the status of women have come to be reflected in improved educational opportunities and a wider choice of employment, both of which have fostered the development of non-traditional family structures and lifestyles.

In addition, once the proposition that sex need not be aimed primarily or solely at procreation had become generally accepted, further trends were set in motion. The social value of marriage decreased, with a consequent decline in the rate of marriage, an increase in divorce and an increase in cohabitation without marriage – all conspiring to depress the fertility rate still further and to create large numbers of non-traditional households (single-parent households, in particular) with non-traditional housing needs, non-traditional residential behaviour and non-traditional demands on urban services. Meanwhile, the effects of economic restructuring, combined with the increased number of female-headed households and the generally inferior role allocated to women in the labour market, has precipitated yet another set of changes with important implications for urban social geography: the economic marginalization of women and the feminization of poverty.

One final and important demographic change in Western cities in recent years has been their growing cosmopolitanism, i.e. increasing cultural and ethnic diversity. This is especially noticeable in large cities such as London (Figure 1.1), Paris, New York and Los Angeles (see also Box 1.3). Such cities have been reception areas for peoples from many countries for many

years and much of their contemporary diversity emanates from the descendants of earlier waves of immigration. This is especially true of US cities with their typical patchwork of diverse ethnic neighbourhoods. However, in recent years new waves of immigration have changed the character of cities. The scale of movement may be smaller than in the past but the range of peoples is far

### Box 1.3

#### Key trends in urban social geography – growing cosmopolitanism in Western cities: the example of London

A major trend in Western cities in recent years has been their growing cosmopolitanism. This cultural diversity reflects not only the descendants of previous generations of immigrants, but also recent migrants such as temporary workers, students, refugees, asylum seekers and long-term tourists.

Few cities illustrate this growing cosmopolitanism better than London. As Hamnett (2003) notes, in the 1960s ethnic minorities in London were small in scale and extent. Yet, as illustrated in the table opposite, by 2001 over one-third of the population in London, as measured by the Census, was other than 'white British'. Some cities have larger proportions of individual groups, such as Latinos and African-Americans in Los Angeles. Nevertheless, few can match the sheer range of ethnic origins to be found in London. This diversity reflects not only the colonial past of Britain but also London's status as a centre of international finance, business services and creative and cultural industries.

The resulting atmosphere in London was well captured by the distinguished social commentator Anthony Sampson:

The capital [London] has become the most cosmopolitan in the world, from top to bottom, teeming with Americans, Europeans, Australians, Asians,

Ethnic group	Numbers (000s)	Percentage of total population
White: British	4287	59.8
White: Irish	220	3.1
White: other	595	8.3
Mixed	226	3.2
Indian	437	6.1
Pakistani	143	2.0
Bangladeshi	154	2.1
Other Asian	133	1.9
Black: Caribbean	344	4.8
Black: African	379	5.3
Other black	60	0.8
Chinese	80	1.1
Other ethnic group	113	1.6
All ethnic groups	7192	

Source: 2001 census data, National Statistics website: [www.statistics.gov.uk](http://www.statistics.gov.uk).

Africans and Arabs . . . The streets and buses are loud with exotic languages, full of Muslim veils and beards and African robes. The high street has restaurants from 30 countries including Iraq, Iran and Sudan.

It is perhaps hardly surprising therefore that in 1999 *Newsweek* ran a cover story headlined 'London: coolest city on the planet' (4 November).

#### Further reading

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#### Links with other chapters

Chapter 3: Postcolonial theory and the city

Chapter 8: The spatial segregation of minority groups, Box 8.1 The Latinization of US cities

Chapter 12: Box 12.4 The rise of transnational urbanism

Chapter 13: Box 13.1 The emergence of clusters of asylum seekers and refugees

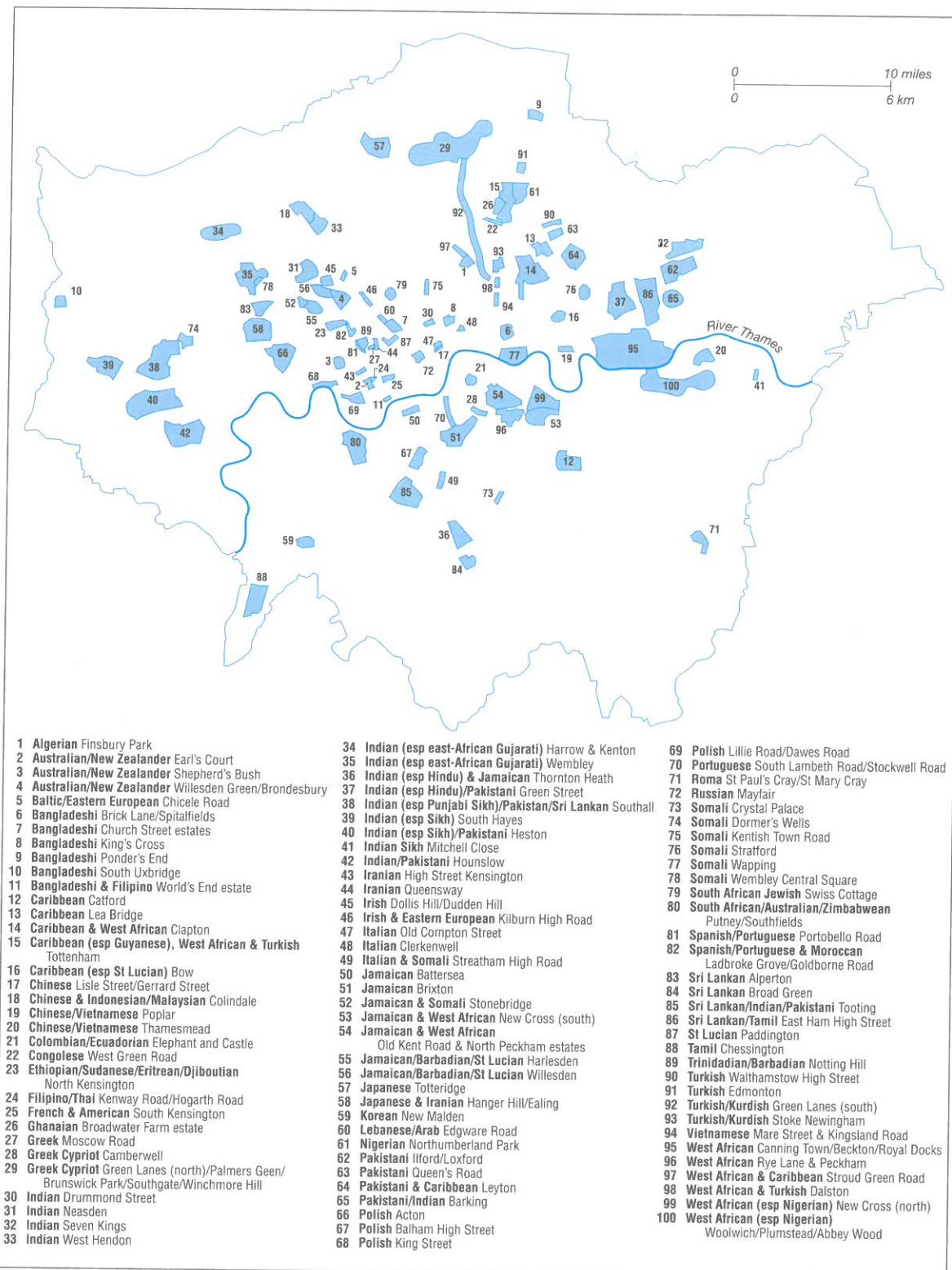


Figure 1.1 Cosmopolitanism in London: the distribution of ethnic minority clusters in 2004.

Source: After The world in one city, *Guardian*, G2 Supplement, 21 January 2005 (Benedictus, L.), Copyright Guardian News & Media Ltd. 2005.

more diverse. No longer is the predominant pattern one of migration from Europe to the United States, or from former colonies into European cities, but the movement of peoples from all around the globe into all the main Western cities. Whether temporary or permanent, legal or illegal, these migrants have been attracted by the economic opportunities offered in Western cities. Some are an elite group of highly skilled workers operating in a global labour market, while others are less skilled workers prepared to undertake relatively low-paid work. Yet other migrants are refugees seeking asylum from political oppression. Others attempt to infiltrate under the guise of political refugees when they are in reality economic migrants.

### The city and cultural change

The rise of consumerism and materialistic values has been one of the dominant cultural trends since 1980. One reason for this is the lifestyle shift associated with the baby boom generation, described above. Another is that people have been made more materialistic as capitalism has, in its search for profits, had to turn away from the increasingly regulated realm of production towards the more easily exploited realm of consumption. Meanwhile, the relative affluence of the post-war period allowed many households to be more attentive to consumerism. For one reason or another, people soon came to be schooled in the sophistry of conspicuous consumption. One of the pivotal aspects of this trend, from the point of view of urban social geography, was the demand for home ownership and the consequent emphasis on the home and its accessories as an expression of self and social identity.

Against the background of this overall trend towards consumerism there emerged in the 1960s a distinctive middle-class youth counterculture based on a reaction against materialism, scale and high technology. These ideas can be seen, for example, in the politicization of liberal/ ecological values in relation to urban development and collective consumption, and in the realm of postmodernist, neoromantic architecture and urban design. It should be noted, however, that the spread of these values has not, for the most part, displaced materialism. Rather, they have grown up alongside. The

middle classes have come to have their (organic) cake and eat it too, facilitated by the commercial development of products and services geared to liberal/ ecological tastes.

Meanwhile, digital telecommunications, innovative forms of electronic representation and economic globalization have fostered a homogenized cultural mainstream in which the meaning and distinctiveness of individual places and communities has become attenuated. The corollary of *this*, in turn, is an increased concern, among some consumers, with conserving and developing the urban sense of place.

### Political change and the sociospatial dialectic

The trends outlined above are pregnant with problems and predicaments that inevitably figure among the dominant political issues. Economic restructuring has led to a realignment of class relations, with differences being drawn increasingly along geographical (as well as structural) lines. As labour markets become more segmented, as differential processes of growth and decline work themselves out, and as shifts in the balance of economic and social power reshape the political landscape, there is a constant stream of political tensions.

Especially significant in this context was the spread in the 1980s and 1990s of the idea that welfare states had not only generated unreasonably high levels of taxation, budget deficits, disincentives to work and save, and a bloated class of unproductive workers, but also that they may have fostered 'soft' attitudes towards 'problem' groups in society. Ironically, the electoral appeal of this ideology can be attributed to the very success of welfare states in erasing from the minds of the electorate the immediate spectre of material deprivation. Consequently, the priority accorded to welfare expenditures receded (though the logic and, critically, the costs of maintaining them did not), displaced by neoliberal policies that are predicated on a minimalist role for the state, assuming the desirability of free markets as the ideal condition not only for economic organization, but also for political and social life (Brenner, 2002). The retrenchment of the public sector has already brought some important changes to the urban scene as, for example, in the privatization of housing and public

services. Meanwhile, deindustrialization and economic recession mean that sociospatial disparities have been reinforced. This has changed the dynamics of inner-city politics, while 'traditional' working-class politics, having lost much of its momentum and even more of its appeal, is being displaced by a 'new wave' of

local politics (Chapter 5). Neoliberalism has held sway in Western economies since the early 1980s and it remains to be seen whether the massive public intervention in the financial system brought about by the 'credit crunch' heralds a radical rethink in other policy spheres that affect city structures.

## Chapter summary

- 1.1 Several different approaches – quantitative, behavioural, structural and poststructural – are relevant to an understanding of contemporary cities.
- 1.2 Cities reflect a *sociospatial dialectic*, a two-way process in which people modify urban spaces while at the same time they are conditioned by the spaces in which they live and work.
- 1.3 City structures reflect their surrounding economic, demographic, cultural and political backgrounds. Consequently, North American cities display somewhat different characteristics to European cities.

## Key concepts and terms

(Note: these will be developed in greater depth later in this book.)

behavioural approach  
Cartesian approach  
classical Marxism  
collective consumption  
cultural myopia  
'cultural turn'  
culture  
decentralization  
deindustrialization  
discourse  
feminization of poverty

functionalist sociology  
global cities  
globalization  
human agency  
Marxian theories  
neoclassical economics  
neo-Fordism  
neoliberal policies  
neo-Marxist approaches  
normative assumptions  
phenomenology

postindustrial society  
poststructuralist approaches  
privatism  
quantitative approach  
recentralization  
social wage  
sociospatial dialectic  
splintering urbanism  
structuralism  
world cities

## Suggested reading

### The Sociospatial dialectic

- Soja, E. (1980) The socio-spatial dialectic, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 70, 207–25
- Soja, E. (1989) *Postmodern Geographies* Verso, London (Chapter 3)

### Urban studies readers

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- Fyfe, N. and Kenny, J.T. (eds) (2005) *The Urban Geography Reader* Routledge, London

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- Le Gates, R. and Stout, S. (eds) (2003) *The City Reader* (3rd edn) Routledge, London  
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- Dictionaries and glossaries for urban geographers**
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- Social geography**
- Pain, R., Fuller, P., Gough, J., McFarlane, R. and Mowl, G. (2001) *Introducing Social Geographies* Arnold, Oxford  
 Panelli, R. (2004) *Social Geographies: From difference to action* Sage, London  
 Valentine, G. (2004) *Social Geographies: Space and society* Prentice Hall, Harlow
- Cultural geography**
- Holdsworth and Mitchell (eds) (1998) *Cultural Geography: A reader* Arnold, London  
 Crang, M. (2003) *Cultural Geography* (2nd edn) Routledge, London
- International journals**
- In addition to the above, there are a number of journals that you should keep an eye on for the very latest research on urban social geography (listed in alphabetical order):
- *Annals of the Association of American Geographers\**
  - *Antipode\**
  - *Area\**
  - *Australian Geographical Studies\**
  - *Built Environment\**
  - *Canadian Geographer\**
  - *Capital and Class\**
  - *Children's Geographies\**
  - *Cities*
  - *City: Analysis of urban trends, culture, theory, policy, action*