

Max Shi

HSS 122

Professor Chun

Final Exam

I pledge my honor that I have abided by the Stevens Honor System.

What is the importance of Karl Marx and Frederick Engel's ideas in urban sociology? Please, explain.

Marx first argued that the economic structure of society is the foundation of life, where the social, political, and spiritual nature of society stem from. He said that societal transformation comes from the conflict between those who control the means of production and those who supply the labor of production. As a result, he argues that the flaws of society come from the flaws of capitalism, rather than individuals. Combining with Engels, they also argued that the rise of the city and specialization freed people to act on their own, taking on extra things such as political roles and using scientific skills. Thus, they believe that the establishment of cities marks the transformation from barbarism to civilization.

Marx's ideas about the flaws of capitalism have some merit. Today, we see a large divide between the people and corporations (billionaires), where corporate greed has been pointed to for a lot of the US's current problems. This is in line with his theories, with corporations being those who control the means of production and the people supplying the labor for production. As for the theory on the civilization of humans through the establishment of cities, we have seen time and time again through history what specialization allows humans to do, in the form of other tasks not inherently necessary for survival. For example, agriculture allowed humans to divert time away from looking for food, which allowed them to specialize. It makes sense that the city, as a form of organization and diverting time away from bare necessities, allowed humans to specialize again.

What is the relevance of Tönnies's Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft in the study of cities? Please, explain.

The ideas of Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft are two contrasting concepts used to describe the interactions between people in society. Gemeinschaft refers to the characterization of life in rural villages, where social lives were "intimate, private, and exclusive living together." The idea was summed up by the phrase "we-ness," which represents how the society in rural villages was focused on the collective. Gesellschaft refers to the character of the modern city, where the meaning of existence shifted from the group to the individual. It told people to be concerned with their own self-interests. In the study of cities, Tönnies argues that there is a gradual replacement of gemeinschaft with gesellschaft observed in the cities, with a loss of unity and human concern. In history, this use of distinctive types of living became a pattern for many urban sociologists.

I agree with Tönnies's idea that the modern city has begun to replace the concept of gemeinschaft with the gesellschaft way of life. This seems to be especially true in the United States, where not only does city life push the agenda of gesellschaft, but the individualism taught in American schools and cultures teaches children to take care of their own self interests first. I would like to see a study on these two concepts in more collectivist-minded societies of East Asia, where China and Japan

are known to focus on the greater good over the individual in much greater capacity than the U.S. If the concept of *gesellschaft* were still rapidly replacing *gemeinschaft* in those countries as well, it would bring great credibility to Tönnies's theories.

Why are cities where they are? Please, explain.

Cities are where they are due to a combination of environmental, economic, and social factors. On the environmental side, the area must be minimally hospitable, meaning that it cannot be infested with disease producing organisms, subject to extreme hot or cold, or exist on a flood plain. Furthermore, cities require access to food, water, and building materials. While these materials may not be present locally in the area, the city must be able to access these to sustain and grow a population. Next, economics play a role in the city, as port cities usually thrive as centers of trade and commerce. Transportation costs and cost of labor play heavily in the economic viability of a region, and the attractiveness of companies to move there. Finally, social aspects play a role, such as cities being at a natural crossroads, a place of transfer of goods, raw materials, amenities such as beaches or mountains, administrative or political centers, strategic military locations, or religious or education purposes.

These ideas make sense, and I think they can be boiled down into three main categories to better understand the city. The first, regarding environmental factors, constitute if a city can even be built in that location. If the area is too hot or too cold or has no access to electricity or water, there is no logistical way to build a city there. The next idea about economic factors play into the idea of whether or not people can "live" there. Whether people and companies be able to create a living in those cities is dependent on those factors. Finally, the social factors represent the ability for the city to keep people living there and attract people over other cities to grow the population. For example, New York City originated as a place with the minimum hospitable requirements, and as a port city, was economically viable as well. The increasing spectacle and culture of New York City (Broadway, NY Stock Exchange, World Trade Center, Central Park) is what allows the city to grow and retain people within its borders and is what differentiates NYC to other cities that are also economically viable.

What are the pros and cons of the LA school of postmodernism? Please, explain.

The LA school of postmodernism presents four basic "ecologies" that differ from the Chicago school, those being "surferbia", "the foothills", "the plains of Id", and "autopia" to describe the areas of LA. The city becomes a decentralized metropolis with a fragmented power structure, which proponents of the theory argue is the future of urban growth. City-county government disputes, slow-growth/no-growth movements, and minority-group political participation will hinder the future growth of cities, and cities will grow with a focus on low-density, ethnic enclaves. Cons of this theory include the argument that LA cannot be applied to other cities, and similar to the Chicago model, there will be cities that do not follow either model. Critics also argue that these cities cannot be reduced to one model, and that a model should rise above any specific time and place in the growth of a city.

I agree with the criticisms of the model. I believe that a model created from an observation of Los Angeles, in the United States, in the 21st century should not be applied to cities in other countries and at different points in time. Countries like Germany and France have very different cultures surrounding the city, and cannot be compared to the Western United States. Asian cities, as well, differ even greater than American cities and probably should not be compared in this sense. I also do not agree that city-county government disputes, no-growth movements, and minority group political

participation should be blamed for slower urban growth in the future. While the overall trend of slower growth is present in modern times, there are many other factors in other cities that contribute to this trend, such as corporate lobbying or ecological concerns. Los Angeles is too specific an example to compare to the rest of the world.

What is the insight of Kevin Lynch in studying the cities? Please, explain.

Lynch found a few insights while studying the interpretation of cities by their populations. He found that people organize their images of the city into five types of locations, paths, edges, districts, nodes, and landmarks. People generally agreed on the classification of these types of locations, such as agreeing on a road being a path, or certain locations such as Boston's Park Street Station being classified as a node. However, what differed between cities was their population's ability to conceptualize the layout of their cities, and where the location of everything was. For example, Bostonians could identify many different paths, edges, nodes, districts, and landmarks, while those living in Jersey City could not identify many. He concluded that the "imagability" of a city was very important in giving people a working knowledge and sense of security of the city, and allowed people to learn and spread this knowledge in an easy manner.

I agree with Lynch's ideas. My experience with New York City affirms the idea of "imagability" being very important for a positive urban environment. Over the past year, my visits to the city have allowed me to generally visualize the locations of things in the city, points of interest, and prevents me from feeling lost in the city at all. This has absolutely given me a sense of confidence and security in my ability to live and work in the city, which is part of the reason I focused on finding a job in the city for the future. I believe I was able to pick up this information easily as well, as many of my friends and online resources would refer to the same landmarks and points of interest that allowed me to gain my working knowledge, an affirmation to Lynch's ideas that the knowledge of a city with high "imagability" can be shared relatively easily.

How do city dwellers deal with anonymity(Lyn Lofland)? Please explain by using examples if you can.

Due to the large amount of people in the city, Lofland argues that city dwellers have to turn to other, visual cues to classify strangers in the city. One of these strategies is noting strangers' appearance and location, as when city people give passing strangers the "once-over," noting their clothing, hairstyle, jewelry, items they are carrying, and how they are walking. This, combined with location, allows people to make judgements about people's identities, differentiating certain people from the vast sea of people in the city. Another strategy for dealing with anonymity is privatizing public space, where public areas become areas specific to a certain group of people, such as street corners, bars, or taverns. In this sense, the social circle of the city is reduced, reducing the sense of anonymity. For example, a group of regulars in a bar will know each other by name and create a sense of familiarity for those city-goers, and anyone who enters the same bar will have to abide by the social standards tacitly enforced by those regulars.

I agree with these ideas around how city dwellers deal with anonymity. Especially in NYC, walking in specific neighborhoods helps me ascertain certain identities and motivations of people – the people of the Financial District are generally focused on work, moving from place to place, while those in Times Square or Chinatown are generally trying to interact with people to sell them something. Even though I am completely anonymous to these people and do not know who the people are, I find myself

avoiding people and eye contact in Chinatown or Times Square, while not caring as much in the Financial District to do the same thing.

How did the city influence civilization? Please, explain by using examples.

Oswald Spengler, Lewis Mumford, and Daniel J. Monti argue three different ways that the city influences civilization. Spengler argues that within development of the city and society, a “soul” emerges within the city. He believes this soul becomes the culture of the civilization itself, and argues that the essence of great cultures are all rooted in cities, such as ancient Greece in Athens, the Roman Empire in Rome, Islamic society in Baghdad, and pre-revolutionary France in Paris. Mumford argues that the city was, throughout history, a center of history, and therefore, culture of civilization, as a place symbolic to culture through the years. This collection of culture in the city magnified the culture of the people, and presented a place for culture to congregate and mix. Finally, Monti argues that the city manifests a civic culture, somewhat different from the culture of a civilization. The city requires its citizens to adopt certain practices and traditions borrowed and adapted from other previous cultures to live harmoniously in a bustling city. These agreed upon practices often reflect the values and beliefs of that civilization, and can influence the development of civilization as well.

There are certain parts of each theory I agree with. I agree with Spengler’s idea that the city can create a “soul” that defines the civilization around it. This is seen in some of the great cultural centers of America, such as New York City, New Orleans, and Chicago. However, I do not believe, in today’s modern society, especially with globalization, that a civilization can be defined by one of its major cities. Mumford’s theory is sound, as the city tends to be a gathering place for culture and people to hold symbolic value, especially noticeable in more historical cities of Europe and Asia. However, to put the development of civilization solely on urban history and not including what the city itself contributes to the development of the culture seems lacking. Thus, Monti’s argument about the development of a civic culture seems to fit well in combination with Mumford’s idea. That combination of cultures of the past and urban history that Mumford emphasizes with the development of new compromises reflective of the beliefs of that society that Monti shows adequately show how the city both consolidates and develops civilization.

Please, discuss the importance of capitalism in the development of the city.

Capitalism has played both a positive and negative role in development of cities. Early forms of capitalism in merchants created trade routes to broaden their economic markets and gain power. Capitalism, changing the ideas of people to only offer their labor to the highest bidder and encouraging economic competition led to the Industrial Revolution, where efforts to be economically competitive with others in the same industry led to scientific advancements in those industries, such as James Watt’s steam engine. Invention of the factory during this time changed the focus of English society at the time from focusing on religion and prayer to focusing on the factory and work. However, capitalism has led to today’s developments of most of the wealth held in the upper echelons of society, unreachable for the poor and the underrepresented. Thus, these upper-class families can have political, social, and economic influence that these underrepresented groups cannot have, causing an even greater spread of inequality and cutting them off from opportunities and success.

While capitalism at its inception caused overall benefit to society, today’s unchecked capitalism has created almost immeasurable inequality among the rich and poor, so much so that the quality of life

of the poor has become arguably worse than at the height of the Industrial Revolution. Especially figures who have taken advantage of the technological revolution like Mark Zuckerberg, Jeff Bezos, and others, with billions of dollars and heaps of influence, not just because of wealth, but the products they control, cause me concern that capitalism has begun to create more negatives than positives in the continued development of civilization.