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The Making of the 20th Century
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The Human Consequences of Urbanisation

DIVERGENT PATHS IN THE URBAN
EXPERIENCE OF THE TWENTIETH
CENTURY

Brian J. L. Berry

*Irving B. Harris Professor of Urban Geography
The University of Chicago*

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FOR JAN

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B. J. L. B.

Park Forest, Illinois
January 1973

Preface

WHEN Christopher Thorne asked me to fill the gap that had emerged in his series because of the untimely death of the distinguished British sociologist John Madge, I agreed with reluctance. A book with a prescribed title, *The Human Consequences of Urbanisation*, to be of no more than sixty thousand words, in a series devoted to 'The Making of the 20th Century', is hardly the obvious thing to be written by a person whose early career had been devoted to 'quantitative' geography, despite a sometime education in economics and political science, on-the-job training in urban sociology, and a practical yen for urban and regional planning. As it turned out, this combination of interests was to stand me in good stead. I had no idea that I would take more than a year longer than promised to write the book. Nor did I realise that this would be a period in which my concerns with national policy and social change would finally crystallise or that the period spent re-shaping an initial rough draft would be one of unique opportunity.

During recent years my several lives as a professional geographer, lecturer on urbanism and planning consultant have taken me into every continent and many of the world's major cities, save only China, the U.S.S.R. and North Africa. On these trips I had the opportunity to work with policy makers, urban and regional analysts and planners, as well as the chance to see and to smell the many forms of city in the world today.

One thing became clear in these travels. I should not write a highly technical, narrowly professional essay in my usual 'mathematised' manner. Rather, I should be responsive to a clearly felt need throughout the world for a general overview of the substantive and ideological aspects of twentieth-century urbanisation and its human consequences. The need was all the more pressing because I saw planners throughout the world attempting to stem the growth of the largest cities in order to produce 'balanced' urbani-

sation and to create more humane urban environments within the framework of a particular conventional wisdom, while at the same time I saw increasing numbers of citizens growing alarmed because the plans were not working.

As I travelled, I perceived that the intellectual basis for much urban policy was derived from social theories written about *nineteenth-century* urbanisation. I thus came to appreciate that many of the difficulties being experienced stemmed from a simple fact : *the conventional wisdom was no longer valid*. The opportunity to compare a variety of circumstances around the world in rapid succession also convinced me that, despite certain broad commonalities, there was not one but *several* paths being taken by twentieth-century urbanisation, and that both the causes and the human consequences differed along these paths. Many of the world's practical urbanists are now coming to realise the need for new intellectual frameworks specifically applicable to different socio-political circumstances.

Thus, what I do in this book is to disavow the view that urbanisation is a universal process, a consequence of modernisation that involves the same sequence of events in different countries and that produces progressive convergence of forms. Nor do I subscribe to the view that there may be several culturally specific processes, but that they are producing convergent results because of underlying technological imperatives of modernisation and industrialisation. I feel very strongly not only that we are dealing with several fundamentally different processes that have arisen out of differences in culture and time, but also that these processes are producing different results in different world regions, transcending any superficial similarities.

It would have been easy to write a focused and highly disciplined report on a piece of analysis undertaken as if the single-process theory that informs conventional wisdom obtained. But to do this would have been both intellectually dishonest and unresponsive to the needs around the world as I saw them. I elected to follow the much more difficult path of marshalling and codifying evidence from a wide range of sources and interpreting this evidence in light of my own observations and experiences in ways that I hope will both challenge the specialist and inform the general reader.

The initial chapter deals with the conventional wisdom, the

base of social theory against which the twentieth-century materials may be judged. An examination of the nature of the nineteenth-century industrial urbanisation provides the backdrop for considering the succession of major works written about the social transformation that took place in these cities, the popular social movements that arose, and the emergence of urban planning as a reaction against some of the most deleterious effects of cities on health and social life.

Chapter 2 follows with a detailed examination of the North American experience. There are several reasons I discuss North America first and in most detail. Most obviously, it is the case I know best, and thus, without apology, I take advantage of this fact to develop the theories used in later chapters. But more importantly, significant changes have taken place and are taking place in North America that are as yet little understood elsewhere in the world, where there remains a tendency to use an image of what the American city became in the mid-twentieth century—but, parenthetically, is no longer—as an idealised picture (or spectre) of what cities elsewhere ought to or might become. It was in North America that much of the traditional social theory of the human consequences of urbanisation was codified by the Chicago School of urban sociologists in the inter-war period. The North American experience was also dominated by rapid economic and technological change, relatively unfettered by public intervention, which might lend some credence to use of the American experience as a lesson for urban policy makers elsewhere. But these changes produced first one new form of city, the decentralised metropolis of the automobile era, and more recently a second and totally new form of urban region that is secondary to both national networks of interdependence and the intensification of local cultures and life styles. In these new circumstances, the conventional social theory has been tested and found wanting, and it may even be questioned whether ‘urbanisation’ or ‘the city’ remain as relevant categories for analysis. What I do in the second part of the chapter is to try to develop the bases of an alternative theory applicable to these new conditions in America today.

The third chapter deals with the Third World, because conventional theorists have said it is there that one should expect a repetition of the nineteenth-century experience of the West as modernisation has diffused and urbanisation has taken place. This

thesis is explored and found wanting. The baseline cultures are different, the pace of urban growth is faster, and different links exist between urban growth and the socio-political circumstances in which it is taking place. The result is new forms of cities and a totally new array of social conditions. Yet, in the Third World, western-educated policy makers have been grappling with urbanisation using the nineteenth-century model and proposing alien solutions either consistent with or in reaction to that model. Their policies seldom have the predicted consequences, whichever of the two routes is taken.

The fourth chapter then turns to the several European experiences, involving paths that differ from the industrial urbanisation of the West during the nineteenth century and from those of North America and the Third World in the twentieth century. The differences arise because of the varying mixtures of technological change, national ideologies and planning powers in the different European nations. In combination, such mixtures have created significantly different forms of urbanisation in which there are diverging human consequences.

This discussion of the European experience is delayed to Chapter 4 for a very specific reason. Neither existing theory nor conventional wisdom captures the several processual streams in the world today, particularly those streams that embody attempts, delicate and otherwise, to engineer social change to achieve explicit goals. This is even more the case when the goals are fashioned out of reactions *against* the perceived human consequences of nineteenth-century industrial urbanisation, as they were in most parts of Europe. Thus, it is toward the shaping of new bodies of theory incorporating these new variables that the volume leads, and it is the European experience that contributes most to the attempt.

Given the European evidence, the final chapter seeks to interpret the urbanisation processes that characterise different socio-political situations in the world today in terms of the public planning styles that are assumed in these contexts. Thus, North American urbanisation is seen as being driven by both a technological and a social dynamic under conditions of competitive bargaining and interest-group politics. The public interest is expressed in a reactive and conservative manner, designed to reduce the problems that arise as the powerful economic forces of

mainstream America run their course. In spite of many attempts to do otherwise, Third World urbanisation is also seen to be the product of an unconstrained dynamic, for public powers have been swamped by the scale and pace of change in spite of highly centralised and increasingly authoritarian governmental forms. That Third World urbanisation is different from that of North America is to be attributed to different cultural contexts, to differential technological impacts, and in particular to the substitution, for the driving mainstream of self-interest, competitively exercised, of communal concerns, jointly expressed or publicly articulated. In Europe, on the other hand, there have been developed variously effective means of regulating urban change in the public interest, means of instituting public counterpoints to speculative private interests, and forms of explicitly directed urbanisation. In each of these cases the sought-after human consequences of urbanisation have become part of the urbanisation process through public intervention; directed change has contributed to a difference in outcomes, and in many cases these outcomes differ markedly from those predicted by the conventional wisdom.