

## Spatial and institutional frameworks: citizens, the state and civil society

### Key questions addressed in this chapter

- In what ways are the structures of cities influenced by legal, governmental and political structures?
- What are the consequences of metropolitan fragmentation?
- In what ways does the institutional structure of cities affect the functioning of democracy?
- How is power distributed in cities?

In this chapter, we explore some fundamental components of the sociospatial dialectic: the social, legal and political structures surrounding citizenship, democracy and civil society. The physical and socioeconomic patterns described in Chapter 4 are all outcomes of complex, interlayered processes in which social and spatial phenomena are intermeshed: the sociospatial

dialectic described in Chapter 1. These processes are all played out, moreover, within spatial and institutional frameworks – electoral districts, school catchment areas, legal codes, homeowner association deeds and so on – that are themselves both outcome and medium of social action. Individually and collectively, we act out our lives and pursue our interests both *in* and *through* these institutional and spatial frameworks. Our lives and our lifeworlds are facilitated, shaped and constrained by these frameworks but we also, consciously and unconsciously, contribute to their shape and character.

### 5.1 The interdependence of public institutions and private life

It was the emergence of capitalist democracies that forged the basis for modern urban society. The scale, rhythm and fragmentation of life required by the new



logic of industrial capitalism meant that traditional societies had to be completely restructured. Local and informal practices had to be increasingly standardized and codified in order to sustain the unprecedentedly extensive, complex and rapidly changing economic and social structures of an urbanized and industrialized system. At the heart of this process was the growth and transformation of public institutions in order to be able to facilitate and regulate the new political economy. This was the era when many new nation states were established and most of the old ones were recast with modern institutions of governance, democracy and judicial process.

Yet these institutions did not simply emerge, autonomous, from the flux of change in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The public sphere that came to encapsulate the realms of private life derived its *raison d'être* from the changing needs (and demands) of citizens. According to social theorist Jurgen Habermas (1989), the public sphere and the citizens who populate it can be seen as one of four fundamental categories of social organization characteristic of modern societies. The others are the *economy*, *civil society* and *the state*. The meaning of *civil society* has changed over time but is

generally understood to involve all the main elements of society outside government. The emergence of these categories, Habermas points out, requires the working-through of an established relationship of the public to the private spheres of life. He has suggested that in most instances this relationship has come to rest on the recognition of three sets of common rights:

- 1 those related to rational critical public debate (freedom of speech and opinion, freedom of the press, freedom of assembly and association, etc.);
- 2 those related to individual freedoms, 'grounded in the sphere of the patriarchal conjugal family' (personal freedom, inviolability of the home, etc.);
- 3 those related to the transactions of private owners of property in the sphere of civil society (equality before the law, protection of private property, etc.).

The way these rights are articulated and upheld in particular locales determines, among other things, the nature of access to economic and political power and to social and cultural legitimacy. It follows that issues of citizenship, legal codes and the roles claimed by (or given to) urban governments have a great deal to do with the unfolding of the sociospatial dialectic.



The city as a space for public protest: a student demonstration. Photo Credit: Paul Knox.



## Citizenship, patriarchy and racism

In contrast to the premodern hierarchies of rights and privileges tied to the notion of the allegiance of subjects to a monarch (see Chapter 2), citizenship implies a rationality that is accompanied by mutual obligations. The citizenship that emerged with the onset of modernity (see Chapter 3) was tied to the territorial boundaries of new and reconstituted national states rather than to the divine authority of nobility. It was the construct through which political and civil rights were embedded in national constitutions. Later, there developed in most of the economically more developed countries an ideal of citizenship that embraced social as well as political and civil rights – the right to a minimum level of personal security and of economic welfare, for example.

The process of constructing this modern idea of citizenship inevitably provoked a running debate over who is and who is not a citizen, especially in countries such as Australia and the United States, which drew demographic and economic strength on the basis of immigration. The result was that the social construction of citizenship has been mediated through deep-seated prejudices and entrenched cultural practices, as introduced in Chapter 3. Sexism and racism, in short, found their way into conceptions of citizenship and from there into the relationship between the public sphere and private life and to the very heart of the sociospatial dialectic through which contemporary cities have been forged.

In the first instance, of course, citizenship was available only to white, property-owning males. The exclusion of women can be traced, in large measure, to the patriarchy inherent within Western culture: in particular, to certain assumptions about the social roles of men and women. The basic assumptions are: (1) that the dominance of husband over wife is a 'law of nature'; and (2) that men by nature are more suited to the aggressive pursuits of economic and public life while women by nature are more suited to the nurturing activities of the domestic sphere. The idea of 'Public Man' (whose corollary was 'Private Woman') persisted even after the franchise was extended to women and indeed still persists, well after the 'women's liberation' of the 1960s.

The exclusion of minority populations has in general been more explicit, not least in ante-bellum America, where black slavery represented the very antithesis of citizenship. The inherent racism of 'mainstream' society overtly circumscribed the participation of native American, Chinese and black populations in the full rights of citizenship all through the 'melting pot' of American urbanization in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, until the Civil Rights legislation of the late 1960s. In Europe, racism was focused on Jews and gypsies until after the Second World War, when immigration brought large numbers of Asians and Africans to the cities of Britain, France and Germany. In addition to the overt and formal limits imposed on these immigrants in terms of the civil and political rights of citizenship, systematic discrimination has circumscribed their social rights of citizenship. We shall see in Chapter 8 how these consequences of racism come into play in the social production of space and the maintenance of sociospatial segregation.

## The law and civil society

The law stands as an important link between the public and private spheres, and between the state and the economy. As a key component of the sociospatial dialectic, the law must be seen as both a product of social forces and spatial settings and as an agent of sociospatial production and reproduction. There are several specific elements to the law in this context. It is *formulated* (usually in quite abstract and general ways) by elected legislatures that in turn draw on citizens' conceptions of justice, equity, etc. It is subsequently *applied* in specific places and circumstances by a variety of agencies (such as the police, social workers, housing authorities, etc.) to whom responsibility is delegated by the national state. Where problems and disputes emerge as to the specific meaning of law, it is *interpreted* through other mechanisms of civil society, principally the courts.

It is now acknowledged that each of these elements is deeply geographical in that they involve the interpenetration of place and power. Among the best-documented examples of the interpenetration of law, civil society and urban geography are the decisions of the US Supreme Court in cases involving voting rights,



## Box 5.1

## Key debates in urban social geography – the relationships between diversity, difference and inequality

The enormous material inequalities that were generated by the Industrial Revolution led, in most Western societies, to the development of class-based political struggles aimed at ameliorating such differences. These struggles resulted in social reforms, trade union recognition and the emergence of various forms of welfare state. In recent years, in the wake of various neoliberal policies, such material inequalities have been growing once again and yet, perhaps surprisingly, apart from a general envy at the ultra-rich 'celebrity class' or resentment of financial moguls, class-based politics are no longer dominant. Instead, they have been replaced by various forms of 'cultural' or 'identity' politics based around other forms of difference than class: gender, age, sexuality, ethnicity, disability, nationality, religion and lifestyle. Hence issues such as abortion, gay marriage, animal welfare or the wearing of Islamic headdress seem to arouse more passions and public debate than poverty.

The rise of these various forms of identity politics raises complex issues for social reformers. In particular, what are the relationships between inequality and difference? And what types of difference constitute a legitimate cause for social concern and reform? Reformers have tended to focus upon those types of difference that are associated with inequalities in resources and power (e.g. inequalities of pay associated with gender; domestic violence by men against women; sexual harassment of gays in public; various forms of discrimination against ethnic minorities).

However, some degrees of difference are not so much associated with inequality but lifestyle choices that are different from majority norms. This raises complex issues of the extent to which the state should intervene to try and affect lifestyles, especially where there is behaviour that is seen to cause self-harm (e.g. smoking, drug and substance abuse, binge drinking, junk food consumption and obesity). While such behaviour primarily affects the individual concerned, there are also social costs in terms of health costs and social breakdown. Geography plays a key role in these debates since clashes of values often occur in particular public spaces. Hence the bans on smoking in public spaces currently being introduced throughout the West have been in large part prompted by objections from passive smokers.

Another good example of identity politics linked to urban social geography is the *eruv*, a designated space that allows orthodox Jews to carry or push objects that would otherwise be restricted to the household on the Sabbath (e.g. pushing wheelchairs or prams, carrying keys or prayer books). Such prohibitions stem from Old Testament teachings since, under Orthodox Jewish biblical law, Jews are not permitted to carry any item in a public domain on the Sabbath. Many Jewish homes are, in fact, established as *eruv*s to permit Orthodox families to perform tasks that would otherwise be forbidden on the Sabbath. While many *eruv*s have been implemented without incident, others have led to

fierce opposition from a variety of groups ranging from other religious denominations to secularists. Especially contentious have been those cases where the zone is delineated by poles, typically of 10 metres (approximately 30 feet) in height and linked by lines of wire. However, some *eruv*s do not have such poles; other have boundaries that include railway tracks, roads and even cliffs and beaches. Non-Jewish inhabitants sometimes fear that *eruv*s will lead to an influx of the designated area by those of the Jewish faith. As with many NIMBY ('not in my backyard') protests, objections to *eruv*s are often couched in other terms, such as fears for nature and wildlife (e.g. fear of birds getting trapped in wires or damage to trees).

## Key concepts related to diversity and difference (see Glossary)

Class, community action, cultural politics, difference, exclusionary zoning, identity politics, NIMBY, residential differentiation, structural assimilation, 'turf' politics.

## Further reading

Cooper, D. (2004) *Challenging Diversity: Rethinking equality and the value of difference* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge

## Links with other chapters

Chapter 3: What is Culture?

Chapter 9: Box 9.3 The development of new 'sacred spaces'



school desegregation, open housing and land use zoning. To take just a few examples, these include decisions on *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), which declared school segregation unconstitutional; *Shelley v. Kraemer* (1948), which ruled that racially restricted covenants on property sales are illegal; *Euclid v. Ambler* (1926), which established the right of municipalities to zone land use in order to protect the public interest; and *NAACP v. Mt. Laurel* (1972), which struck down an exclusionary zoning ordinance.

Through such cases, particular social values and moral judgements are mapped on to the urban landscape while others are deflected or eradicated. This, of course, is by no means straightforward. Apart from anything else, the formulation, application and interpretation of law take place not only at the national scale but also at the level of the municipality (or 'local state'), making for a complex and sometimes contradictory framework of legal spaces that are superimposed on, and interpenetrated with, the social spaces of the city. At the same time, the continual evolution and reorganization of society introduces elements of change that cumulatively modify the tenor of civil society itself, alter the relationships between central and local states, and raise new challenges for law and urban governance.

## The changing nature of urban governance

As the economic base of cities has shifted, the fortunes of different groups have changed, cities themselves have thrown up new problems and challenges, and urban government has attracted different types of people with different motivations and objectives. The ethos and orientations of urban government, reflecting these changes, have in turn provided the catalyst for further changes in the nature and direction of urban development. Today, the scope of urban governance has broadened to the point where it now includes the regulation and provision of all kinds of goods and services, from roads, storm drainage channels, street lighting, water supplies and sewage systems to law enforcement, fire prevention, schools, clinics, transport systems and housing. All these activities have a direct and often fundamental effect on the social geography

as well as on the physical morphology of cities, as we shall see in Chapter 13. Moreover, the economic and legislative power of modern local authorities makes them a potent factor in moulding and recasting the urban environment. In general terms, it is useful to distinguish five principal phases in the evolution of urban governance:

- 1 The earliest phase, dating to the first half of the nineteenth century, was a phase of virtual non-government, based on the doctrine of utilitarianism. This *laissez-faire* philosophy rested on the assumption that the maximum public benefit will arise from unfettered market forces: a classical liberal economic stance. In practice, an oligarchy of merchants and patricians presided over urban affairs but did little to modify the organic growth of cities.
- 2 The second phase, dating between 1850 and 1910, saw the introduction of 'municipal socialism' by social leaders in response to the epidemics, urban disorder and congestion of the Victorian city. The law and urban governance in this period were based on a strong ethos of public service and paternalism, and the result was a wide range of liberal reforms. At the same time, the increasing power and responsibility of political office-holders facilitated the widespread development of corruption in urban affairs.
- 3 Between 1910 and 1940 there occurred a critical event – the Depression – that finally swung public opinion in favour of a permanent and more fundamental municipal role in shaping many aspects of social life and well-being. The market failures that had triggered the Depression undermined the legitimacy of classical, *laissez-faire* liberalism and led to its eclipse by an egalitarian liberalism that relied upon the state to manage economic development and soften the unwanted side effects of free-market capitalism. Cities everywhere expanded their activities in health, welfare, housing, education, security and leisure. At the same time, the composition and character of city councils shifted once more. In Britain, the 75 per cent de-rating of industry by the Local Government Act (1929) and the central government's policy of industrial protection in the 1930s combined to remove from many businessmen the incentive to participate in local affairs. In contrast,



members of the working and lower-middle classes found a new rationale for being on the council: to speak for the city's growing number of salaried officials and blue-collar employees. These developments led to the replacement of paternalistic businessmen and social leaders by 'public persons' drawn from a wider social spectrum. In addition, representatives of the working class were installed on city councils through the agency of the Labour Party, and *party politics* soon became an important new facet of urban governance.

4 Between 1940 and 1975, the many roles of urban government generated large, vertically segregated bureaucracies of professional administrators geared to managing the city and its environment. The professional and the party politician came to rule as a duumvirate, the balance of power between the two being variable from function to function and from city to city. By this time, however, a deep paradox had clearly emerged to confront all those concerned with urban affairs. The paradox was this. *Although urbanization was the vehicle that capitalism needed in order to marshal goods and labour efficiently, it created dangerous conditions under which the losers and the exploited could organize themselves and consolidate.* Urban governance and management, facing this paradox, became hybrid creatures, dedicated on the one hand to humanistic and democratic reform, but charged on the other with the management of cities according to a particular kind of economic and social organization. Inevitably, the demands of this task led to an escalation in the number of professional personnel employed to assist councillors in their decision making. At the same time, however, the effective power of councillors to formulate policy initiatives decreased. As the technical complexities of municipal finance, public health, educational administration and city planning increased, councillors became more and more dependent on the expertise of professional personnel and their staff. Consequently, most cities have become permanently dependent on large bureaucracies staffed by specialist professionals.

5 The most recent phase, from the mid-1970s, of neoliberalism. Just as the idea of market failures had

been a powerful notion in the ideological shift from classical liberalism to egalitarian liberalism in the 1930s, so the idea of government failures became a powerful notion in undermining egalitarian liberalism (and especially the Keynesian welfare state) in the mid- to late 1970s. Governments, the argument ran, were inefficient, bloated with bureaucracy, prone to overregulation that stifles economic development, and committed to social and environmental policies that are an impediment to international competitiveness. As a result, egalitarian liberalism was eclipsed by neoliberalism, a selective return to the ideas of classical liberalism. In the United Kingdom and the United States, the Thatcher and Reagan administrations of the 1980s dismantled much of the respective Keynesian welfare states, deregulated industry (notably including the mortgage finance and real estate sectors in the United States), ushered in an era of public-private cooperation in place making and economic development, and rekindled libertarian ideas about the primacy of private property rights.

At a more general level, it has been argued by sociologist Ulrich Beck that the transnationalism, supranationalism, and cosmopolitanism associated with globalization is bringing a 'second modernity' – a reassertion of the structural processes of modernity that is at odds with the managed capitalism and planned modernity of the twentieth century. This implies a deconstruction and reconstruction of many of the institutions of governance, along with our ideas about them. Many of the ideas and institutions that have their origins in the nineteenth-century modernization of societies and nation states, suggests Beck, are 'zombie categories', the walking dead of the present era. According to Beck, 'Zombie categories embody nineteenth-century horizons of experience, horizons of the first modernity. And because these inappropriate horizons, distilled into *a priori* and analytic categories, still mold our perceptions, they are blinding us to the real experience and ambiguities of the second modernity' (Beck and Willms, 2003, p. 19).

### Spaces of neoliberalization

The ascendancy of the free-market doctrines of neoliberalism has been a circular and cumulative process. Increased taxation (to fund spending on the casualties



of deindustrialization), unemployment and inner-city decline contributed to resentment among more affluent sections of the taxpaying public, who were caught up in an ever-escalating material culture and wanted more disposable income for their own private consumption. With pressure on public spending, the quality of public services, public goods and physical infrastructures inevitably deteriorated, which in turn added even more pressure for those with money to spend it privately. People's concern to have their children attend 'good' schools intensified demand for housing in upscale developments with their own community pre-schools and elementary schools. Increasing numbers of people began to buy private security systems, enrol their children in private extra-curricular lessons and activities, and spend time at shopping centres rather than the local playground. It is only human nature that people paying for private services will tend to resent paying for public services which they feel they no longer need. Also resentful of continued spending on socially and geographically redistributive programmes, they began to support the view of certain policy experts and politicians who were demanding 'fiscal equivalence' – where people and businesses 'get what they pay for'.

The concept of the public good was tarred with the same brush as Keynesianism, as government itself (to paraphrase Ronald Reagan) came to be identified as the problem rather than the solution. Globalization also played a part: Keynesian economic policies and redistributive programmes came to be seen as an impediment to international competitiveness. Labour-market 'flexibility' became the new conventional wisdom. In the United States, thanks to the composition and dynamics of Republican politics in the 1980s and 1990s, this economic fundamentalism became inextricably linked with a moralizing social conservatism, producing the peculiar mix of conservatism and libertarianism that became the hallmark of George W. Bush's America. By the mid-1990s, neoliberalism had become the conventional economic wisdom, even among mainstream Democrats.

As Jamie Peck, Adam Tickell and others have pointed out, all this is part of a continuous process of political-economic change, not simply a set of policy outcomes. Peck and Tickell (2002) have characterized the process in terms of a combination of 'roll-back'

neoliberalization and 'roll-out' neoliberalization. Roll-back neoliberalization has meant the deregulation of finance and industry, the demise of public housing programmes, the privatization of public space, cutbacks in redistributive welfare programmes such as food stamps, the shedding of many of the traditional roles of federal and local governments as mediators and regulators, curbs on the power and influence of public institutions such as the labour unions and planning agencies, and a reduction of investment in the physical infrastructure of roads, bridges and public utilities. Roll-out neoliberalization has meant 'right-to-work' legislation, the establishment of public-private partnerships, the development of workfare requirements, the assertion of private property rights, the encouragement of inner-city gentrification, the creation of free-trade zones, enterprise zones and other deregulated spaces, the assertion of the principle of 'highest and best use' for land-use planning decisions, public service pricing, educational competition and the privatization of government services. So complete is the contracting of services in parts of the United States that small municipalities operate with only a handful of full-time employees. Weston, Florida – a city of nearly 70 000 people – has just three employees, while Sandy Springs, Georgia, an Atlanta-area baby boomburb of more than 80 000 residents, has only four public employees who are not involved with public safety. Except for police and fire, virtually every government function has been contracted out. Meanwhile, with neoliberalism established as an ideological 'common sense', it was a short step to what Neil Smith has called *revanchism*: reclaiming urban spaces through the displacement and exclusion of homeless and low-income people through coercive legal and police force in the cause of a 'good business climate'.

The net effect has been to 'hollow out' the capacity of the central governments while forcing municipal governments to become engaged in *civic entrepreneurialism* in pursuit of jobs and revenues; increasingly pro-business in terms of their expenditures; and increasingly oriented to the kind of planning that keeps property values high. This has fostered a speculative and piecemeal approach to the management of cities, with a good deal of emphasis on set piece projects, such as downtown shopping centres, festival market-places, conference and exhibition centres and so on,



that are seen as having the greatest capacity to enhance property values (and so revivify the local tax base) and generate retail turnover and employment growth (see also Box 5.2). Brenner and Theodore (2002, p. 21) suggest that the implicit goal of neoliberalization at the metropolitan scale is 'to mobilize city space as an arena both for market-oriented economic growth and for elite consumption practices'. Indeed, the proponents of neoliberal policies have advocated free markets as the ideal condition not only for economic organization, but also

for political and social life. Ideal for some, of course. Free markets have generated uneven relationships among places and regions, the inevitable result being an intensification of economic inequality at every scale, from the neighbourhood to the nation state. In the vacuum left by the retreat of the local state, voluntarism has become a principal means of providing for the needs of the indigent, while in more affluent communities various forms of 'stealthy', 'private' governments, such as homeowner associations, have proliferated.

## Box 5.2

### Key trends in urban social geography – the growth of 'urban entrepreneurship'

In 1989 David Harvey drew attention to 'urban entrepreneurialism' – an emerging set of changes in the way cities are governed. Since then, the trends that he highlighted have intensified and others have undertaken extensive analyses of the 'entrepreneurial city' (e.g. Hall and Hubbard, 1996; Jessop, 1997).

Entrepreneurs are people who introduce new goods and services. In a city context, entrepreneurialism also refers to both new ways of providing traditional services and also completely new policies. Such innovation has been necessary in response to the 'hollowing out' of the central state, the devolution of responsibilities down towards smaller units and greater involvement of the private sector in the provision of services.

This has involved more than the public sector simply behaving in a more efficient 'businesslike' manner, adopting the private sector language of targets, markets and customers. It has also involved engaging in public-private partnerships, attracting private sector capital and utilizing private sector expertise to provide local services and solve local problems. As a result, cities have increasingly come into

competition with one another as they attempt to attract inward investment from both central government and the private sector. This has led to a concern with the external image of cities, 'city branding' and 'place marketing'. Cities have also become involved in new schemes to transform their neighbourhoods and encourage indigenous innovation and entrepreneurship.

Despite the emphasis upon cities behaving in new, innovative ways, in many respects urban entrepreneurialism involves a new form of orthodoxy as cities attempt to adopt the most successful policies of their rivals. Common themes are the promotion of high-technology clusters, gentrified inner cities, waterfront redevelopment, the promotion of cultural quarters and retail-led regeneration. It has also been argued that such policies circumvent traditional forms of democratic representation, giving greater powers to private capital.

#### Key concepts associated with urban entrepreneurship (see Glossary)

Governance, 'hollowing out', place marketing, pro-growth coalitions, property-led development.

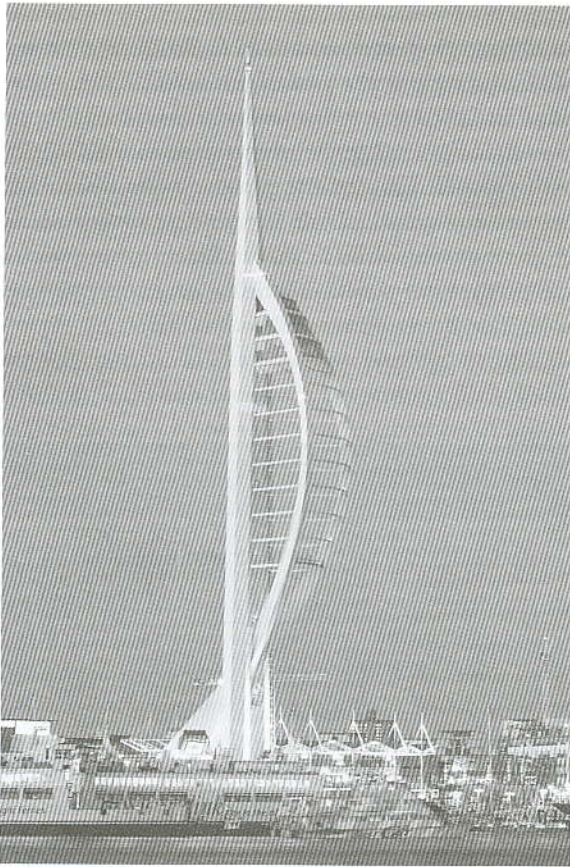
#### Further reading

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#### Links with other chapters

Chapter 13: Box 13.3 The Rise of Social Entrepreneurship





An example of iconic architecture as a tool for 'place branding': Portsmouth's 165-metre high Spinnaker Tower. Photo Credit: Andy Vowles.

### Green politics

In contrast to these neoliberal impulses, it is perhaps possible to see an emerging phase of local government centred around issues of economic sustainability. This follows increasing public concern over environmental issues and the 1992 Rio Earth Summit that produced Agenda 21, a framework for sustainable global development. This was followed up by Habitat II, a summit in Istanbul in 1996 that brought to the fore issues of cities and sustainability; and, most recently, by widespread concerns about the implications of global climate change. In the United Kingdom, for example, although local authorities have had their powers reduced in the spheres of water and transport services, and they have been undermined by the contracting-out of services to the private sector, they have assumed an increasing role in

the sphere of environmental regulation and recycling. However, critics point to the fact that local policies for urban sustainability have been patchy and limited in scope, since in their existing form local authorities lack power to influence many of the realms affecting the environment. In addition, it is intended that Agenda 21 be implemented through the notion of subsidiarity – the devolution of decision making down to the most appropriate level. However, this raises the issue of just what is the most appropriate level for decision making; sustainable policies require local level empowerment and democratic participation, yet they also need central coordination across administrative boundaries.

## 5.2 *De jure* urban spaces

The geopolitical organization of metropolitan areas is an important element in the sociospatial dialectic. *De jure* territories are geographical areas as enshrined in law (i.e. with legal powers, as in political and administrative regions) and can be seen as both outcome and continuing framework for the sociospatial dialectic. In this section we examine the evolution of *de jure* spaces at the intrametropolitan level and discuss some of the major implications of the way in which urban space has been partitioned for political and administrative purposes.

### Metropolitan fragmentation and its spatial consequences

Modern metropolitan areas are characterized by a complex partitioning of space into multipurpose local government jurisdictions and a wide variety of special administrative districts responsible for single functions such as the provision of schools, hospitals, water and sewage facilities (hence the term *jurisdictional partitioning*). This complexity is greatest in Australia and North America, where the ethic of local autonomy is stronger, and it reaches a peak in the United States, where the largest metropolitan areas each have hundreds of separate jurisdictions. While never reaching these levels of complexity, the same phenomenon can be found in Europe. In Britain, for example, the government of



London is still fragmented among 32 boroughs; and in every city there are special district authorities that are responsible for the provision of health services and water supplies.

Much of this complexity can be seen as the response of political and administrative systems to the changing economic and social structure of the metropolis. In short, the decentralization of jobs and residences from the urban core has brought about a corresponding decentralization and proliferation of local jurisdictions. New local governments have been created to service the populations of new suburban and ex-urban dormitory communities, resulting in the 'balkanization' of metropolitan areas into competing jurisdictions. In the United States, this process has been accelerated by policies that, guided by the principle of local autonomy, made the annexation of territory by existing cities more difficult while keeping incorporation procedures very easy.

New single-function special districts, meanwhile, have proliferated throughout metropolitan areas, largely in response to the failure of existing political and administrative systems to cope with the changing needs and demands of the population. Between 1942 and 1972, the number of non-school special districts in the United States increased from 6299 to 23 885. By 1992, Cook County, Illinois, contained 516 separate jurisdictions, one for every 10 000 residents. Special districts are an attractive solution to a wide range of problems because they are able to avoid the statutory limitations on financial and legal powers that apply to local governments. In particular, a community can increase its debt or tax revenue by creating an additional layer of government for a specific purpose. Special districts also have the advantage of corresponding more closely to functional areas and, therefore, of being more finely tuned to local social organization and participation. Another reason for their proliferation has been the influence of special interest groups, including (a) citizen groups concerned with a particular function or issue and (b) business enterprises that stand to benefit economically from the creation of a special district.

Yet although spatial fragmentation can be defended on the grounds of fostering the sensitivity of politicians and administrators to local preferences, it can also be shown to have spawned administrative complexity, political disorganization and an inefficient distribution

of public goods and services. Not least of these problems is the sheer confusion resulting from the functional and spatial overlapping of different jurisdictions. Decentralized decision making leads to the growth of costly bureaucracies, the duplication of services and the pursuit of conflicting policies. Of course, not all public services require metropolitan-wide organization: some urban problems are of a purely local nature. But for many services – such as water supply, planning, transport, health care, housing and welfare – economies of scale make large areal units with large populations a more efficient and equitable base.

The balkanization of general-purpose government in the United States has also led to the suppression of political conflict between social groups: Social groups can confront each other when they are in the same political arena, but this possibility is reduced when they are separated into different arenas. This subversion of democracy means in turn that community politics tends to be low key, while the politics of the whole metropolitan area are often notable for their absence. The balkanization of the city means that it is difficult to make, or even think about, area-wide decisions for area-wide problems. The result is a parochial politics in which small issues rule the day for want of a political structure that could handle anything larger.

## Fiscal imbalance and sociospatial inequality

One of the most detrimental consequences of metropolitan fragmentation is the fiscal imbalance that leaves central city governments with insufficient funds and resources relative to the demands for the services for which they are responsible. The decentralization of jobs and homes, the inevitable ageing of inner-city environments and the concentration of a residuum of elderly and low-income households in inner-city neighbourhoods has led to a narrowing tax base accompanied by rising demands for public services. The ageing, high-density housing typical of inner-city areas, for example, requires high levels of fire protection; high crime rates mean higher policing costs; and high levels of unemployment and ill-health mean high levels of need for welfare services and health-care facilities. As a result of these pressures, many central cities in the United States



have experienced a *fiscal squeeze* of the type that led to the near-bankruptcy of New York City in 1975 (and again in the early 1990s). Some have suggested that such problems are aggravated by additional demands for public services in central city areas that stem from suburbanites working or shopping there. This is the so-called **suburban exploitation thesis**. There is no question that the presence of suburban commuters and shoppers precipitates higher expenditures on roads, parking space, public utilities, policing and so on; on the other hand, it is equally clear that the patronage of downtown businesses by suburbanites enhances the central city tax base while their own suburban governments have to bear the cost of educating their children. The extent to which these costs and benefits may balance out has never been conclusively demonstrated.

A more compelling argument has interpreted fiscal squeeze as a product of the nature of economic change. In this interpretation, it has been the growth of new kinds of *private* economic activity that has imposed high costs on the *public* sector. In general, the growth of new kinds of urban economic activity has been expensive because it has failed to provide employment and income for central city residents. The new office economy drew on the better-educated, better-heeled, suburban workforce. At the same time, the rising office economy of the central city has made demands on the public sector for infrastructure expenditures that were not self-financing: mass transit, parking, urban renewal and the more traditional forms of infrastructure.

These infrastructural investments were insulated from conflict through the exploitation of new forms of administration and financing: autonomous special districts, banker committees, and new forms of revenue and tax increment bonding. As a result there emerged two worlds of local expenditure: one oriented to providing services and public employment for the city's residents, the other to constructing the infrastructure necessary to profitable private development.

### Fiscal mercantilism

In a classic economic interpretation of urban public economies, Tiebout, noting the different 'bundles' of public goods provided by different metropolitan jurisdictions, suggested that households will tend to sort

themselves naturally along municipal lines according to their ability to pay for them (Tiebout, 1956). It is now increasingly recognized, however, that a good deal of sociospatial sorting is deliberately engineered by local governments. This unfortunate aspect of metropolitan political fragmentation arises from the competition between neighbouring governments seeking to increase revenue by attracting lucrative taxable land users. The phenomenon has been called **fiscal mercantilism**. Its outcome has important implications for residential segregation as well as the geography of public service provision.

In a fiscal context, desirable households include those owning large amount of taxable capital (in the form of housing) relative to the size of the household and the extent of its need for public services. Low-income households are seen as imposing a fiscal burden, since they not only possess relatively little taxable capital but also tend to be in greatest need of public services. Moreover, their presence in an area inevitably lowers the social status of the community, thus making it less attractive to high-income households. In competing for desirable residents, therefore, jurisdictions must offer low tax rates while providing good schools and high levels of public safety and environmental quality, and pursuing policies that somehow keep out the socially and fiscally undesirable.

The most widespread strategy in the United States involves the manipulation of land use **zoning** powers, which can be employed to exclude the fiscally undesirable in several ways. Perhaps the most common is 'large lot zoning', whereby land within a jurisdiction is set aside for housing standing on individual plots of a minimum size – usually at least half an acre (0.2 ha) – which precludes all but the more expensive housing developments and so keeps out the fiscally and socially undesirable. It is not at all uncommon, in fact, for American suburban subdivisions to be zoned for occupation at not more than one acre per dwelling. Other exclusionary tactics include zoning out apartments, the imposition of moratoria on sewage hook-ups, and the introduction of building codes calling for expensive construction techniques.

The existence of large tracts of undeveloped land within a jurisdiction represents a major asset, since it can be zoned to keep out the poor and attract either affluent



households or fiscally lucrative commercial activities such as offices and shopping centres. Inner metropolitan jurisdictions, lacking developable land, have to turn to other, more expensive strategies in order to enhance their tax base. These include the encouragement of gentrification and/or urban redevelopment projects designed to replace low-yielding slum dwellings with high-yielding office developments – both of which also have the effect of displacing low-income families to other parts of the city, often to other jurisdictions. The end result is that central city populations are left the

privilege of voting to impose disproportionate costs of social maintenance and control upon themselves.

The conflicts over resources that are embodied in the issues surrounding metropolitan fragmentation, fiscal imbalance and fiscal mercantilism are at once the cause and the effect of significant interjurisdictional disparities in public service provision. Here, then, we see another facet of the sociospatial dialectic: spatial inequalities that stem from legal and institutional frameworks and sociopolitical processes, inequalities that in turn are constitutive of the relations of power and status.

### Box 5.3

#### Key debates in urban social geography – the significance of New Orleans and Hurricane Katrina

If you type 'Hurricane Katrina' into a search engine you will soon accumulate a huge amount of data about this 'natural' disaster that devastated the historic city of New Orleans – one of the worst disasters in US history, both in terms of total cost and lives lost. However, it is important to get beyond this mass of detail (together with some of the simplistic conspiracy theories) and question what this event says about US society and its urban policy in particular. It is also important to remember that press and media coverage of such dramatic events (including rioting – see Box 13.4) often portrays them in ways that are exaggerated and confined to certain narratives. For example, reporting of natural disasters tends to follow what has been termed the 'Hollywood Model' (Couch, 2000). In this narrative people are revealed to be at root violent and egotistical but a hero usually emerges to prevent the descent into anarchy.

The basic details of Hurricane Katrina are well known but no less shocking for all their familiarity. About 1500 people lost their lives in an event that, unlike earthquakes or volcanic eruptions, was fairly predictable. Further-

more, the wealthiest nation on earth could have easily mitigated the effects of a hurricane by undertaking engineering works to prevent flooding. There were a string of articles published before 29 August 2005 highlighting the fact that New Orleans was a 'disaster waiting to happen'. Little wonder then that the much-publicized failings of the Federal Emergency Management Agency led to it becoming known locally as 'Fix Everything My Ass'.

Two weeks after the disaster President George W. Bush proclaimed that, 'this great city will rise again' but the media spotlight eventually moved on and redevelopment plans have been scaled down. On 7 September 2005, while he was an Illinois senator, Barack Obama claimed, 'the people of New Orleans weren't just abandoned during the hurricane, they were abandoned long ago'.

It is difficult to escape the conclusion that the whole sorry episode is a testament to the enduring nature of both class and racial divides in the United States. The areas that were most severely flooded were the low-lying districts south of Lake Pontchartrain inhabited predominantly by poor African-

Americans, and it was these citizens who experienced the bulk of the casualties. The majority living there lacked automobiles to escape quickly from the city or incomes to afford evacuation to hotels. Furthermore, it is the black neighbourhoods that are still largely devastated as redevelopment plans have so far focused on more affluent white areas. The poorest areas have the lowest recovery rates because grants based on pre-storm market valuations have been insufficient for rebuilding and many of these areas now have less than 50 per cent occupation. Hence the population of New Orleans is today, at just over 300 000, roughly two-thirds of what it was, and it is predominately African-Americans who may never return. Those that do return have experienced high rates of allergies, depression and suicide.

However, social change is never one sided or universally bleak; indeed, there are some signs of social revival. Appalled by Mayor Ray Nagin's reliance on market mechanisms for revival, citizens in New Orleans have engaged in increased volunteering and community mobilization to take rebuilding into their own hands (aided by



continued

faith-driven volunteers from outside the city). Ultimately the scale of the problems requires government action and it may be that Katrina, together with the credit crunch, prompts a rethink about three decades of neo-liberalism in US cities.

#### Key concepts related to New Orleans and Hurricane Katrina (see Glossary)

Neoliberalism, race-preference hypothesis, *revanchist* city, segregation, social closure.

#### Further reading

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Eckstein, B. (2005) *Sustaining New Orleans: Literature, local memory and the fate of a city* Routledge, London

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Sothor, B. (2007) *Down in New Orleans: Reflections on a disaster* University of California Press, Berkeley, CA

McNulty, I. (2008) *A Season of Night: New Orleans life after Katrina* University Press of Mississippi, Jackson, MI

<http://understandingkatrina.ssrc.org>

#### Links with other chapters

Chapter 13: Box 3: The French riots of 2005

## 5.3 The democratic base and its spatial framework

In all Western cities, the political framework is structured around the democratic idea of power resting, ultimately, with an electorate in which all citizens have equal status. A distinctive feature of urban politics in practice, however, is the low turn-out of voters at election time. Seldom do more than 50 per cent of the registered voters go to the polls in municipal elections: the more likely figure is 30 per cent, and it is not uncommon for the vote to drop to less than 25 per cent of the electorate. Moreover, although data on voting behaviour at municipal elections is rather fragmentary, it seems probable that about one-fifth of the electorate never vote at all. This passivity can be attributed to two very different perspectives on life. On the one hand there are those who feel that their interests are well served by the existing power structure and who therefore do not feel the need to act; and on the other there are those who feel that their interests are consistently

neglected or sacrificed by government but who feel they can do little about it.

Such passivity is clearly undesirable from the standpoint of civic vitality. But even more serious is the consequent lack of sensitivity of the political system to the interests of all sectors of society, since non-voters are by no means distributed randomly throughout the population. People living in rented accommodation tend to vote less than home owners; women tend to vote less than men; young people and retired people are less likely to go to the polls than are people in intervening age groups; people with lower incomes and lower educational qualifications tend to vote less than the rich and the well educated; and recent in-migrants are less inclined to vote than long-term residents. This represents another important facet of the sociospatial dialectic. It amounts to a distortion of the democratic base that inevitably leads to a bias in the political complexion of elected representatives; and, given the overall composition of voters compared with non-voters, it is logical to expect that this bias will find expression in municipal policies that are conservative rather than liberal.



## The spatial organization of elections

At the same time, the *spatial organization* of the electoral process is itself also a source and an outcome of conflict. Electoral results, in other words, can be influenced by the size and shape of electoral districts in relation to the distribution of the electorate. Evaluating the effects of geopolitical organization on urban affairs in this context is not easy, since systems of electoral representation and their associated spatial frameworks can be very complex. This complexity is compounded by the existence, in most countries, of a hierarchy of governments responsible for a variety of different functions. A further complicating factor is the electoral system itself which, for any given set of constituencies may operate on the basis of: (1) a single-member plurality system; (2) a multimember plurality system; (3) a weighted plurality system; (4) preferential voting in single-member constituencies; (5) preferential voting in multimember constituencies; or (6) a list system in multimember constituencies. It is not possible to do justice here to the potential effect of each of these systems on the sociospatial dialectic. Rather, attention is directed towards two of the more widespread ways in which the spatial organization of electoral districts has been engineered in favour of particular communities, social groups and political parties: malapportionment and gerrymandering.

### Malapportionment and gerrymandering

Malapportionment refers to the unequal population sizes of electoral subdivisions. Quite simply, the electorate in smaller constituencies will be overrepresented in most electoral systems, while voters in larger-than-average constituencies will be underrepresented. Deliberate malapportionment involves creating larger-than-average constituencies in the areas where opposing groups have an electoral majority. In the United States, malapportionment of congressional, state senatorial and state assembly districts was ended by the Supreme Court in a series of decisions between 1962 and 1965 that began the so-called 'reapportionment revolution'. But malapportionment continues to exist at the city council level, and deviations in constituency size as large as

30 per cent are not unusual. Deviations of this magnitude also exist at the intrametropolitan level in Britain, effectively disenfranchising large numbers of citizens. If, as is often the case, the malapportioned group involves the inner-city poor, the problem assumes an even more serious nature. Policies such as rent control and garbage collection, and questions such as the location of noxious facilities or the imposition of a commuter tax will be decided in favour of the outer city.

Gerrymandering occurs where a specific group or political party gains an electoral advantage through the spatial configuration of constituency boundaries – by drawing irregular-shaped boundaries so as to encompass known pockets of support and exclude opposition supporters, for example; or by drawing boundaries that cut through areas of opposition supporters, leaving them in a minority in each constituency. Not all gerrymanders are deliberate, however: some groups may suffer as a result of any system of spatial partitioning because of their geographical concentration or dispersal. Gerrymandering by a party for its own ends is usually termed 'partisan gerrymandering' and it occurs most frequently where – as in the United States – the power to redraw constituency boundaries lies in the hands of incumbent political parties.

## The spatiality of key actors in urban governance: elected officials and city bureaucrats

The formal democracy of urban affairs is also subject to imperfections in the behaviour of the elected holders of political office. Although city councillors are ostensibly representative of their local communities, there are several reasons for doubting their effectiveness in pursuing their constituents' interests within the corridors of power. Apart from anything else, councillors are by no means representative in the sense that their personal attributes, characteristics and attitudes reflect those of the electorate at large. Even in large cities the number of people who engage actively in local politics is small and they tend to form a community of interest of their own. Moreover, those who end up as councillors tend to be markedly more middle class and older than the electorate as a whole, and a large majority are men.



It is in any case doubtful whether many councillors are able – or, indeed, willing – to act in the best interests of their constituents. Councillors with party political affiliations, for example, may often find that official party policy conflicts with constituency feelings. Alternatively, some councillors' behaviour may be influenced by the urge for personal gain or political glory.

Another doubt about the effectiveness of councillors as local representatives stems from the conflicting demands of public office. In particular, it is evident that many councillors soon come to view their public role mainly in terms of responsibility for the city as a whole or in terms of their duties as committee members rather than as a voice for specific communities. It is therefore not surprising to find that empirical evidence suggests that there is a marked discrepancy between the priorities and preoccupations of local electorates and those of their representatives. At least part of this gap between councillors' perceptions and those of their constituents must be attributable to the dearth of mutual contact. When there is contact between local councillors and their constituents it tends to take place in the rather uneasy atmosphere of councillors' advice bureaux and clinics, where discussion is focused almost exclusively on personal grievances of one sort or another – usually connected with housing.

### Bureaucracy and sociospatial (re)production

In theory, the expert professional is 'on tap' but not 'on top', but there are many who believe, like Max Weber, that the sheer complexity of governmental procedure has brought about a 'dictatorship of the official' (Weber, 1947). The influence of professional personnel can be so great and the decision rules by which they operate so complex as to effectively remove the allocation of most public services from the control of even the strongest political power groups. The crucial point here is that the objectives and motivations of professional officers are not always coincident with the best interests of the public nor in accordance with the views of their elected representatives. Although it would be unfair to suggest that bureaucrats do not have the 'public interest' at heart, it is clear that *they are all subject to distinctive professional ideologies and conventions*; and their success in conforming to these may be more valuable to them

in career terms than how they accomplish their tasks as defined by their clientele.

There are several techniques that bureaucrats are able to use in getting their own way. Among the more widely recognized are: (1) 'swamping' councillors with a large number of long reports; (2) 'blinding councillors with science' – mainly by writing reports that are full of technicalities and statistics; (3) presenting reports that make only one conclusion possible; (4) withholding information or bringing it forward too late to affect decisions; (5) rewriting but not changing a rejected plan, and submitting it after a decent interval; and (6) introducing deliberate errors in the first few paragraphs of a report in the hope that councillors will be so pleased at finding them that they let the rest go through.

But there is by no means common agreement as to the degree of autonomy enjoyed by professional officers. There are broad economic and social forces that are completely beyond the control of any bureaucrat, as well as strong constraints on their activities which derive from central government directives. In addition, it can be argued that the highest stakes in urban politics are won and lost in the budgetary process, to which few professional officers are privy. Thus, having set the 'rules of the game', politicians 'can leave the calling of the plays to the bureaucratic referees'.

### The parapolitical structure

Bureaucrats as well as politicians may in turn be influenced by elements of what has been called the **parapolitical structure** – informal groups that serve as mediating agencies between the individual household and the machinery of institutional politics. These include business organizations, trade unions and voluntary groups of all kinds, such as tenants' associations and conservation societies. Although relatively few such organizations are explicitly political in nature, many of them are *politicized* inasmuch as they occasionally pursue group activities through the medium of government.

Indeed, there is a school of thought among political scientists which argues that, in American cities at least, private groups are highly influential in raising and defining issues for public debate. According to this school of thought, politicians and officials tend to back off until it is clear what the alignment of groups on



any particular issue will be and whether any official decision making will be required. In essence, this gives urban government the role of umpiring the struggle among private and partial interests, leaving these outsiders to decide the outcome of major issues in all but a formal sense.

### Business

Business leaders and business organizations have of course long been active in urban affairs. One of the more active and influential business organizations in most towns is the Chamber of Commerce, but it is by no means the only vehicle for private business interests. Business itself typically engages in **coalition building**. Business executives take a leading part in forming and guiding a number of civic organizations, they often play a major role in fund raising for cultural and charitable activities, and they hold many of the board positions of educational, medical and religious institutions. Because of its contribution to the city's economic health in the form of employment and tax revenues, the business community is in an extremely strong bargaining position and, as a result, its interests are often not so much directly expressed as *anticipated* by politicians and senior bureaucrats, many of whom seek the prestige, legitimacy and patronage that the business elite is able to confer.

The basic reason for business organizations' interest in urban affairs is clearly related to their desire to influence the allocation of public resources in favour of their localized investments. In general, the most influential nexus of interests is often the 'downtown business elite': directors of real estate companies, department stores and banks, together with retail merchants and the owners and directors of local newspapers who rely heavily on central city business fortunes for the maintenance of their advertising revenue.

The policies for which this group lobbies are those that can be expected to sustain and increase the commercial vitality of the central city. Given the widespread trend towards the decentralization of jobs and residences, one of their chief objectives has been to increase the accessibility and attractiveness of the CBD as a place in which to work and shop, and this has led business interests to support urban motorway programmes, improvements to public transport systems, urban renewal schemes

and the construction of major amenities (such as convention centres and theatres) from public funds.

### Labour

Organized labour, in the form of trade unions, represents the obvious counterbalance to the influence of the business elite in urban affairs. But, while organized labour is a major component of the parapolitical structure at the national level, it has traditionally exercised little influence in urban affairs. It is true that union representation on civic organizations has been widespread, and many union officials have been actively engaged in local party political activities; but organized labour in general has been unwilling to use its *power* (the withdrawal of labour) over issues that are not directly related to members' wages and conditions. In Britain, Trade Councils have provided a more community-based forum for trade unionists and have taken a direct interest in housing and broader social problems, but they are concerned primarily with bread-and-butter industrial issues rather than those related to the size and allocation of the 'social wage'.

The point is that organized labour in most countries (France and Italy being the important exceptions) is essentially and inherently reformist. Occasionally, however, union activity does have direct repercussions on the urban environment. In Australia, for example, the Builders' Labourers Federation has organized 'Green Bans' that have held up development projects on the grounds that they were environmentally undesirable; construction unions in the United States have resisted changes to building regulations that threatened to reduce the job potential of their members; and the pressures of local government fiscal retrenchment have drawn public employee unions directly into the local political arena.

### Citizen organizations and special interest groups

It is commonly claimed in the literature of political sociology that voluntary associations are an essential component of the democratic infrastructure, helping to articulate and direct the feelings of individuals into the relevant government channel. But relatively little is actually known about the number of citizen



organizations of different kinds in cities, whose interests they represent, and how many of them are ever politically active. There have been numerous case studies of pressure group activity over controversial issues such as urban renewal, transportation and school organization, but these represent only the tip of the pressure group iceberg, leaving the remaining nine-tenths unexplored. This other nine-tenths encompasses a vast

range of organizations, including work-based clubs and associations, church clubs, welfare organizations, community groups such as tenants' associations and parents' associations, sports clubs, social clubs, cause-oriented groups such as Shelter, Help the Aged and the Child Poverty Action Group, groups that emerge over particular local issues, as well as political organizations per se.

## Box 5.4

### Key trends in urban social geography – the resurgence of Barcelona

One of the most celebrated examples of *urban entrepreneurialism* (see also Box 5.2) is the case of Barcelona, a city in the Catalan region of north-east Spain. In the 1970s Barcelona was a decaying, dirty, traffic-congested port, yet within a few decades it had become a prime example of economic growth based around cultural regeneration.

Under the leadership of mayor Pasqual Maragall, a coalition of liberal middle classes and working-class immigrants has enabled Catalan identity and regional autonomy to find expression in a redeveloped and cosmopolitan city. Not least important in encouraging the renaissance was the hosting of the Olympic Games in 1992. This brought enormous publicity for the city and encouraged considerable inward investment from the private sector. Just as Glasgow has exploited the architectural heritage left by Mackintosh, so Barcelona has made the most of the remarkable buildings created by the unique and enigmatic architect Gaudi. These have been supplemented by a staggering array of new architectural forms catering for museums, art galleries, leisure centres and offices.

However, as in other resurgent cities, the regeneration of Barcelona has not been without social costs. Many

poorer groups have been dislocated following the gentrification of inner-city districts. In addition, the famous tree-lined boulevard popularly known as La Rambla has become so popular that crowds of tourists have begun to undermine the charms of strolling past the shops, bars and cafés (McNeill, 2004a). Finally, Port Vell, part of the gentrified waterfront, has ceased to be a venue sought out by the affluent. Instead, a mixture of young adult tourists, immigrant groups and working-class citizens has led to social tensions, sometimes resulting in crime and violence. Things came to a head following the drowning of an Ecuadorian immigrant who was beaten by door staff after his ejection from a prominent nightclub (Chatterton and Hollands, 2003). City authorities have subsequently developed plans to restrict alcohol consumption and promote greater social diversity and family-oriented activities.

In recent years the credit crunch has led many to question the merits of urban regeneration using the 'Barcelona Model'. The reversal of rapidly increasing property values in Spain has led to the bankruptcy of many Spanish building firms and the abandonment of architecturally cutting-edge developments in the city, notably Richard Rogers' design to transform the Las Arenas bullring. Norman

Foster's development of Barcelona's football club stadium and Frank Gehry's plans for dramatic new high-rise office blocks.

#### Key concepts associated with Barcelona (see Glossary)

Civic boosterism, gentrification, growth coalitions, property-led development, regime theory, spectacle, urban entrepreneurialism.

#### Further reading

- Chatterton, P. and Hollands, R. (2003) *Urban Nightscapes: Youth cultures, pleasure spaces and power* Routledge, London
- Marshall, T. (ed.) (2005) *Transforming Barcelona* Routledge, London
- McNeill, D. (2004a) Barcelona as imagined community: Pasqual Maragall's spaces of engagement, *Transactions, Institute of British Geographers* 26, 340–52
- McNeill, D. (2004c) *New Europe: Imagined spaces* Arnold, London

#### Links with other chapters

- Chapter 10: Box 10.4 The development of 'urban nightscapes'
- Chapter 11: Box 11.3 The resurgence of Dublin



Given the nature of local government decision making, many of these are able to influence policy and resource allocation on the 'squeaky wheel' principle. This need not necessarily involve vociferous and demonstrative campaigns. The Los Angeles system of landscaped parkways, for example, is widely recognized as the result of steady lobbying by *Sunset* magazine, the official organ of obsessive gardening and planting in southern California. But not all organizations are politically active in any sense of the word. Their passivity is of course a reflection of the passivity of the community at large. It should not be confused with neutrality, however, since passivity is effectively conservative, serving to reinforce the status quo of urban affairs.

### Homeowners' associations: private governments

In contrast to this passivity, affluent homeowners have come to represent an increasingly important element within the parapolitical structure. This has been achieved through homeowners' associations (also known as residential community associations and property owners' associations). Legally, these are simply private organizations that are established to regulate or manage a residential subdivision or condominium development. In practice, they constitute a form of private government whose rules, financial practices and other decisions can be a powerful force within the sociospatial dialectic. Through boards of directors elected by a group of homeowners, they levy taxes (through assessments), control and regulate the physical environment (through covenants, controls and restrictions (CCRs) attached to each home's deed), enact development controls, maintain commonly owned amenities (such as meeting rooms, exercise centres, squash courts and picnic areas) and organize service delivery (such as garbage collection, water and sewerage services, street maintenance, snow removal and neighbourhood security).

The earliest homeowners' associations, from the first examples in the 1920s to the point in the mid-1960s when a new wave of suburbanization provided the platform for the proliferation of a new breed of associations, were chiefly directed towards exclusionary segregation. They were overwhelmingly concerned with the establishment of racially and economically homogeneous residential enclaves based on the single-family home.

Their activities involved crude and straightforward legal-spatial tactics. At first, the most popular instrument was the *racially restrictive covenant*. This was a response to the Supreme Court's judgment against segregation ordinances enacted by public municipalities (*Buchanan v. Warley*, 1917); it was, in turn, outlawed by a Supreme Court case (*Shelley v. Kraemer*, 1948). Later, they turned to campaigns for *incorporation* that would enable them, in their metamorphosis to a public government, to deploy 'fiscal zoning' (e.g. limiting the construction of multifamily dwellings, raising the minimum lot size of new housing) as a means of enhancing residential exclusivity.

The explosive growth of homeowners' associations in recent years has been driven by the logic of the real estate industry, which saw mandatory membership in pre-established homeowners' associations as the best way to ensure that ever-larger and more elaborately packaged subdivisions and residential complexes would maintain their character until 'build-out' and beyond. Initially concerned chiefly with the preservation of the aesthetics and overall design vision of 'high-end' developments, these common-interest associations soon moved to defend their residential niches against unwanted development (such as industry, apartments and offices) and then, as environmental quality became an increasingly important social value, against any kind of development. Complaining about encroachment and undesirable development, they represent the vanguard of the NIMBY movement (see also Box 5.1).

The private nature of these associations means that they are an unusually 'stealthy' element of the parapolitical structure. In most of the developed industrial nations, homeowners' associations have proliferated, but their numbers and activities remain largely undocumented. In the United States, where the phenomenon is most pronounced, homeowners' associations range in size and composition from a few homes on a single city street to thousands of homes and condominiums covering hundreds of acres. Altogether, it is estimated that there are over 86 000 homeowners' associations in the United States (compared with fewer than 500 in the early 1960s and around 20 000 in the mid-1970s), together covering more than 20 per cent of the nation's households and 57 million people. Four out of five US homes built since 2000 have been in homeowner



association-governed subdivisions, and at least half of all housing currently on the market in the 50 largest metropolitan areas and nearly all new residential development in California, Florida, New York, Texas and suburban Washington, DC, is subject to mandatory governance by a homeowners' association.

The key element of these private governments in US law is a 'servitude regime': the covenants, controls and restrictions that circumscribe people's behaviour and their ability to modify their homes and gardens. They are typically drafted by developers to preserve landscaping and maintain the integrity of urban design but also to control the details of residents' homes and their personal comportment (in order to protect property values). Developers thus become benevolent dictators, imposing a bourgeois cultural framework on new subdivisions. Servitude regimes are *implemented*, however, by homeowner associations, membership of which is mandatory for every homeowner in the development.

For consumers, these servitude regimes offer a means of narrowing uncertainty, protecting home equity values and, above all, establishing the physical framework for the material consumption that constitutes their lifestyle. Little is left to chance, with CCRs detailing what is and what is not allowed in terms of garden fences, decking, hot tubs and clotheslines, the colour of doors and mailboxes, and so on. Most ban all signs except for real estate placards, and restrict what kind of vehicles can be parked outside, even in driveways; some even prescribe how long garage doors can be left open, the type of furniture that can be seen through front windows, the colour of Christmas tree lights and the maximum length of stay for guests. Most limit the number and types of pets that residents may keep, as well as the kinds of activities that are allowed in gardens, driveways, streets and public spaces, and whether any sort of business can be conducted from the home. Servitude regimes are often cited as being at odds with American ideals of individual freedom. As McKenzie (1994) puts it: 'No more pink flamingos.'

In terms of community governance, suburban developments with homeowner associations have been characterized as fragmented 'privatopias', in which 'the dominant ideology is privatism; where contract law is the supreme authority; where property rights and property values are the focus of community life;

and where homogeneity, exclusiveness, and exclusion are the foundation of social organization' (McKenzie, 1994, p. 1). Privatopias are premium spaces designed to accommodate the secession of the successful in enclaves that are legally sequestered by carefully devised servitude regimes. They are culturally hermetic spaces, 'purified arenas of social reproduction, dominated by material consumption and social segregation. Administered as common-interest communities by homeowner associations, private master-planned communities have an internal politics characterized by unprecedented issues of control, democracy, citizenship and conflict resolution.

The trend toward privatized government and neighbourhoods is part of the more general trend of splintering urbanism in contemporary cities. The resulting loss of connection and social contact is further undermining the idea of civil society, leading to 'civic secession':

Almost imperceptibly, the societal idea of what it means to be a resident of a community seems to have changed; it is more common now to speak of taxpayers than of citizens . . . In gated communities and other privatized enclaves, the local community that many residents identify with is the one within the gates. Their homeowner association dues are like taxes; and their responsibility to their community, such as it is, ends at that gate . . . One city official in Plano, Texas, summed up his view of the attitude of the gated community residents in his town: 'I took care of my responsibility, I'm safe in here, I've got my guard gate; I've paid my [homeowner association] dues, and I'm responsible for my streets. Therefore, I have no responsibility for the commonweal, because you take care of your own.'

(Blakely and Snyder, 1999, pp. 139–40)

Setha Low (2003) suggests that common-interest communities, with weak social ties and diffuse interpersonal associations among homogeneous populations, promote a kind of 'moral minimalism' – a reluctance to get personally involved in any kind of political dispute. Only when residents can be assured that someone else will bear the burden of moral authority, enabling them to remain anonymous and uninvolved, are they likely to participate in any kind of overt exercise of social control.



## Box 5.5

## Key thinkers in urban social geography – Mike Davis

A writer who has had a big influence on urban social geography in recent years and our view of one city in particular – Los Angeles – is Mike Davis. In a similar vein to David Harvey (see Box 1.1), Davis's approach is staunchly in the Marxian tradition, and underpinning the diversity of urban forms in Los Angeles he sees evidence of a continuing class struggle. However, in contrast to Harvey's somewhat abstract economic theorizing, Davis's writings are full of empirical details about Los Angeles, in particular the rapacious behaviour of developers, the bigoted conservatism of suburban homeowners and the struggles of exploited Latino and African-American workers.

The popularity and influence of Davis's work has been enhanced by a highly accessible, almost 'journalistic' style. Not that Davis's work is a pleasant read: he presents a rather doom-laden view of Los Angeles that has led some to label him a latter-day Jeremiah (McNeill, 2004b; Merrifield, 2002). Nevertheless, the dystopian vision outlined in Davis's book *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles*

(1990) seemed to chime with the mood of the times, as manifest in the subsequent urban riots in Los Angeles in 1992.

In his follow-up volume *Ecology of Fear: Los Angeles and the Imagination of Disaster* (1998) Davis played much greater attention to issues of nature than previous urban scholars. He portrayed Los Angeles as a city in a overstretched ecosystem at the mercy of various catastrophes of earthquake, fire and drought. In this book Davis also outlined the impact of growing crime, drug trafficking and violence through measures such as increased surveillance, private armies and gated communities.

Contrary to his reputation for gloomy prognostications on urban development, his third major book, *Magical Urbanism: Latinos reinvent the American city* (2000) is a celebration of the diversity and vitality brought to US inner cities by new Latino communities. However, his more recent book *Planet of Slums* (2006) represents a return to apocalyptic form (see Angotti, 2006).

## Key concepts associated with Mike Davis (see Glossary)

Bunker architecture, Los Angeles School, 'scanscape'.

## Further reading

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## Links with other chapters

Chapter 2: Neo-Fordism

Chapter 8: Box 8.1 The Latinization of US cities

Chapter 14: Los Angeles and the California School

## Urban social movements

The impact of affluent homeowner groups raises the question of whether it is possible for disadvantaged groups to sidestep the traditional institutions of urban affairs so that they too can somehow achieve greater power. The conventional answer has been negative, but a distinctive new form of urban social movement was precipitated in the 1970s by fiscal stress that in turn led to crises in the provision of various elements of collective consumption. These crises had a serious impact on many of the skilled working classes and the lower-middle and younger middle classes as well

as on disadvantaged and marginalized groups. As a result, concern over access to hospitals, public transport (especially commuter rail links), schools and so on, together with frustration at the growing power of technocratic bureaucracies and disillusionment with the formal institutions of civil society, gave rise to a new kind of urban social movement that was based on a broad alliance of anti-establishment interests.

Nevertheless, urban social movements have generally been sporadic and isolated, and some observers have questioned the initial expectation that community consciousness, activated by issues related to collective consumption, can in fact lead to the kind of class



		Community consciousness	
		low	high
Class consciousness	low	competitive individualism	community-defined movement
	high	class struggle	community-based movement

**Figure 5.1** A typology of political movements.

Source: Fitzgerald (1991), Fig. 1, p. 120.

consciousness that is assumed to be a prerequisite to achieving a degree of power on a more permanent basis. The answer here seems to be contingent: it depends on whether a community can mobilize an awareness of the structural causes of local problems. This caveat is the basis of the typology of political movements shown in Figure 5.1. Two of these categories represent urban social movements. *Community-defined* movements are those that are purely local: issue-oriented movements that are bounded by particular context and circumstance. *Community-based* movements are those that transcend the initial issue, context and circumstance to form the basis of alliances that are able to achieve a broader and more permanent measure of power.

## 5.4 Community power structures and the role of the local state

How are the relationships between these various groups and decision makers structured? Who really runs the community and what difference does it make to the local quality of life? These are questions that have concerned political scientists and urban sociologists for some time and have caught the attention of urban social geographers because of their implications for the sociospatial dialectic. There are two 'classic' types of urban power structure – monolithic and pluralistic – each of which has been identified in a wide range of cities since their 'discovery' by Hunter (1953) and

Dahl (1961) respectively. In his study of 'Regional City' (Atlanta), Hunter found that nearly all decisions were made by a handful of individuals who stood at the top of a stable power hierarchy. These people, drawn largely from business and industrial circles, constituted a strongly entrenched and select group: with their blessing, projects could move ahead, but without their express or tacit consent little of significance was ever accomplished.

In contrast, the classic pluralistic model of community power advanced by Dahl in the light of his analysis of decision making in New Haven, Connecticut, holds that power tends to be dispersed, with different elites dominant at different times over different issues. Thus, if the issue involves public housing, one set of participants will control the outcome; if it involves the construction of a new health centre, a different coalition of leaders will dominate. In Dahl's model, therefore, business elites of the kind Hunter found to be in control of Atlanta are only one among many influential 'power clusters'. Dahl argued that the system as a whole is democratic, drawing on a wide spectrum of the parapolitical structure and ensuring political freedom through the competition of elites for mass loyalty. When the policies and activities of existing power structures depart from the values of the electorate, he suggested, people will be motivated to voice their concerns and a new power cluster will emerge. According to the pluralist model, therefore, we may expect the interplay of views and interests within a city to produce, in the long run, an allocation of resources that satisfies, to a degree, the needs of all interest groups and neighbourhoods: problems such as neighbourhood decay are seen merely as short-term failures of participation in the political process. On the other hand, we might expect monolithic power structures to lead to polarization of well-being, with few concessions to the long-term interests of the controlling elite.

## Regime theory

More recently, it has been suggested that urban politics should be seen not in terms of monolithic versus pluralistic power structures but in terms of the evolution and succession of a series of regimes. Regime theory attempts to examine how various coalitions of interest



come together to achieve outcomes in cities. Frequently these are the interests of 'pro-growth coalitions' put together by political entrepreneurs in order to achieve concrete solutions to particular problems. The crucial point about regime theory is that power does not flow automatically but has to be actively acquired. In the context of economic restructuring and metropolitan change, city officials seek alliances, it is argued, that will enhance their ability to achieve visible policy results.

These alliances between public officials and private actors constitute regimes through which governance rests less on formal authority than on loosely structured arrangements and deal making. With an intensification of economic and social change in the 'postindustrial' city, new sociopolitical cleavages – green, yuppie, populist, neoliberal – have been added to traditional class- and race-based cleavages, so that these regimes have become more complex and, potentially, more volatile. Meanwhile, the scale and extent of economic restructuring has meant that greater competition for economic development investments *between* municipalities has established a new dynamic whereby the intensity of political conflict *within* them is muted. Such considerations require us to take a broader view of urban politics.

### Structuralist interpretations of the political economy of contemporary cities

Many scholars have turned to structuralist theories of political economy in response to the need to relate urban spatial structure to the institutions of urban society. At their most fundamental level, structuralist theories of political economy turn on the contention that all social phenomena are linked to the prevailing mode of production discussed in Chapter 2. This is the material economic base from which everything else – the social superstructure – derives.

In historical terms, the economic base is the product of a dialectical process in which the prevailing ideology, or 'thesis', of successive modes of production is overthrown by contradictory forces (the 'antithesis'), thus bringing about a *transformation* of society to a higher stage of development: from subsistence tribalism through feudalism to capitalism and eventually, as Marx believed, to socialism. The base in Western society

is of course the capitalist mode of production and, like other bases, it is characterized by conflict between opposing social classes inherent in the economic order. The superstructure of capitalism encompasses everything that stems from and relates to this economic order, including tangible features such as the morphology of the city as well as more nebulous phenomena such as legal and political institutions, the ideology of capitalism and the counter-ideology of its antithesis.

As part of this superstructure, one of the major functions of the city is to fulfil the imperatives of capitalism, the most important of which is the *circulation* and *accumulation* of capital. Thus the spatial form of the city, by reducing indirect costs of production and costs of circulation and consumption, speeds up the rotation of capital, leading to its greater accumulation. Another important role of the city, according to structuralist theory, is to provide the conditions necessary for the perpetuation of the economic base. In short, this entails the *social reproduction* of the relationship between labour and capital and, therefore, the stabilization of the associated social structure. One aspect of this is the perpetuation of the economic class relationships through ecological processes, particularly the development of a variety of suburban settings with differential access to different kinds of services, amenities and resources.

The role of government is particularly important in this respect because of its control over the patterns and conditions of provision of schools, housing, shopping, leisure facilities and the whole spectrum of collective consumption. Moreover, it can also be argued that urban neighbourhoods provide distinctive milieux from which individuals derive many of their consumption habits, moral codes, values and expectations. The resulting homogenization of life experiences within different neighbourhoods reinforces the tendency for relatively permanent social groupings to emerge within a relatively permanent structure of residential differentiation.

The division of the proletariat into distinctive, locality-based communities through the process of residential differentiation also serves to fragment class consciousness and solidarity while reinforcing the traditional authority of elite groups, something that is also strengthened by the symbolic power of the built environment. In short, the city is at once an expression of capitalism and a means of its perpetuation. It is here



that we can see the notion of a sociospatial dialectic in its broadest terms.

Meanwhile, it is also recognized that the structure of the city reflects and incorporates many of the *contradictions* in capitalist society, thus leading to local friction and conflict. This is intensified as the city's economic landscape is continually altered in response to the 'creative destruction' of capital's drive towards the accumulation of profits. Residential neighbourhoods are cleared to make way for new office developments; disinvestment in privately rented accommodation leads to the dissolution of inner-city communities; the switch of capital to more profitable investment in private housing leads to an expansion of the suburbs; and so on.

This continual tearing down, re-creation and transformation of spatial arrangements brings about locational conflict in several ways. Big capital comes into conflict with small capital in the form of retailers, property developers and small businesses. Meanwhile, conflict also arises locally between, on the one hand, capitalists (both large and small) and, on the other, those obtaining important use and exchange values from existing spatial arrangements. This includes conflict over the nature and location of new urban development, over urban renewal, road construction, conservation, land use zoning and so on: over the whole spectrum, in fact, of urban affairs.

Underlying most structuralist analyses of the political economy of cities is the additional hypothesis involving the role of the state as a **legitimizing agent**, helping to fulfil the imperatives of capitalism in a number of ways. These include defusing discontent through the pursuit of welfare policies, the provision of a stable and predictable environment for business through the legal and judicial system, and the propagation of an ideology conducive to the operation and maintenance of the economic base through its control and penetration of socializing agencies such as the educational system, the armed forces and the civil service.

We should at this point remind ourselves again of the major criticism of structuralist theory – that it does not give sufficient recognition to the influence of human agency: the actions of individuals are seen in structuralist theory as a direct function of economic and sociopolitical structures. It has been argued, however, that there are elemental and universal human drives

and behavioural responses that give life and structure to the city and that people are capable of generating, independently, important ideas and behaviours. These ideas are the basis of the poststructuralist approaches described in Chapter 1; we will encounter them in subsequent chapters. Nevertheless, the overall contribution of structuralist theory is clearly significant. It provides a clear break with earlier, narrower conceptions of urban sociospatial relationships and a flexible theoretical framework for a wide range of phenomena. As we shall see, it has been deployed in the analysis of a variety of issues.

## The local state and the sociospatial dialectic

Despite the clear importance of local government – even simply in terms of the magnitude of expenditure on public services – there is no properly developed and generally accepted theory of the behaviour and objectives of local government, or the 'local state'. Within the debate on this question, however, three principal positions have emerged:

- 1 that the local state is an adjunct of the national state, with both acting in response to the prevailing balance of class forces within society (the 'structuralist' view);
- 2 that the local state is controlled by officials, and that their goals and values are crucial in determining policy outcomes (the 'managerialist' view);
- 3 that the local state is an instrument of the business elite (the 'instrumentalist' view).

The managerialist view (also termed **managerialism**) has generated widespread interest and support, and it is clear that a focus on the activities and ideologies of professional decision makers can contribute a lot to the understanding of urban sociospatial processes (as we shall see in Chapter 6 in relation to the social production of the built environment). We shall also see, however, that the managerialist approach does not give adequate recognition either to the influence of local elites and pressure groups or to the economic and political constraints stemming from the national level.

Because of such shortcomings, attention has more recently been focused on the structuralist and instrumentalist positions, both of which share certain views



on the role of the local state. These may be summarized in terms of three broad functions:

- 1 facilitating private production and capital accumulation (through, for example, the provision of the urban infrastructure; through planning processes that ease the spatial aspects of economic restructuring; through the provision of technical education; and through 'demand orchestration' which, through public works contracts, etc., brings stability and security to markets);
- 2 facilitating the reproduction of labour power through collective consumption (through, for example, subsidized housing);
- 3 facilitating the maintenance of social order and social cohesion (through, for example, the police, welfare programmes and social services, and 'agencies of legitimation' such as schools and public participation schemes).

Where the structuralist view differs from the instrumentalist view is not so much in the identification of the functions of the state as in the questions of for whom or for what the functions operate, whether they are class biased, and the extent to which they reflect external political forces.

### Regulation theory and urban governance

Some theorists have attempted to reconcile elements of all three models – managerialist, structuralist and instrumentalist. This, in turn, has led to the suggestion that the regulationist approach (introduced in Chapter 2) provides the most appropriate framework for understanding the local state. Regulation theory is based on the concept of successive regimes of accumulation that represent particular organizational forms of capitalism



The Barcelona Model of culturally driven urban regeneration: the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona. Photo Credit: Michael Edema Leary.



(e.g. Fordism), with distinctive patterns and structures of economic organization, income distribution and collective consumption. Each such regime develops an accompanying **mode of regulation** that is a collection of structural forms (political, economic, social, cultural) and institutional arrangements that define the 'rules of the game' for individual and collective behaviour. The mode of regulation thus gives expression to, and serves to reproduce, fundamental social relations. It also serves to guide and to accommodate change within the political economy as a whole. In this context, the local state can be seen as both an object and an agent of regulation, a semi-autonomous institution that is itself regulated so that its strategies and structures can be used to help forge new social, political and economic relations within urban space.

One of the most important regulationist-inspired concepts of recent years is the notion of **governance**. The term is used to indicate the shift away from *direct* government control of the economy and society via hierarchical bureaucracies towards *indirect* government control via diverse non-governmental organizations. The argument is that governance is part of the shift towards a new mode of regulation dictated by the demands of the new neo-Fordist regime of accumulation. As introduced in Chapter 2, this new regime is characterized by continuous innovation to achieve global competitiveness via economies of scope in specialized products. This approach, it is argued, is necessary to compensate for the saturation of mass markets and the inability of states to engage in Keynesian policies of demand management in a deregulated global financial

## Box 5.6

### Key trends in urban social geography – The growth of culturally driven urban regeneration

In the last 25 years over 100 major art galleries have been established in cities throughout the world, and countless scores of other smaller artistic emporia and exhibition centres have also been established. These developments reflect a major planning trend that has become a new orthodoxy throughout much of the Western world as urban authorities attempt to grapple with the consequences of job losses in manufacturing and traditional service centres – culturally driven urban regeneration. This policy has been defined as: 'the encouragement of a high density mix of creative industry production and related consumption activities, often involving the renovation of historical, commercial and manufacturing premises on the edge of city centres' (Porter and Barber, 2007, p. 1327). The policy takes many forms; for example, it may incorporate culture as it is *consumed* (e.g. in art galleries, theatres, concert halls and exhibition

centres) or culture as it is *produced* (e.g. in support for various economic sectors).

Culturally driven urban regeneration reflects the growing importance of the 'cultural industries' such as the performing arts, advertising, design, entertainment, media and publishing. These cultural industries are hard to define precisely, and differ in many of their characteristics, but they have in common the desire to commercialize work of 'expressive value'. These are spheres that enlarge cultural understanding, typically involving aesthetics and symbolic characteristics, and include books, films, plays, adverts, graphic design and video games. Although the cultural industries require highly talented individuals (often known as 'creatives'), there is now widespread recognition that cultural creativity depends upon interactions within complex social networks. Central to the innovation in the cultural

industries is creative 'buzz' – the exchange of complex forms of knowledge that is facilitated by personal communication on a face-to-face basis. Despite the growing importance of the Internet, cities seem to be essential for such creativity as they bring people together in many contexts including firms, institutions, public bodies, labour markets and myriad social settings. Hence we find that the cultural industries are heavily concentrated in major cities, often within distinctive neighbourhood clusters based around older industrial premises (sometimes termed cultural quarters). Some of these quarters such as the Northern Quarter in Manchester have grown by themselves without any deliberate planning but more recently they have deliberately been fostered by planning authorities.

These initiatives reflect, in part, the highly influential ideas of Richard Florida (2004) who argues that central



continued

to local economic development is the attraction of the 'creative class' who are central in the 'new economy'. This class involves scientists and engineers as well as members of the artistic community. Cultural facilities are necessary to attract the creative class by fostering a liberal, tolerant 'people environment' – which Florida argues is today even more essential for economic growth than a favourable local 'business climate'. Although these ideas have become extremely popular in planning circles they involve many flaws and have been subject to considerable critique (Peck, 2005). One major criticism concerns directions of causality; it is questionable whether the presence of a creative class is a cause or a consequence of economic growth. Hence studies show that people do not generally migrate to cities that lack jobs. Others argue that pandering to the needs of the relatively well-off creative class may lead city authorities to ignore the disadvantaged who may not experience

the 'trickle-down' effects of economic growth. An early critic McGuigan (1996, p. 99) argued that such developments only 'articulate the interests and tastes of the postmodern professional and managerial class without solving the problems of a diminishing production base, growing disparities of wealth and opportunity, and the multiple forms of social exclusion'. Of course, some artistic groups are not wealthy and older industrial premises have proved to be attractive to them because of relatively low rents. Paradoxically, formal policies to enhance the quality of cultural quarters may increase rents and undermine the organic processes of growth that led to the evolution of such quarters in the first place.

**Key concepts associated with culturally driven urban regeneration (see Glossary)**

BOBOs, bohemia, creative cities, creative class, cultural industries, cultural

quarters, culturalization of the economy, heritage landscapes.

**Further reading**

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**Links with other chapters**

Chapter 7: Box 7.1 The growth of Bohemian enclaves

system. This requires a new mode of regulation in which the interests of welfare are subordinated to those of business. This in turn has required circumventing many of the traditional democratic institutions such as local government that are perceived to be resistant to the new agenda of welfare reductions, flexibility and private–public partnerships. In addition, governance has been encouraged by the extensive neoliberal critique of the public sector, which sees public bureaucracies as inherently inefficient and self-seeking. Table 5.1 lists some new developments in British local governance following changes in the mode of regulation.

In the welfare sphere, governance has meant a shift towards increasing use of a diverse range of voluntary and charitable bodies. Wolch has argued that this had led to the creation of a shadow state: 'a para state

apparatus with collective service responsibilities previously shouldered by the public sector, administered outside traditional democratic politics, but yet controlled in formal and informal ways' (Wolch, 1989, p. 201). In Los Angeles County Wolch found over 8500 voluntary bodies including both local neighbourhood organizations and large trusts and foundations. The scope of their activities ranged from social welfare to the arts, and their total spending amounted to a staggering 60 per cent of per capita municipal expenditures on public services. In the United Kingdom the shift towards contracting-out of services has meant that many welfare functions are now *funded* by the public sector but *delivered* by private sector organizations. This shift towards a diverse range of service providers is often termed welfare pluralism (see also Chapter 13).



Table 5.1 New developments in British local governance

Sites of regulation	British local governance in Fordism	New developments
Financial regime	Keynesian	Monetarist
Organizational structure of local governance	Centralized service delivery authorities Pre-eminence of formal, elected local government	Wide variety of service providers Multiplicity of agencies of local governance
Management	Hierarchical Centralized Bureaucratic	Devolved 'Flat' hierarchies Performance driven
Local labour markets	Regulated Segmented by skill	Deregulated Dual labour market
Labour process	Technologically undeveloped	Technologically dynamic (information-based)
	Labour intensive Productivity increases difficult	Capital intensive Productivity increases possible
Labour relations	Collectivized National bargaining Regulated	Individualized Local and individual bargaining 'Flexible'
Form of consumption	Universal Collective rights	Targeted Individualized 'contracts'
Nature of services provided	To meet local needs Expandable	To meet statutory obligations Constrained
Ideology	Social democratic	Neoliberal
Key discourse	Technocratic/managerialist	Entrepreneurial/enabling
Political forms	Corporatist	Neocorporatist (labour excluded)
Economic goals	Promotion of full employment Economic modernization based on technical advance and public investment	Promotion of private profit Economic modernization based on low-wage, low-skill, 'flexible' economy
Social goals	Progressive redistribution/social justice	Privatized consumption/active citizenry

Source: After Goodwin and Painter (1996).

## Redefining citizenship

One of the key elements of the reconfiguration of state activities around the new agendas of competitiveness, innovation and flexibility has been the reconstitution of notions of citizenship. This shift reflects the growing influence of continental European intellectual traditions in the sphere of welfare. Unlike the tradition established in the United States and United Kingdom in the nineteenth century (which was rooted in ideas of society as nothing more than a set of separate individuals), the European approach envisages society as a collectivity bound together in a mutual contract by obligations

as well as rights. The notion of citizenship has therefore been expanded beyond the realm of entitlements to benefits to include reciprocal obligations to aim for self-reliance and paid work. This strategy, which is spreading throughout the Western world, is bound up with notions of 'workfare' that are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 13. Cynics would argue that this new version of citizenship is simply a way of saving welfare budgets by coercing unsuitable people into employment. Nevertheless, the new focus on social exclusion recognizes that citizenship involves more than just material factors and also includes senses of belonging and democratic empowerment.



## 5.5 The question of social justice in the city

The issues of citizenship, patriarchy, racism, collective consumption, the law, the state and civil society reviewed in this chapter all raise, in one way or another, the question of social justice in the city. David Harvey, following Engels, recognizes that conceptions of justice vary not only with time and place, but also with the persons concerned (Harvey, 1992). It follows that it is essential to examine the material and moral bases for the production of the lifeworlds from which divergent concepts of social justice emerge. This we shall do in subsequent chapters. Meanwhile, however, it is useful to clarify some basic concepts and principles with respect to social justice: no student of social geography will be able to avoid confrontation with the moral (or theoretical) dilemmas of social justice for long.

There are, as Harvey points out, many competing concepts of social justice. Among them are: the positive law view (that justice is simply a matter of law); the utilitarian view (allowing us to discriminate between good and bad law on the basis of the greatest good of the greatest number); and the natural rights view (that no amount of greater good for a greater number can justify the violation of certain inalienable rights). Making clear sense of these concepts and understanding the 'moral geographies' of postindustrial cities and postmodern societies (which contain fragmented sociocultural groups and a variety of social movements, all eager to articulate their own definitions of social justice) is a task that even Harvey finds challenging. Having wrestled with the fundamental issues ever since writing the immensely influential volume on *Social Justice and the City*, published in 1973, Harvey avoids the fruitless task of reconciling competing claims to conceptions of social justice in different contexts. Rather, he follows Iris Young (1990) in focusing on sources of *oppression*, from which he

draws six propositions in relation to just planning and policy practices:

- 1 They must confront directly the problem of creating forms of social and political organization and systems of production and consumption that minimize the exploitation of labour power both in the workplace and the living place.
- 2 They must confront the phenomenon of marginalization in a non-paternalistic mode and find ways to organize and militate within the politics of marginalization in such a way as to liberate captive groups from this distinctive form of oppression.
- 3 They must empower rather than deprive the oppressed of access to political power and the ability to engage in self-expression.
- 4 They must be sensitive to issues of cultural imperialism and seek, by a variety of means, to eliminate the imperialist attitude both in the design of urban projects and modes of popular consultation.
- 5 They must seek out non-exclusionary and non-militarized forms of social control to contain the increasing levels of institutionalized violence without destroying capacities for empowerment and self-expression.
- 6 They must recognize that the necessary ecological consequences of all social projects have impacts on future generations as well as upon distant peoples, and take steps to ensure a reasonable mitigation of negative impacts.

As Harvey recognizes, this still leaves a great deal for us to struggle with in interpreting the moral geographies of contemporary cities. Real-world geographies demand that we consider all six dimensions of social justice rather than applying them in isolation from one another; and this means developing some sense of consensus over priorities and acquiring some rationality in dealing with place- and context-specific oppression.



## Box 5.7

### Key films related to urban social geography – Chapter 5

*Chinatown* (1974) A retro detective story of the *film noir* genre. Although a fictionalized account of the expansion of Los Angeles (see Chapter 14) many argue that this film captures the essence of local politics in the United States. Another on the 'must-see' list for those interested in relationships between cinema and the city.

*Devil in a Blue Dress* (1995) Another detective story in a genre that has been termed the 'New Black Realism'. Deals with issues of race, identity and

power but in a subtle way in an exciting story.

*The Phenix City Story* (1955) A semi-documentary, low-budget film dealing with political corruption in a city in Alabama.

*Sunshine State* (2002) A film by John Sayles dealing with issues that cross many chapters in *Urban Social Geography*: politics, racism and neighbourhood change. Deals with the pressures on an older black neighbourhood in coastal Florida under threat from

developers. Full of interesting and complex characters.

*When the Levees Broke: A Requiem in Four Acts* (2006) A documentary movie by celebrated director Spike Lee focusing on the devastation wrought on New Orleans by Hurricane Katrina. Shows that this was not just an 'act of nature' but a consequence of governmental neglect at federal and local levels both before and after the disaster.

## Chapter summary

- 5.1 The processes at work in cities have both shaped, and been shaped by, institutional frameworks. The law is a crucial link between the public and private spheres of city life. The changing economic base of urban areas has important implications for city life.
- 5.2 The fragmentation of cities into multiple political and administrative jurisdictions is justified in the interests of local democracy but often leads to considerable inequalities in resource allocation.
- 5.3 The functioning of local democracy is influenced by electoral frameworks, elected officials and city bureaucrats as well as the parapolitical structure of informal groups focused around residents, organized labour and various business interests.
- 5.4 Who has most power to effectively control cities is a question that has produced numerous theories principally: the pluralist, managerialist, instrumentalist and structuralist interpretations. Regulation theory is seen by some as a way of overcoming the limitations of these previous theories.
- 5.5 The functioning of institutional frameworks in mediating the activities of citizens and the state raises crucial issues of social and territorial justice.



## Key concepts and terms



accumulation	laissez-faire	racism
agency	legitimizing agent	regime of accumulation
Balkanization	local state	regime theory
citizenship	malapportionment	regulation theory
civic entrepreneurialism	managerialism	sexism
civil society	metropolitan fragmentation	shadow state
coalition building	mode of regulation	social movements
collective consumption	municipal socialism	social reproduction
decision rules	NIMBY	subsidiarity
<i>de jure</i> territories	parapolitical structure	suburban exploitation thesis
fiscal imbalance	paternalism	superstructure
fiscal mercantilism	pluralistic model	sustainability
gerrymandering	pro-growth coalitions	voluntarism
governance	property-led development	welfare pluralism
jurisdictional partitioning	public sphere	zoning

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