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2

Towards a Political Urban Sociology

Mannuel Castells

1. New Trends in Urban Sociology*

We start with a paradox: while urban problems are increasingly regarded as priorities in political programs and in the daily lives of people, urban sociology seems more and more incapable of providing scientific answers to these problems; i.e., it can describe problems, but it seems incapable of *explaining* the processes at work. We can agree on the fact that even though empirical research is an indispensable moment in any demonstration, it is hardly sufficient. Research data, to be something other than simply a photograph of reality at a precise point in time (and, hence, *dépassé* since reality is always changing), must be used to verify hypotheses which themselves have to be integrated into a cumulative, evolving body of knowledge. Of course, the metaphysical lucubrations associated with the search for a 'Grand Theory' have taught researchers to distrust abstract constructions that become only formal games. Yet, this distrust should not lead researchers to abandon the search for an understanding of the relationship between empirical observation and explanatory theoretical schemes; such a relationship constitutes the only means for social scientists to understand social action beyond specific concrete situations.

Moreover, this observation is particularly important given the fact that certain fields of sociology, such as the sociology of organizations, the sociology of social mobility, the sociology of development, etc., have made considerable progress in strictly scientific terms in recent years. While there is not a unified and undisputed overarching theory, there are the beginnings of some relatively circumscribed fields of knowledge which now permit exchanges and some progress in common despite their very different starting points. Such is not the case, it seems to me, for urban sociology, in American as well as in Europe, even though it is one of the oldest branches of sociology.

Our hypothesis is that such a situation is essentially due to the fact that urban sociology is not a scientific domain, nor a field for observation, but rather an ideological artifact. That is, its existence, as it was constituted historically, is justified less by the effects of the knowledge it produces than by its ideological impact on social relations.¹ Let us explain.

A scientific discipline is built either by a certain conceptual cutting up of reality, i.e. through the definition of a *scientific object*, or by a specific field of

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observation, i.e. through the choice of a *real object*. Most of the specific fields of sociology (industrial, political, medical, etc.) are established by applying general sociological theories to a particular sphere. In other cases, it is a *social process*, abstracted in theoretical terms, which constitutes a special area of sociology; for instance, social mobility is a field of study which corresponds to a certain problematic which cuts across all of social reality.

However, *urban phenomena* or *urbanization* is neither a specific real object nor a scientific object. Indeed, what is the urban phenomenon? What is relevant to cities that is not relevant to the countryside? Is an urban phenomenon something that is not rural? But, what is rural? Is it a phenomenon that is non-urban? Is it a certain organization of the economy, defined by the nature of industry or by the division of labour? But then, why call it 'urban'? In this sense, most of what is going on in our societies is urban since the city is the major scene of action. Yet, if we consider as 'urban problems' transportation and criminality, housing and political cliques, radical tensions and green areas, educational infrastructure and leisure activities, it seems that we are far from the specificity of an observed concrete reality. Of course, we may call 'modern' society an 'urban' society, but this caprice of terminology is not without its consequences, both theoretical and ideological.

While we mean by urban a certain style of society (whose description strangely resembles either American or Western European society), we also mean by this term a certain social organization of space characterized by the concentration and interpenetration of man and his activities. But, if this space is the arena of a given sociological inquiry (in contrast to space which is 'rural'), it is because we embody within it certain *social* properties. Otherwise, we would consider this space as a factor contributing to the social activity which we study, in much the same way as if we were to consider the mineralogical structure of the land upon which a school is built as influencing its pedagogical system which we are studying.

In reality, it is this implicit, obvious, almost natural association between a certain type of space and a certain type of society which defines the possibility and utility of an urban sociology. The best attempt to provide a conceptual basis for this discipline was that of Wirth and the Chicago school who tried to define urbanism as a specific cultural system (basically, the liberal capitalist society). It was called urban because it was produced by certain specific qualities of the spatial organization of the human species: density, size and heterogeneity or urban agglomerations. In this sense, urban sociology is not an empirical or conceptual specification, but its very definition implicitly assumes an entire 'theory' of society: the forms of space produce social relations and the physical characteristics of human territorial collectivities determine their cultural models of behaviour. This is in fact one of the most advanced versions of naturalism and of the organicism of the origins of functionalism. Such a 'theory' is extremely useful to ruling political elites inasmuch as it conceptualizes social organization as depending less on social data, in particular class relations, than on natural, spatial, technical and biological data. As a consequence, any

action for reform or any action for control is examined using the objective technical terminology of the organization of space. Hence, urban planning by technocrats replaces the political debates between social groups.

On the other hand, since urbanization is a natural consequence of human evolution and since it necessarily produces certain social effects, i.e. the 'Western' cultural model, human history is in fact predetermined and all countries may be ordered in terms of their greater or lesser proximity to 'urban' or 'modern' society (in effect, this means an advanced industrial society of the American type). This type of society is considered as the historical model with which we can judge the degree of progress or backwardness of other countries. For example, Tynbee did not hesitate to assimilate the terms 'urbanisation' and 'westernisation'.²

We would be wrong to underestimate the importance of this debate by dismissing it as a purely epistemological problem. The theses which are the basis of 'urban sociology' are also the basis for extremely important daily ideologies, such as, for example, the explanation of criminality by the size of cities or of political radicalism by the level of urbanization. All of these analyses are based on spurious correlations because, if we control for the 'social' variables, spatial variables produce different effects, depending on the circumstances. But it is easier to put the responsibility for criminality on 'the monstrous huge city' than to introduce into the explanation variables such as the growth of unemployment among ethnic minorities evicted from the South by the mechanization of agriculture.

Most of the works in urban sociology are influenced, implicitly, by such a perspective or they are descriptive empirical investigations. In neither case is it possible to explain the observed phenomena, especially since the so-called urban perspective has progressively moved from themes of social integration and the accumulation of migrants to themes of urban politics or of social conflict over issues such as some aspect of a city's infrastructure. For it is, in fact, this social evolution which explains the decreasing capacity of the old functionalist schemes to be credible and the increasing demand for a new type of 'urban sociology'.

The transformations which are at the root of an increasing, politically important new urban perspective may be summarized as follows:³

- (a) On the one hand, the economy of advanced capitalist societies rests more and more on the process of consumption; i.e. the key problems are located at the level of the realization of surplus value or, if one prefers, on the extension of the market.
- (b) The accelerated social and spatial concentration of the means of production and of management units also determines a concentration and growing interdependency between the population and distribution process. Consequently, the organization and management of the means of consumption such as housing, schools, health, services, commerce, leisure, etc., is increasingly concentrated. The concentration is not necessarily realized in the same space,

however, although it is articulated around a system which is increasingly centralized from a functional point of view. So, consumption processes are increasingly organized in terms of collective consumption and it is the location of these collective facilities which determines the structure of residential space and, hence, of urban entities.

(c) Thus, a series of new social contradictions emerge at the level of consumption processes and especially at the level of processes of collective consumption in correspondence with the displacement of economic contradictions toward the sphere of consumption. The urban social movements which result from this contradiction are a new factor which directly affects the dynamics of the transformation of advanced societies to the extent that they affect those social strata (such as the middle class) which, until the moment, have not been involved in social conflicts.

(d) Finally, to the extent that these means of collective consumption are generally managed by public authorities (the state at its different levels—national, regional and local), the entire urban perspective becomes politicized, since the organization of hospitals, schools, housing and transportation are at the same time fundamental determinants of everyday life, tightly linked and interdependent networks, and political options linked to the class interests which form the social structure. Consequently, the state becomes, through its arrangement of space, the real manager of everyday life. But, on the other hand, the politicization of the urban question also politicizes the consequent social conflicts: urban movements become one of the axes of social change in advanced societies.

This increasing politicization of urban affairs has rendered even more decrepit an urban sociology based on the perspective of social integration and the adaptation of migrants of rural origins to the urban culture of modern society. This is why political science has increasingly taken the lead in urban research, in particular in the study of the power processes or in communities. Urban problems have ceased to be the natural consequence of modernization. They are instead inserted into a web of social and political strategies and are redefined and transformed according to power relations. Urban political studies of a liberal bent (from Robert Dahl to Terry Clark, Nelson Polsby and Edward Banfield) accomplished a genuine change of perspective and opened the way to the *social analysis* of urban contradictions. But these studies remained enclosed within an individualist and social psychological approach to power which prevented them from probing these questions more deeply. The central object of such analyses has been the network of strategies among *actors*, each one of whom is defined by his attempt to maximize his power and gains. Thus, trade unions, the press or businessmen are considered to be on the same level, and power is viewed as an end in itself which each tries to monopolize, with the relative equilibrium of forces always forcing compromises. Such a perspective, even though it has permitted very fine descriptions of concrete situations, has been able to generalize its discoveries only through the use of highly formalist

perspectives, e.g. the search for the determinants of a centralized or decentralized power structure, of a unitary or pluralist network of power, etc. But it has not accounted for the relations between political processes, urban contradictions, and general social interests, i.e. the economic, political and ideological interests of the social classes which form the totality of a society. This has occurred for two reasons.

Firstly, such studies usually remain at the level of a local community, while urban problems—even those which appear at the local level—are determined by general social forces and structures.⁴ Of course, this determination of urban problems by social structures is expressed in a specific way in each case. But such specific traits cannot be the beginning of research. On the contrary, in order to understand the logic of these specific traits, we must locate them within their general determinants.

Secondly, one cannot analyse a social or political process independently from its structural context and from the web of structural interests which determine it.⁵ Consequently, we cannot base urban research on the analysis of actors and of their strategies without first analysing urban issues and the contradictions in the social structure which these issues express. These contradictions will objectively define the social interests at stake and will allow an understanding of the unfolding of the political process, which possesses autonomy *vis-à-vis* the socio-economic structure, but which becomes a pure formal game, coupled with a utilitarian metaphysic, if it is not studied by starting from class relations.

This perspective on urban research has been developed in France and in other European countries by a more and more influential wave of urban research which has been forcefully developed since 1968 (and it is not without reason that it has dated from that year). The central interest of this wave of research is that, even though it attempts to pose problems theoretically starting from an analysis of the class structure, it advances only through *empirical research* which simultaneously attempts to understand certain urban political problems as they exist as well as to verify some more general hypotheses about the nature of emerging contradictions in advanced societies.

The result is represented by more than a hundred pieces of empirical research in urban sociology carried out in France in the last five years; if these works do not provide definitive solutions to problems, at least they open the way to new theoretical and methodological perspectives towards the problems which have been posed.⁶ These research results attempt simultaneously to recognize the new importance of urban contradictions, trying to give them a precise place within the social structure and to develop, starting from there, a theoretical and empirical analysis of the political processes which seem to us to be at the heart of the question. It is to be expected that such an ambitious attempt is still in its infancy, but it is trying to confront real social and theoretical problems in a spirit which is both scientific and socially engaged.

We would like to present one example of this new approach by summarizing briefly the findings and methods of one of our own studies, centred on the

analysis of the relationship between the urban system and the political system in the expanding industrial region of Dunkerque, France.⁷ We will start by giving some background details about the concrete situation observed, then providing a presentation of our methods and finally summarizing the major aspects of our analysis which is grounded on this empirical study.

2. Urban Contradictions and Political Processes: A Case Study*

a. *Urban System and local Political Arena in the Dunkerque Region*

In order to facilitate an understanding of the concrete analysis to be discussed below it is first necessary to set out some of the characteristic features of the Dunkerque situation emerging as a result of our research.

The Dunkerque situation is characterized by the very rapid creation of a major industrial pole around a steelworks (Usinor-Dunkerque), together with the extension of a second steelworks (Creusot-Loire), an oil refinery (B.P.-Total), shipyards, and a number of existing industrial establishments or plants to be set up in the future, which are either directly linked to the new complex (e.g. Vallourec) or else are seeking to take advantage of the technical and industrial environment it has created (e.g. Lesieur, Ciments Lafarge). This industrial pole is articulated around a new giant outer harbour which is now being built and which is capable of taking ships and tankers in the 125,000–500,000 ton range. The state is paying for the majority of the construction costs of the new infrastructure and the Port Autonome de Dunkerque [Dunkerque Port Authority] is the sole developer of the gigantic port and industrial zone currently under construction.

Industrial growth of this magnitude not only totally transforms the urban landscape but also requires a supply of labour which has to be housed, transported, provided with facilities, etc. If one adds to this the wide range of urban facilities required by the various social categories it is easy to comprehend the crisis we observed in the functioning of the urban system.

More precisely, what we observed was a total seizure in the circuit of production, distribution and management of housing, transport and collective facilities, as well as in the functioning of the city as a centre and in the symbolic elements of the urban landscape. Such a seizure is due in part to the shortage of funds in relation to existing needs. But this is not the most important reason, for the crisis persisted even after the releasing of additional resources. The primary obstacle is the inadequacy of the traditional circuit of production and planning of the urban in relation to the new demands placed on it. The persistence of the crisis is not due to the traditionalist reflex of 'resistance of change'. It is due to the opposition between political interests seeking to obtain control over these circuits of production as essential trumps in their relations with the powerful economic interests which dominate the overall functioning of the

*This section is translated by C. G. Pickvance. Translation additions are marked by square brackets.

region. In other words, what we are witnessing essentially is an attempt by the urban community (controlled by local councillors) to keep control of housing circuits in the face of manoeuvres by the state at the central level to avoid pouring large sums of money into channels which might escape its control, in an operation of the scale of the of Dunkerque.

However, this is not a case of direct opposition between the state and the 'locals', but a confrontation of social interests, a conflict between contradictory logics in urban development. More precisely, the newly emerging economy in the Dunkerque region has brought about profound changes in the social structure; new interest groups have arisen adopting new strategies, their conflicting bases and aims leading to a new network of relations in the region. The long-standing opposition between the port bourgeoisie and the traditional working class (dockers, railwaymen, textile workers) umpired by a middle class of provincial notables is displaced and transformed by the direct opposition between the big industrial interests (Usinor, Schnaider) which take control of the Chamber of Commerce and the new working class in the big firms, highly unionized and extremely militant. These varied interests are reflected in the different priorities accorded to urban development by different groupings.

Briefly, two main tendencies can be distinguished: on the one hand, priority for the development of production facilities, and an emphasis on the central city (Dunkerque), with its tertiary facilities and nearby residential and recreational areas for managers in the former resort of Malo; and, on the other hand, priority for the old and new working class housing areas (in part organized around the priority development area of la Grande Synthe, which is actually a working class housing estate at the gates of Usinor), the shacks on the building sites, single workers' hostels and rural districts which now serve as dormitories for peasants transformed into workers.

Between these two tendencies a petite bourgeoisie of officials, teachers, shopkeepers and members of the liberal professions seeks to preserve its social role as manager of the local community. It thus allies itself in turn with the two main forces emerging in the agglomeration, now moving closer to the big economic interests in the central city, now seeking support among the popular classes in the working class suburbs and small towns of the Dunkerque region (Coudekerque, Gravelines).

These varied social interests find expression in three main political tendencies: (1) the apoliticals and U.D.R. Gaullists, who control the city of Dunkerque; (2) the socialist notables of the Nord *département*, who retain predominant positions in most of the older districts; and (3) the 'Union de la gauche', socialist-communist alliance with a trade union base, whose strengths lie in working class districts. The expression and mediation of these social and political interests at the urban level takes place through the transformation of the institutional system. The new industrial complex and the urban facilities resulting from it have in fact altered the spatial scale of daily life and made necessary a readjustment by the administrative institutions responsible for it. But this readjustment has not taken place according to juridical rules ensuring

an optimal distribution of spheres of competence, but according to competing formulae advanced by each of the social interests mentioned above in an attempt to maintain their own hegemony. For example, the local notables, at socialist instigation, created the first voluntary Urban Community in France, giving it the maximum number of spheres of competence permitted by the law, thus providing themselves with a privileged instrument in their attempt to counteract the 'industrial power' of the economic groups by an 'urban power' based on local institutions.

In the face of this institutional mechanism which threatened to interfere with the smooth realization of an economic project of international dimension, the state at one time considered the idea of an inter-Ministerial urban planning authority, as at Fos. But due to the complexity and relative power of the local community of Dunkerque, the choice was made instead to gain support primarily in the city of Dunkerque (which was socially and politically in favour of close collaboration with big firms) by seeking to strengthen it gradually through a series of carefully planned amalgamations between *communes*. This plan, known as the 'Greater Dunkerque' scheme, has already started with the linking of Dunkerque first to Malo-les-Bains, then to Rosendaël and la Petite-Synthe, thus enabling the city to grow from 27,000 inhabitants in 1963 to over 80,000 in 1972, or a total of about 150,000 inhabitants for the agglomeration as a whole.

This thrust by the 'ruling classes' met with resistance on the part of the 'opposition' which reacted by strengthening the Urban Community. The opposition retains control of the latter by means of an alliance between socialist notables and Union de la gauche which expresses politically the alliance between the traditional petite bourgeoisie and the various strata of the working class.

This, then, is the context in which we have attempted a concrete analysis of a number of general questions posed by the new urban sociology.

b. Research Methodology

The basic hypotheses from which we start are the two fundamental laws of historical materialism according to which, in a capitalist society, the economic instance determines the social structure while it is the political relations between classes which explain and organize each conjuncture for social practice as a whole. As far as the realization of economic logic is concerned, this perspective implies concretely the study of the movement of capital responsible for the creation of the industrial complex of Dunkerque, the process of concentration of the labour force and the characteristics of its various strands, and hence the conditions of its reproduction and of daily life. As for the specifically political logic, it is necessary to show both its relative autonomy and its subordinate character. This requires an analysis of the structure of class interests intervening in the industrial and urban growth of the Dunkerque littoral in terms of the positions of individuals and social groups in the economic dynamic commanded

by capital and in the productive structure defining the relations of production. On the basis of this analysis, and by relating class structure to class practice (both with reference to struggles and to reproduction), it is possible to understand the complex and dislocated game of the local political arena; and, by combining the effect of the latter with the general logic of the state apparatus, it is possible to begin a study of local institutions. Finally, an analysis of the structural and conjunctural logic of the urbanization process and the local political system enables one to understand the social mechanisms underlying urban politics.

In order to demonstrate these propositions as a whole, two levels must be distinguished: (1) proof of propositions specific to each of the topics and real processes we have identified and (2) validation of the general approach.

On the first point, it goes without saying that proof is specific to each concrete analysis and even to each proposition in each analysis. All we can do here is to set out the approach which has been generally followed, more or less rigorously, according to the actual possibility of obtaining proof for each proposition. In general, we sought to use a systematic set of propositions in order to give meaning to a set of observations itself systematized and from which no information had been deliberately excluded. In other words, rather than 'operationalize' each concept by means of an indicator, which implies a term by term correspondence, a completely illusory goal in the analysis of dynamic social processes, we have attempted to find a correspondence between a 'theoretical chain' and a 'chain of observations', by means of logical connections, in such a way that the totality of facts is illuminated and interpreted in a coherent and theoretically meaningful way.

Such an approach requires extreme care in the establishment of facts and a very close correspondence between the observations made and the questions posed at the outset. It is thus that the theoretical perspective adopted directly conditioned the way in which the research was carried out; a wide variety of techniques was made use of, always with the aim of obtaining in the most appropriate way the specific information required to answer a particular question.

In general, and without going into technical details, the study developed in a number of simultaneous sequences during the two years of fieldwork. The various levels of approach used can be summarized as follows:

- (1) Examination, analysis, classification and interpretation of a vast quantity of economic, geographical, sociological, political and administrative documentation relating to the problems being researched.
- (2) Examination and analytical classification of daily newspapers and of certain periodicals, as well as of various leaflets, internal documents and reports of different bodies, and minutes of the local councils of the different *communes*.
- (3) Information obtained by letter from government authorities, firms and associations. Thus, for example, we sent a questionnaire concerning a

number of precisely defined points of information to the main firms in the agglomeration, who kindly provided detailed replies.

(4) An exploratory study to make contact with the area observed using interviews, participant observation and the collection of documents, during the municipal elections of March 1971, in order to familiarize ourselves with the urban problems of Dunkerque in a 'hot' conjuncture.

(5) Interviews with 'key informants' or significant 'actors' in the process studies. These persons were chosen after an examination of the points of information they were capable of providing. For each interview we drew up an interview guide. The guide was as flexible but also as specific as possible, and took account of all the information already available to us on each subject, thus enabling us to check and interpret on the spot the information and points of view expressed in the course of the interview. At no time were we concerned with the psychological or individual attitude of the interviewee, or his 'values'. Each interview contributed to the universe of information available to us on each topic studied, and new information arising from one interview was often pursued in subsequent interviews with other information. Our informants and actors represented the main points in the spectrum of social, urban political and ideological situations. In total about one hundred interviews were conducted, lasting on average 1½ hours. They were mostly tape-recorded, then transcribed, analysed and classified.

(6) Ethnographic study and participant observation, firstly, during a number of short stays lasting several days made by the team as a whole during the two years of the research, and, secondly, during an uninterrupted stay of several months by one member of the team who participated in the social and political life of several parts of the city. Throughout these stays we held group discussions (with a number of local councils, political militants, employers' committees, urban planning teams, etc.) and attended a variety of political and organizational events (sessions of the Urban Community, meetings, local neighbourhood gatherings, meetings in the youth centre and social centre, etc.). We also actively participated in the pleasures of local life, from the waterfront cafes to long walks in the region, and gained a knowledge of all the industrial and port establishments, and the various districts and neighbourhoods of the agglomeration.

(7) Production of a forty-minute film, with soundtrack, presenting the main results of our research. This film, shown to and discussed with research workers from other teams, is intended to make the study known to the various social groups in Dunkerque, in order to obtain some feedback from our research.

(8) Direct observation of families from different social backgrounds, involving the completion of (a limited number of) time-budget diaries and the drawing up of profiles of daily activity.

(9) A study of urban symbolism, with photographic transcription of the results.

The sum total of the information obtained in these ways in itself proves nothing.

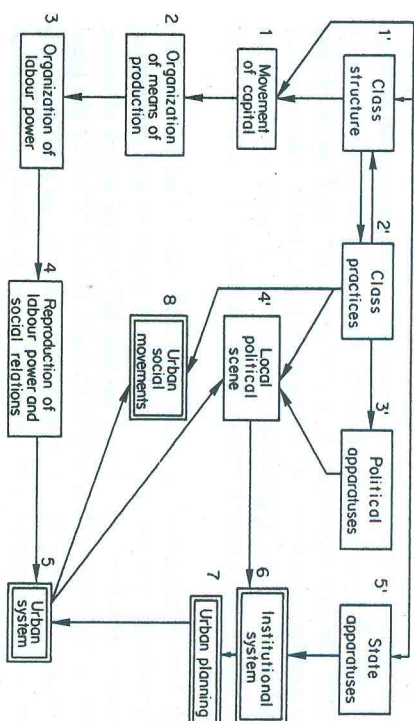


Figure 1 Theoretical order of determination of the real process observed—

It is for this reason that we neither collected it for descriptive purposes nor presented it in the order in which it was collected. Rather it has served as the raw material on which to found our specific analyses and has provided an empirical basis for the articulation of a coherent picture of the social process as a whole.

In our view it is at the level of the logic of development of the process as a whole that the validation of our general approach and of the specific propositions can best be carried out. The propositions mutually reinforce one another in that they are interwoven within a single theoretical register and show the logic and hierarchical order of the determination order of the determinations and interactions postulated by the general theoretical perspective. This perspective organizes the real process observed in order of social determination as set out in Figure 1.

Now by analysing these different processes in the numerical order indicated (where 1', 2', ..., 5' represent the simultaneity of the structural order in relation to 1, 2, ..., 5) we arrive at a twofold result:

(1) The totality of the real process observed is explained by interpreting it within a single theoretical perspective and by relating together all the facts observed.

(2) Each level expresses and specifies the structural logic of the preceding level, and it is solely in this way that it is possible to understand the concrete effects actually observed at this former level. For example, the urban system may be understood by starting from the logic of reproduction of the different strands of the labour force, itself the result of the organization of the means of production which in turn derives from the logic of capital in interaction with the class structure. Moreover, the feedback and interaction effects among the different elements of the social process observed are not arbitrarily determined: in every case they convey the structural charge which they contain as a result of the process of social production which underlies them.

c. *Principal Results*

A set of closely interrelated questions underlay our study. To start with, we observed that an acute situation of crisis regarding 'urban problems' existed in the agglomeration which was emerging in the Dunkerque littoral. This led us to analyse the conditions of reproduction of labour power and social relations, together with the functioning of the urban unit in which this process took place. In fact our questions referred back to the conditions of production of an urban system, understood as a structure of contradictions resulting from the process of collective consumption.

A study of the social treatment of these contradictions revealed the decisive importance of interventions by the state apparatus and led us on to two further concrete questions: (1) the causes and consequences of the very rapid and thoroughgoing reorganization (unprecedented in France) of the whole local institutional system and (2) the social role of urban planning in a situation where conditions unquestionably justified the demands being made for rational control of the overwhelming social and functional effects of the urban growth currently occurring.

i. *The Social Process of Production of 'Urban Problems'* One of the first results of our analysis was to show the fruitfulness and relevance of the perspective which treats 'urban problems' as questions relating to the reproduction of labour power, thus giving them a precise social structural content. In fact our approach was not to start from 'urban problems' as pragmatically defined; rather we started from the requirements of the process of reproduction of labour power and it was at the conclusion of our analysis that we arrived at a concrete understanding of the set of so-called urban questions. It should also be noted that the urban unit in question, the Dunkerque agglomeration, is based on all the processes necessary to the reproduction of the labour force concentrated in it, whereas the complex unit of production requiring this concentration is in no way identical with the agglomeration.

It is in the concrete articulation of the various processes which constitute the urban system that we discover both the main features of the processes of reproduction of labour power and of urban problems as they are posed in practice. It is on the basis of this definition of the status and content of urban problems that we have been able to understand the social production of the various 'crises' as being due to the specific action, in these processes, of general social contradictions: contradictions between capital and labour, contradictions internal to the logic of capital and contradictions between the capitalist logic of the economic and the capitalist logic of the political developing in dislocated fashion and subject to the hazards of the political scene. It is mechanisms such as these that we have found to underlie the crises, bottlenecks, contradictions and conflicts of the urban system, which we regard as structural effects of these mechanisms.

In the first place, the contradiction between the requirements of capital and

those of the reproduction of labour power reveal through two specific effects that they underlie the crisis of the urban system:

(1) The systematic dominance of the organization of means of production over all other elements of the urban system. *Note.* Such a situation will not occur in all cases: it derives from the key role played by the productive apparatus of Dunkerque for big French capital as a whole and for those fractions implanted in Dunkerque in particular.

(2) An inability to carry out regulatory intervention in the urban system as a whole and the limitation of any actual intervention to pragmatic responses to crises as they occur; this derives from the secondary importance of the reproduction of labour power in relation to the principal stake, part of a complex national and international chain of interdependences.

Secondly, contradictions internal to the logic of capital, which may take two forms:

(1) Previously established monopolies and monopolies seeking to establish themselves follow two differing development strategies thus obstructing the adoption of a series of measures aimed at stabilizing and controlling the quantity and type of labour required.

(2) The preference of capital, in the present instance, for the production of means of production results in a seizure in the production of certain means of consumption (e.g. housing).

Finally, the contradictions and dislocations between the requirements of capital and those of the reproduction of labour power, on the one hand, and the means available to effect this reproduction, on the other, prove to be an underlying factor in urban crisis. This lack of adjustment has three causes:

(1) The total amount and distribution of resources allocated for purposes related to the process of reproduction, in particular through the state apparatus, are not solely determined by the requirements of the economic (in its dual aspect, capital and labour); they are treated socially by the economic branch of the state apparatus and are thus subject to urban policy imperatives serving the overall interests of capital and of the class block in power.

(2) The 'ineffectiveness' or 'seizure' of the institutional means for dealing with crises in the process of reproduction of labour power are not the result of a historically accidental delay or of administrative bungling, but derive both from the variety and the complexity of the different functions which the state apparatus has to perform and from the dependence of the state on the political arena and on the contradictory social interests which confront each other there, within the last instance the logic of the structurally dominant class.

(3) Capital invested in the functioning of means of circulation or consump-

tion follows an internal and individual logic of production for profit, thereby introducing notorious 'inconsistencies' at the level of the articulation of complex urban use values.

This set of social processes, mutually interrelated in a hierarchy of reciprocal determinations, is the underlying source of the 'crises' and 'problems', so often denounced, in the urbanization process of the Dunkerque littoral. Now these 'problems' are nothing but the perception, at the level of experience, of the bottlenecks and contradictions of the urban system—themselves a reflection of the contradictory mode in which the reproduction of labour power takes place, in compliance with the structurally dominant logic of capital—in the various specific ways we have just indicated. These contradictions underlie the struggles and social conflicts which are perceived as 'urban crises'.

The urbanization process we studied is characterized by the decisive strategic importance of the intervention of the state apparatus on urban contradictions, and its structural and conjunctural incapacity to cope with demands so manifold and contradictory.

Under these conditions the questions initially posed demand an analysis of the functioning and social effectiveness of state institutions intervening in urban organization. It is to this question we now turn.

ii. Local Institutions as Social Process Local institutions in the Dunkerque littoral have undergone a profound transformation as a result of the exceptional changes in social relations which have taken place there. But it is not simply a matter of local government 'adjusting to new needs' nor of the straightforward replacement of one elite by another. On the contrary, at the level of real individuals and social groups holding key positions in the local apparatus, there is a remarkable continuity with the period prior to the occurrence of rapid industrialization. But this continuity at the level of individual supports conceals a major change in the interests expressed through the political arena and institutional machinery, as witnessed by the profusion of institutional formulae in this field (Urban Community, amalgamation of *communes*, joint study commissions, etc.).

These institutional changes may be explained in terms of the interaction of three elements which are indissolubly linked in the effects they produce on the institutional system:

- (1) The diverse structural exigencies of the state apparatus at the local level, due in particular to the complex dialectic between dominant and dominated classes in relation to the four functions which the state apparatus must perform: domination and regulation of the interests of the dominant classes, repression and integration of the dominated classes.
- (2) The local political arena, itself the resultant of the reciprocal action of political apparatus expressing in dislocated fashion the different social interests determined by relations between classes.
- (3) Interaction within the different instances of the institutional system,

insofar as these instances express the social and political interests underlying each institution in each conjuncture.

The concrete progression of institutional changes in Dunkerque can be understood as due to the combined action of these three elements. Now it is essential to emphasize the need to take account of the complexity of the web of interactions in order to avoid either the mechanistic image of institutions acting simply as transmission belts for dominant interests or the liberal voluntaristic perspective of an endless struggle for power between different pressure groups, particularly as we have shown to what extent the strategies of different apparatuses and individuals reflect their position in the web of class contradictions.

Thus administrative institutions appear neither as sources of inertia nor as mere trampolines for individual ambition, as in the images to which we have been too accustomed by a certain 'sociology of organizations'. On the contrary, the case of Dunkerque reveals the striking capacity for change of institutions when change proves necessary. The source of this change lies not in the pursuit of an abstract rationality determined by the meandering course of 'natural technical progress', but rather in the social rationality of the interests of the classes and class fractions present in the different levels and branches of the state apparatus in each conjuncture. Thus at Dunkerque the position between big monopoly firms, powerfully supported by the central level of the state apparatus, and the industrial working class coincides with an internal division within the local political elite. Within local institutions, the 'regnant' bourgeoisie is divided into two fractions set against each other in terms of the interests of the opposing blocs of classes and class fractions with which they identify, given their role as managers of social interests with more significant structural roots than their own.

It is by decoding local institutions in this way that it also becomes possible to understand the conditions of their functioning, both as regards their internal division into spheres of competence and their organizational structure or financial policy. Through the various mechanisms we have analysed in the principal local institutions, we have uncovered a general tendency: modes of institutional functioning cannot be related to a rationality of means but only to a rationality of ends. The functioning of local institutions is largely dependent on the social interests predominating in each conjuncture and expresses the particular way in which these institutions ensure the realization of interests for which they are the means.

But it is first and foremost through the meaning and content of interventions on the urban system that we have been able to test the relevance of our perspective for the analysis of the social logic of local institutions. These interventions did not prove to be a direct translation of a technical rationality or even of a clearly unfolding class rationality. Rather they could be understood as relating to the articulation between the conflicting web of underlying social interests of the different apparatus present in each institution. Thus the 'seizure' produced

by the logic of capital in the circuit of house production seems to be closely linked to the battle being waged between institutions and industrial monopolies, in which control over the sizeable resources (to finance house production) is a major stake; similarly, non-intervention in the public transport crisis is not a sign of irrationality but the result of local alliances dominated by big firms, alliances which are necessary for the maintenance of part of the labour force scattered throughout country districts, in accordance with the requirements of the process of reproduction of social relations; and, finally, the adequate provision of facilities in the central city and the inadequate provision of the working class *communes* are not only an effect of segregation but the expression of a policy of the central municipality, supported by the central state, seeking to encourage the amalgamation of *communes*, a policy whose social and political logic, directly connected to the interests of the hegemonic fraction of the dominant class, we have already established.

The general tendency identified at the level of the institutional system as a whole and its interventions (of which urban planning represents a specific example) thus expresses the political logic of the dominant class, as it relates to each stake in question, conditioned by the concrete conjuncture of institutional functioning and continuously modified by the state of class relations in the social formation as a whole and in the local political arena.

iii. *The Social Effects of Urban Planning* The social effects of urban planning may be located at two different levels: on the one hand, at the ideological level of rationalization and legitimization of social interests, particularly in the case of master plans; and, on the other hand, at the political level, where planning is a privileged instrument of negotiation and mediation which each group present seeks to appropriate in order to give itself the appearance of social and technical neutrality—without of course planners themselves being able to do anything about it. Our main findings on this point are as follows.

It was found that master plans, which appear to be the veritable embodiment of schemes for urban development, whatever their scale, have an underlying social and political logic, which varies for each plan in exact correspondence with the situation of political hegemony within the institutional apparatus on which the planning agency in question depends. This hypothesis turned out to be so precise that plans drawn up in indecisive political situations took the form of 'question mark plans', while other plans underwent substantial changes as changes took place in the political parties controlling the planning apparatus. But, in addition to this observation, which is in the nature of things, what was significant was the importance of the ideological role of urban planning, since for such an ideology to be particularly effective in the realization of the social interests it embodies, the legitimization-recognition effect characteristic of all ideologies must accommodate itself to the specific means of expression which is urban planning. Plans stamp all individual schemes with a double character: on the one hand, they come to be seen as 'reasonable', rational technical solutions to the problems posed and, on the other, they appear to bring about a convergence of the various social groups and urban functions. Town planning

comes to embody social neutrality, by expressing the general interests of the community, in addition to its advantage of technical neutrality. It is for this reason that planning is a privileged instrument for the ideological embodiment of the interests of classes, fractions and groups; it increases opportunities for social integration to the maximum, a prime function of dominant ideology.

Moreover, as we have seen, the political role of urban planning is due essentially to its capacity to act as an instrument of mediation and negotiation between the different fractions of the dominant class and between the various requirements necessary to the realization of their overall interests, as well as *vis-à-vis* the pressures and demands of the dominated classes. We have seen that this mediating capacity derives from the possibility of achieving an overall relative harmony between the different corrective and regulatory interventions of the state apparatus, wherever the dominant logic pushes contradictions so far that the process of reproduction of labour power and social relations is interfered with. Now, for such mediation to take place efficiently, i.e. to avoid in the final analysis the transformation of the dominant structural logic, the 'dice must be loaded'; in other words, the process of negotiation itself must be organized in such a way that once the various interests have been expressed, the law can ultimately be brought to bear. This is achieved by a number of mechanisms ranging from direct political control to administrative regulation and control of criteria of budgetary allocation.

It is urban planning's capacity to act as a framework for conditional and institutionalized social negotiation which explains the eagerness of the various political tendencies to gain control of planning agencies, which thus become not only political instruments but political stakes in themselves.

Thus the incapacity—so often decried—of urban planning institutions to 'control growth' and to resolve the contradictions of collective consumption is revealed to be merely the reverse side of a process whose true significance lies in the ideological and political effects of urban planning on urban contradictions and social relations.

The research we presented here is still not able, of course, to answer the number of questions we raised at the more general level. But it represents an effort to move from the critical perspective of the first part of this paper to the proposition of some alternative to what is entered there for use in our research field. In spite of the present limits of this effort, our attempt has to be considered within the broader purpose of adjusting the orientations of a new urban sociology to the increasingly political status of urban problems in advanced capitalism, i.e. as a step towards a political urban sociology.

Notes

1. See Castells, M., Theory and ideology in urban sociology, in *Critical Essays on Urban Sociology* (Ed. C. G. Pickavance), Methuen, London, 1976.
2. For a systematic discussion of the overall perspective, see Castells, M., *La Question Urbaine*, Maspero, Paris, 1972 (forthcoming English translation, Arnold, London).
3. See Castells, M., Advanced capitalism, collective consumption and urban contradic-

tions, in *Patterns of Change in Advanced Industrial Societies* (Ed. L. Lindberg), Council for European Studies (forthcoming), both for the development of the argument and for bibliographical references on the topic.

4. See Alford, R. R., *Social Needs, Political Demands and Administrative Responses*, unpublished paper, University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1974.
5. As do, in a masterpiece of urban political research, Cloward, R. A., and Piven, F. F., *The Politics of Turnout*, Pantheon Books, New York, 1974.
6. Most of these research results are unpublished but they are beginning to appear, particularly in a new collection called *La Recherche Urbaine*, published by Mouton. Also, many articles representative of this new trend have been published in *Sociologie du Travail and Espaces et Sociétés*. Researchers having this general perspective include: in France, Jean Lojkin (*La Politique Urbaine dans la Région Parisienne*, Mouton, Paris, 1973), and *La Politique Urbaine dans la Région Lyonnaise*, Mouton, Paris, 1974), Edmond Preceille (*La Production des Grands Ensembles*, Mouton, Paris, 1973), and *Jeux et Simulations: Une Critique des Jeux Urbains*, Mouton, Paris, 1974), Francis Godard (*La Renovation Urbaine à Paris*, Mouton, Paris, 1973), Christian Topalov (*Les Promoteurs Immobiliers*, Mouton, Paris, 1975), and *Capital et Propriété Foncière*, C.S.U., Paris, 1974), Sylvie Biazet and others, (*Institution Communale et Pouvoir Politique*, Mouton, Paris, 1973), Claude Portier, (*La Logique du Financement Public de l'Urbanisation*, Mouton, Paris, 1975), Alain Cottereau, (two important articles on urban planning in Paris in the issues of *Sociologie du Travail*, 4, 1969, and 4, 1970), Suzanne Magri, (*La Politique de l'Etat pour le Logement des Travailleurs*, C.S.U., Paris, 1972), Amel Huet and others, (*Le Role Ideologique et Politique des Comités de Quartier*, Ministère de l'Équipement, Paris, 1972), Jacques Ion and others, (*Les Equipements Socio-culturels et la Ville*, Ministère de l'Équipement, Paris, 1972), Michel Amiot and others (*Politique et Equipements Culturels*, Ministère de l'Équipement, Paris, 1973) and M. Castells, E. Chertk, F. Godard and D. Mehl, *Sociologie des Mouvements Sociaux Urbains*, Vol. 1, Mouton, Paris, 1975), etc.
- In other European countries, there are researchers that by and large share the same perspective, but not always in the same way; e.g. in Italy, Enzo Mingione (*Città e Conflitto Sociale*, Feltrinelli, Milano, 1972, in collaboration with others), Franco Ferrarotti (*Roma da Capitale a Periferia*, Roma, 1971 and *Vita dei Baraccati*, Roma, 1974), A. Daolio (Ed.) *Le Lotte per la Casa in Italia*, Feltrinelli, Milano, 1974) and Giuliano della Pergola (*Lotte Urbane e Diritto alla Città*, Feltrinelli, Milano, 1974); in England, Tom Davies, Michael Harloe, Ray Pahl, Christopher Pickavance, Rosemary Mellor, etc.; in Spain, Jordi Borja, Jose Olives, etc.; in the Socialist countries, Jiri Musil, Ivan Szelenyi, etc.
- We do not want to oppose France to the United States by establishing a geographical separation between these intellectual trends. Some excellent French researchers such as Gremion, Worms and Birnbaum are more linked to the liberal tradition while certain American works such as those of Robert Alford, Dorothy Nelkin or Frances Piven have many similarities with the French ones we have mentioned. However, it is certainly true that specific social situations and different intellectual traditions facilitate the development of the perspective just outlined in these different countries to a greater or lesser extent.
7. For a complete presentation of our findings and theoretical explanations, see the book reporting this research: Castells, M., and Godard, F., *Monopolville*, Mouton, Paris, 1974.

3 Regional Policy Research: Some Theoretical and Methodological Problems

Elizabeth Lebas

1. Introduction

This paper is essentially a consideration of some issues and problems involved in attempting to go beyond a certain sociological perspective, a perspective which, we will say, is grounded in positivism¹ and focuses on individual social actors as the bearers of social action. It is characterized, perhaps as a consequence, by a remarkable lack of theoretical conceptualization.

The background to this essay is research on 'the impact of British industrial location policy upon relatively non-industrialised areas of Britain'.² The mandate is a double one and, to some extent, a contradictory one. For while it is to be an evaluative study of the possible socio-economic effects of an aspect of regional policy and planning, and entails extensive fieldwork, it is also research into the theoretical and methodological possibilities of undertaking such evaluative work. This paper is therefore about a particular set of problems encountered when attempting to redefine the object of study, namely the search for, and the use of, theory and its confrontation with empirical observations. In this sense these problems must be envisaged in an evolutionary manner, for they constitute only a moment in the realization of a study.

After a time-in-our thinking, regional policy was perceived as a political process, ongoing and historically delimited. This process was constitutionally and ideologically defined by the state, but its substance appeared to be complex negotiations between demands of production, the market, types and extent of labour forces, as well as of the actions of the bureaucratic and political representatives of that state. The policy process was also conceived as being vindicated by the economic and political repercussions of a capitalist national and international socio-economic system, a system whose contours and implications have yet to be fully identified or properly understood. Although the policy process was seen as a state activity designed to 'rectify' the inherent and obvious contradictions in the economic and political system, these contradictions and their constituent elements had yet to be theoretically located.

Having reached this stage of conceptualization, we began to see more of the implications of this political process. Did it provide a sufficient point of departure from which to organize field research? Would it assist us in further attempts at conceptualization? Finally, could it eventually serve an evaluative function? What further theoretical, methodological, not to mention epistemo-