

Modern and Postmodern Views on Urban Growth

Theories of urban structure are being challenged by postmodern scholars who argue that the Chicago School fails to explain late 20th and early 21st century urbanism. The issues are twofold, as Dear and Flusty argue (1998). First, urbanism and urban structure itself has changed; second, knowledge and understanding of urban structure has changed. The purpose of this essay is to re-orient and reframe the literature from the perspectives of modernism and postmodernism. Toward this end, this report provides an overview of the urban growth literature; the modernist approach to urban growth; the postmodernist approach to urban growth; and future approaches to understanding postmodern urbanism. The essay concludes with this author's analysis of the literature by situating it within the larger, epistemological implications for social science research.

Overview of the Urban Growth Literature

Scholarly research suggests that urban growth patterns are the result of numerous interactions among economic, political, environmental, geographic, social and cultural factors. These interactions vary with changes in population sizes of cities (Overman & Ioannides, 2001; Black & Henderson, 2003) and in local population densities (Clark, 1951; Mills & Tan, 1980; Glaeser & Kahn, 2004); decentralization of employment (Glaeser & Kahn, 2001); urban specialization patterns (Kim, 1995; Holmes & Stevens, 2004); innovation and production (Henderson, Kuncoro, & Turner, 1995; Duranton & Puga, 2001a), management and production (Duranton & Puga, 2001b), manufacturing and services (Kolko, 1999); and edge cities (Henderson & Mitra, 1996), amid others.

Among the many variables affecting these patterns are urban land uses (von Thünen, 1826; Marshall, 1890; Burgess, 1925; Hoyt, 1939; Harris & Ullman, 1945; Alonso, 1964; Muth, 1969; Thrall, 1987); demographic, lifestyle and lifecycle changes (Bogart & Cromwell, 2000; Bradford & Kelejian, 1973; Clark, Deurloo & Dielman, 2000; Clark & Onaka, 1983; Haurin & Brasington, 1996; Kendig, 1984; Margo, 1992; South & Crowder, 1997); housing preferences (Devaney, 1991; Megbolugbe & Simmons, 1995); transportation networks (Cervero & Landis, 1995; Garreau, 1991); changing income levels (Mieszkowski & Mills, 1993); crime incidence (Berry-Cullen & Levitt, 1999); racial conflict (Alba & Logan, 1991); planning controls (DeGrove, 1993); and amenities (Tiebout, 1956; Bayoh, Irwin, & Haab, 2002).

The Modernist Approach to Understanding Urban Growth

Modernist approaches to urbanism and urban structure are grounded in environmental determinist theories of urbanization and draw on the Chicago School's notion of urban form, which is grounded in human ecology theory. The central human ecologist theorist, Robert Park, advanced the notion that the manner in which an urban area is organized over space manifests from the struggle for survival. Modernist perspectives on urban growth are illustrated through the monocentric, concentric, sector and multiple nuclei models. These models hold that urban growth varies with: (1) land use, mobility and population density; (2) land location and bid-rent functions; (3) individual preferences; (4) neighborhood change; (5) transportation technologies, accessibility and investment; and (6) economic clustering and agglomeration economies. Given these foci, modernists predominantly explain uneven development as the result of various transactions and trade-offs in the market. This orientation is evident in the following summary of the modernist models of urban growth.

Urban Growth Patterns Vary With Land Use, Mobility and Population Density. Urban growth, according to Marshall (1890), begins with the addition of new jobs at the urban periphery. The arrival of retailers signals the culmination and end of the development process. He argued that manufacturing is not attracted to the urban core; rather, manufacturing becomes the core around which the city grows. To Marshall, land value and intensity of land use are the result of spatial equilibrium processes. Christaller's (1933) Central Place Theory extends this line of thought such that fixed ratios (*k* values) of populations are needed to sustain the development of central places which would provide the population with different services (Dickens, 1990). Similarly, Marshall suggested that these factors equilibrate by way of the



movement of people and industry, which in turn changes population density and land values.¹ As such, fluctuating equilibrations manifest uneven growth patterns.

Urban Growth Patterns Vary With Land Location, Bid-Rent Functions and Individual Preferences. In Alonso's (1964) monocentric model, the urban spatial structure is determined by the relative bid rent functions of office, manufacturing and residential land uses. Economic activity is concentrated at the center of the city, which is the transportation node, railhead or port for transporting output. The urban pattern of economic activity via land use is seen as a circle, where office activities are concentrated at the dense city center, ringed by manufacturing activities, which, in turn, are ringed by residential land use.

In the monocentric model, competition for housing near urban centers drives up housing prices inducing a negative price gradient. Because households substitute more land as the price of housing declines, lot sizes increase with distance from the urban center (Alonso, 1964; Muth, 1969). As household size and income increase, so does the demand for newer and larger homes in the suburbs. In theory, the bid-rent function, a hypothetical land rent, includes a bid-price curve that shows the land rent the household could pay at each distance from the center city in order to achieve a predetermined utility level.² The residential bid price curve is the set of prices for land the individual could pay at various distances while deriving a constant level of satisfaction.³ Likewise, the bid price function for the urban firm describes the prices which the firm is willing to pay at different locations (distances from the city center) in order to achieve a certain level of profits. As such, uneven growth patterns arise out of individual preferences for particular types of land and housing.⁴ However, some scholars argue that these preferences are shaped more so by the misallocation of decisive resources.

Bayoh, Irwin and Haab (2002) argue that the role of declining public services and quality of life in the central city drive locational choice. This is congruent with Tiebout's (1956) notion that households have preferences over local public goods that vary across local jurisdictions. He argued that amenities, as well as distance and land costs, influence households' location choices. In fact, the uneven distribution of private and public amenities across local jurisdictions is viewed as the main determinant of uneven growth patterns (Deller, Tsai, Marcouiller & English, 2001). These patterns engender crime, violence, racial conflict, low quality schools, inadequate public services, and poor environmental quality in the central cities. Unlike Alonso's explanation, Bayoh, Irwin and Haab (2002) and Tiebout (1956) maintain that the households that can afford to move to the suburbs will do so, in search of safer neighborhoods, better schools, nicer environments, and communities comprised of people more like themselves.

Urban Growth Patterns Vary With Neighborhood Change. Conversely, Earnest Burgess (1920) hypothesized that growth is patterned around a process of invasion and succession.⁵ Via his concentric zone model, Burgess tied land use to socioeconomic status, which he noted, varies directly with the

¹ Alfred Marshall (1890) addressed how market forces affect changes in urban land use patterns. Extending von Thünen's (1826) work, Marshall (1933) identified the underlying assumptions of land use, which Thrall (1991) grouped into tenets: (1) land is a factor of production; (2) land has area and density and complements capital and labor; (3) land's situation and site values are measures of the importance of relative spatial location; and (4) land is the recipient of external economies from natural and built environments—localization of manufacturing industry arises from agglomeration economies that result from the density and scope of the labor market, spatial distribution of physical resources, and threshold demand. Concentrations of service industry save customers transportation cost and time. Due to the increased volume of customers and increased visibility, higher-order facilities benefit by agglomerating with other higher-order facilities.

² Alonso (1964) stresses three points in his characterization of the bid price curve: (1) every individual or household has his or her own bid price curve; (2) every bid price curve represents a given utility level; and (3) bid prices are hypothetical and do not follow actual prices.

³ On the other hand, Michelson (1966, 1976) argued that residential location choice is a function of values and lifestyle.

⁴ Both the monocentric and urban bid rent models have been used to derive the "natural evolution" theory of urban growth. This theory identifies demographic, aging housing stock and changes in transportation networks as causal variables of growth patterns (Mieszkowski & Mills, 1993).

⁵ This term was adopted from ecology to describe a process of neighborhood change whereby one social group succeeds another in a residential area.



distance from the city core. He suggested that pressure on inner city housing, typically by migrant groups of low socioeconomic status, prompts neighborhood change. These groups move to adjacent residential areas, therein pushing out current residents to the next zone. In turn, this incites a rippling trend of outward movement with the highest status groups at the furthest distance from the center. In this model, uneven growth results primarily from patterns of social disorganization and competition, which manifest, for example, in slum areas. Burgess would argue, however, that this is a natural process of organization-disorganization-reorganization to equilibrium. Uneven growth patterns are simply zones in transition.

Urban Growth Patterns Vary With Transportation, Accessibility and Investment. Homer Hoyt (1939) suggested that accessibility increases land value and modified Burgess' model to account for major transportation routes. He associated high rent residential districts with the tendencies for growth along these transportation corridors (and toward high ground, open country sides, and established homes of community leaders). Hoyt theorized that while commercial functions remain in the CBD, manufacturing activity develops in wedged patterns surrounding transportation corridors. Residential land use patterns develop in similar fashion with a sector of lower-income households bordering the manufacturing and warehousing sector⁶ and sectors of middle- and higher-income households located away from industrial sites. In this model, housing and commuting gradients explain uneven growth patterns.

Urban Growth Patterns Vary With Economic Clustering and Agglomeration Economies. Unlike Hoyt, Chauncy Harris and Edward Ullman's (1945) multiple nuclei model suggests that growth occurs around distinct nuclei or growth centers. Smaller business districts act as satellite nodes, or nuclei, of activity around which land use patterns are formed. These areas develop according to specific requirements of certain activities (e.g., facilities for heavy industry or railways), different rent-paying abilities, and the clustering of economic activities.

The urban spatial pattern reflects a change from the core-dominated monocentric city to a multicentric, suburbanized city where the bulk of jobs are far from the city center. In the multiple nuclei city, workers commute to jobs in both the CBD and suburban subcenters. The assumptions are that workers are willing to pay more for housing and land near employment centers, *ceteris paribus*, so the land-rent function has several peaks, one near the CBD and one near each subcenter, which form a ridge centered on the beltway (O'Sullivan, 2003). The urban spatial structure depicts a clustering of firms in suburban subcenters, which result from agglomerative economies of production. The subcenter firms share input suppliers, a labor force, and information.

Indeed, the modern urban landscape reflects numerous spatially-concentrated economic activities. Hoover (1971) and Marshall (1920) suggest that external agglomeration economies generated by localized aggregations of firms in the same industry explain this phenomenon. On the other hand, Jacobs (1967) suggests that urbanization economies coupled with the presence of a diversity of firms, a large labor supply, and appropriate infrastructure better explain this distribution. Mills (1972) suggested the change in the urban landscape was the result of the suburbanization of manufacturing employment and the suburbanization of population. Nonetheless, it is here that theories of agglomeration and polycentricity emerge in the post-multiple nuclei model literature. Anas, Arnott and Small (1998) report that classical, or modernist, explanations of polycentricity are spatial inhomogeneities; internal and external economies of scale in production; and imperfect competition. It is also here that the postmodernist approach represents the epistemological break from modernity.

The Postmodernist Approach to Urban Growth

Postmodernist approaches to urbanism and urban structure are drawn from Los Angeles' urban form, which Soja (1996) considers being the quintessential prototype of the postmodern urban metropolis. L.A. urban spatial structure depicts what Dear, Schockman and Hise (1998) refer to as a polycentric urban agglomeration "compounded by its multicultural and polyglot character of the population in the sprawling metropolis." Because modernist models of urbanism and urban structure simply fail to illuminate this

⁶ Traffic, noise and pollution made these areas less desirable locations in which to live.



peculiar urban form, postmodernists have drawn a historiographic view of the economic, political, spatial and demographic changes that occurred in the latter part of the 20th century.

To the postmodernists, this era represented both an epistemological break and a material break in the way society was organized and structured. This break led to multi-dimensional restructuring that contemporary theory could not explain. The epistemological and material breaks represented a paradigmatic shift in theories of urban structure and gave way to a new, postmodern view of urbanization. Soja (1996) defines this view as “something less than a total transformation, a complete urban revolution, an unequivocal break with the past; but also to something more than continuous piecemeal reform without significant redirection.” In the Sojain framework, there is both change and continuity where the modern city still exists and the postmodern city exists to some degree in every city (Soja, 1996).

In pertinent part, the postmodernist approach to urban growth is drawn from a re-oriented, postmodernist view of capitalist industrial urbanization and the dramatic transformations that ensued, e.g., the expansion of commerce and markets, industrialization of production, the urbanization of labor, the rise of the bureaucratic state and the decreasing salience of sacred symbols as a result of expanding secular law and science (Turner, 2003).

From this perspective, capitalist industrial urbanization transformed preindustrial communities to industrial societies to global urban systems. These global urban systems marked a decline of cohesive and local communities (Turner, 2003); the dissolution of social bonds (Wirth, 1938); perpetuation of alienation, oppression, class conflict, fetishism of commodities (Marx, 1977); an anomic social system (Durkheim, 1964); a marginal and fractured self (Simmel, 1956); a deteriorated sense of place; and “home” became a boundary-less multinucleated metropolitan region vis-à-vis capitalist industrial urbanization.

The new world urban system marked an amalgamation of an interdependent system of people, knowledge, images and ideas with capital, labor-power, and consumption of goods (Turner, 2003). The postmodern urbanization, associated with capitalist industrial urbanization in the last part of the twentieth century, was characterized by a crisis of Fordism and deindustrialization; class and racial conflicts and demographic shifts; hypermobile capital; and political, economic and industrial restructuring and globalization that manifest in urban and regional restructuring.

These “restructurings” are the *sine qua non* of the postmodern approach to urbanization: urban spatial structures and urban growth are manifestations of past, present and future restructuring processes. This view is best captured by Edward Soja (1996), who categorizes this restructuring process around six geographies, which are based on L.A.’s urban form. Accordingly, the modernist monocentric, concentric, sector, and multiple-nuclei models are countered by a postmodern model of restructuring.

Deindustrialization and Reindustrialization. This era marked changes in organization, technology, and industrial production. Mass production and mass consumption around industrial complexes reorganized into more flexible, vertically disintegrated systems of production clustered in new industrial spaces. Technopoles of high technology aerospace and electronics firms, office buildings, and industrial parks emerged in the former industrial zones.

Internationalization and Expansion of Globalized Capital. The global world city emerged marking an expansion in the outreach of cities yielding the hinterland. Spatial restructuring and globalization prompted globally hyper-mobile capital.

Decentralization and Recentralization. A flurry of neologisms emerge in the third geography including such terms as megacities, outer cities, edge cities, metroplex, technoburbs, postsuburbia, technopolis, heteropolis and exopolis. The urban form undergoes a radical restructuring such that the city is turned “inside out” through the urbanization of suburbia.

Social Fragmentation, Segregation and Polarization. This era marked drastic increases in social, economic, and cultural inequalities accompanied by geographically uneven development. The urban



spatial structure is shaped into a dumbbell. The income gap widens substantially and the blatant contrasts between the rich and poor take shape across urban space.

Emergence of the Carceral Landscape. Increasingly, the postmodern city becomes ungovernable. A frenzy of flying buttresses has taken hold: homes are fortified; fences are higher; gates are heavier; windows are barred; and private police assure yuppies, buppies and DINKS a good night's sleep. Whole subdivisions, entire condominium developments and apartment complexes are now "protected" from the outside world by armed guards and electronic security.

Hyper-reality. A hyper-reality manifests in the material reality and ideological imaginary of urban life, confounding and reorienting traditional ways of distinguishing the real from the imagined. It diffuses over the urban landscape and permeates every day life.

Thus, the classical, or modernist, and postmodernist interpretations of the polycentric landscape are quite different, indeed. Where the modernists speak a language of spatial inhomogeneities, internal and external economies of scale in production, and imperfect competition—the postmodernists counter with an entirely different language of deindustrialization, reindustrialization, internationalization, globalization, glocalization, decentralization, recentralization, fragmentation, segregation, and polarization that yield a carceral and hyper-real urban form and urban imaginary. Here, the postmodernist approach distinguishes its epistemological and material break from modernity.

Future Approaches to Understanding Postmodern Urbanism

Future approaches to understanding postmodern urbanism will likely be shaped by the robust and growing postmodernist literature. This literature may be categorized into two schools of thought: the postmodernist critique of science (modernity) and the postmodernist break from modernity.

Postmodernist Critique of Science

Postmodernists suggest that science is a cultural production like any other sign system and therefore has no "privileged voice" (Lyotard, 1979; Wittgenstein, 1973). A faction of these theorists argue, moreover, that no truth exists apart from the ideological interests of humans (Rorty, 1979; Lemert, 1990; Gottdiener, 1990, 1993; Seidman, 1994); discontinuity of knowledge is the norm (e.g., Foucault's "governmentality"); and permanent pluralism of cultures is the only *real truth* that humans continually face. Gottdiener (1990, 1993) and Seidman (1994) question social theory that posits a *foundationalism*—or the view that knowledge accumulates such that one level of knowledge can serve as the base on which ever more knowledge is built. To them, foundationalism is just another effort to impose a grand narrative as a privileged voice. Gottdiener (1990) sees foundationalism as *logocentrism* where the classics of social theory are seen as the base for all subsequent theory and used by theorists as a political ploy to maintain privileged positions. Given this, Seidman (1994) says that the hope of emancipation through sociological theory must be replaced by "the more modest aspiration of a relentless defense of immediate, local pleasures and struggles for justice."

Postmodernist Break from Modernity

The economic postmodernists are concerned with capital, overaccumulation, level of dispersion and movement in the new world system of markets driven and connected by information technologies. These theorists suggest that culture and systems of symbols emerge from economic processes but exert independent effects on economy and every facet of human endeavor. These social theorists are troubled by "postmodern pathologies" marking a loss of a core or essential sense of self; the use of symbolic and material means to control individuals; increased salience of cultural resources as tools of repression and resistance; emotional disengagement of individuals from culture; and a loss of national identities in a shift to local and personal identities. Zygmunt Bauman (1992) argues that rather than assimilating to the whole of society, communities now lead a distinctive existence and become the refuge for strangers and ethnic, religious, or political groups. Bauman (1992) claims that politics, ethics, and morality are all part of the postmodern world; however, morality in the postmodern world is not universal.



Fredric Jameson (1984) argues that the truth of postmodernism is the world space of multinational capital. Praxis is transformed and confounded by the changed nature of signification with machines which remove the direct connection between human production and its symbolic representation. To Jameson (1984), the foundation of thought and knowledge in postmodernity is nonexistent. Rather, machines of late capitalism *reproduce* knowledge, not produce it. According to Jameson (1984), this reproduction is focused on the *medium*, not the message. Hence, the signification chain from object to sign is broken down. As such, the postmodern condition has created a *fragmented* rather than alienated subject. Self is a series of images in a material world dominated by the instruments of reproduction rather than production. Jameson (1984) explains that there is an emotional flatness or depthlessness—emotions are now free-floating and impersonal.

David Harvey (1989) asserts that capitalism has ushered in problems associated with humans' capacity to conceptualize time and space. Contrasting Jameson, Harvey (1989) and Scott Lash & John Urry (1987) do not see praxis as the problem; rather, the critical condition of postmodernity is a condition of overaccumulation—too much capital assembled and disseminated. Conversely, cultural postmodernist Jean Baudrillard (1981) draws attention to the non-material signs that have come to dominate contemporary society through the transformation of producer- to consumer-oriented society. According to Baudrillard (1981), we consume *signs* rather than goods or services. He argues that we do not consume because we need to but rather because we want to be different from other consumers. Baudrillard (1993) believes that simulations and a lack of genuineness dominate the postmodern world.

This lack of authenticity may be seen in Kenneth Gergen's (1971) depiction of the postmodern *self* comprised only of images, revealing no inherent qualities, and an utter loss of the ability and desire to create self-consistency. The self is saturated with images that are incoherent. Normal Denzin (1991) and Douglas Kellner (1992) target television for this saturation via the flow of incessant, disjointed and empty images that have formed people's ideas and actions. Media images are the basis, they claim, from which people obtain their identities—particularly race, class, gender. Similarly, Thomas Luckmann (1991) concludes that advanced capitalism creates a postmodern diversity of *commodified* meaning sets that can be mass produced and consumed by individuals in search of cultural coherence that stave off anxiety and fear in a structurally differentiated and culturally fragmented social world.

Although the foregoing summary of the literature represents only a snapshot of the theoretical underpinnings of postmodernist thought, it illustrates well the striking epistemological shift and material break from modernist notions that will likely shape future approaches to understanding postmodern urbanization, urban spatial structure, and urban growth.

Author's Synthesis and Analysis

A synthesis of the theoretical underpinnings of the modernist approach to urban growth paints a surreal, if not fantastic, conceptual framework. This particular orientation to urban growth, originally ground in the human ecology model, homes in on market forces moved by an invisible hand in which rational economic actors make rational economic decisions manifest in individual preferences based on what appears to be perfect knowledge and perfect mobility yet exist in a perpetual state of a natural, equilibrated, competitive struggle for survival. The simultaneous interplay of these peculiar market and human behaviors against a backdrop of environmental determinism are said to yield the modern urban landscape. Yet, as Gottdiener (2000) and Castells (1977) argued, these models are time and place-bounded archaic hypothetical abstractions that wholly ignore political and economic spheres. They lend little insight into the global city. Indeed, the postmodern view better depicts the world in which this author walks.

But, perhaps more importantly, the modernist and postmodernist models speak to a larger issue: that of the researcher's role (and this nascent social scholar's role) in accepting or rejecting the epistemological grounds in which these models are rooted. In pertinent part, the researcher's conscious or unconscious adoption or rejection of an epistemology are political acts such that the outcome of either is to "co-sign" a set of values and interests that shape the questions that can be asked, the puzzles and anomalies that can be seen, the tools that can be used, and the conclusions that can be reached. To consciously or



unconsciously accept one epistemology over another is to also accept that in which it is epistemologically grounded, e.g., the particular prescriptions and proscriptions of what that epistemology dictates exists (ontology); what it dictates is true; and what it dictates is of interest and value.

The implication for social science research is the import of making the implicit explicit. The failure to do this, together with the failure to interrupt the indoctrination of contemporary modernist notions of scientific research, are political acts that exacerbate and perpetuate the dominant epistemology (Latour & Woolgar, 1986)—an epistemology which the nonpositivist postmodern researcher finds incomprehensible (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Winch, 1958); inadequate, oppressive, exclusive (Harding, 1993; Olesen, 2000; Reinharz, 1992; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Gamson, 2000; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000); wrong-headed, and illusory (Dickson, 1988; Sarewitz, 1996). It is here that this author finds it well to join with the postmodernists in their clean break from the dominant epistemology.



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