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THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT AND THE URBAN QUESTION

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SÉRIE SEMINÁRIO INTERNACIONAL "PESQUISA URBANA E POLÍTICAS URBANAS NA EUROPA DOS ANOS 80"

APRESENTAÇÃO

Em Dezembro de 1987 se realizou no Rio de Janeiro o seminário internacional "Pesquisa Urbana e Políticas Urbanas na Europa dos Anos 80". Tal seminário foi organizado pelo Instituto de Economia Industrial (IEI) em colaboração com o Development Planning Unit (DPU) da University College, London e o Instituto Brasileiro de Administração Municipal (IBAM) e teve lugar no quadro das atividades de seu grupo de pesquisa em políticas urbanas. Contou com o patrocínio do Programa para o Desenvolvimento das Nações Unidas (PNUD) e da Financiadora de Estudos e Projetos (FINEP) e com a colaboração científica do Instituto de Pesquisa em Planejamento Urbano e Regional (IPPUR) e do Instituto Universitário de Pesquisa do Rio de Janeiro (IUPERJ).

O seminário teve como objetivos: (1) apresentar e avaliar algumas das contribuições teóricas da pesquisa urbana européia atual para a análise dos processos de desenvolvimento urbano e das políticas urbanas; (2) proporcionar elementos para uma análise comparativa das políticas urbanas em países desenvolvidos e em vias de desenvolvimento, com particular ênfase no caso brasileiro e (3) apresentar alguns exemplos de experiências atuais de políticas urbanas e de planejamento urbano na Europa que fossem relevantes para o debate em curso sobre o futuro das estratégias e políticas urbanas no Brasil.

As pesquisas e teorias urbanas desenvolvidas na Europa na década de 70, particularmente na França, tiveram um grande impacto nos círculos acadêmicos tanto dos países desenvolvidos como do Terceiro Mundo. A pesquisa urbana no Brasil, por exemplo, foi profundamente influenciada pelas perspectivas teóricas da chamada escola francesa de sociologia

urbana, a qual marcou uma ruptura com as teorias urbanas funcionalistas ao salientar as contradições do processo de urbanização e o papel da intervenção do Estado e das políticas urbanas no desenvolvimento das sociedades capitalistas.

Estas contribuições críticas à uma teoria geral da urbanização capitalista foram objeto de intenso e contínuo debate, mas é talvez no contexto das profundas transformações econômicas e políticas da última década na Europa e das novas formas de articulação entre a sociedade civil e o Estado, que suas limitações se fizeram mais evidentes. Em verdade, o que muitos autores se referem como a crise da pesquisa urbana européia - sobretudo a de seu núcleo mais dinâmico e coerente, a escola francesa - não parece estar disvinculada da própria crise do que era seu objeto previlegiado de análise: o Estado de bem-estar.

Uma década mais tarde, na Europa dos anos 80, se a pesquisa urbana crítica ainda mostra certa continuidade com a da década passada, ela também apresenta profundas rupturas. Ao mesmo tempo ela se faz mais atomizada e diversificada - na própria lógica da fragmentação interior de seu objeto de estudo. Nosso propósito foi justamente explorar estas descontinuidades e rupturas e discutir - sem pretensões de nenhuma visão compreensiva - alguns dos novos caminhos que esta pesquisa hoje percorre e as potenciais contribuições teóricas que ela possa dar para a pesquisa e a análise urbana em outros contextos. Para isso contamos com a presença de alguns dos mais destacados acadêmicos europeus trabalhando nesta área, os que, na sua maioria, tiveram um papel também importante na década passada.

Em relação às experiências de planejamento urbano, nos concentramos em dois dos casos mais inovadores dos últimos anos na Europa: os de Madrid e de Barcelona. Ao mesmo tempo, trata-se de casos com interessantes paralelos com a situação brasileira, proporcionando assim um importante contraponto para o debate sobre os desafios da política urbana no Brasil de hoje. Para a apresentação destes casos contamos com a presença das pessoas diretamente responsáveis pela formulação e implementação dos planos e políticas urbanas das duas cidades referidas.

Incluimos aqui lista dos participantes europeus do seminário, cujos papers apresentados pretendemos ir publicando na língua original nesta série de textos para discussão:

MICHAEL BALL - Economista, Birbeck College, Londres

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A gap in urban research?

The most obvious way that people know they are in a city or town is that buildings are everywhere. It might be expected therefore that those physical structures would be of central interest to any subject claiming to be 'urban studies'. Remarkably, they are not. Instead, the built environment in urban theories is generally treated as a passive backdrop to other social processes. Such passivity seems odd. It is difficult to see how the creation of the built environment can be avoided when examining housing provision; the cyclical patterns of office development; the general role of the state in the built environment including land-use planning; and even in comprehending the very shapes and forms of cities and towns. Yet urban development and the production of the built environment in general are regarded frequently as fairly isolated and specialised areas of study. In this article I argue that these topics are far more important for the subject areas generally covered by urban studies than is usually accepted, and I suggest a theoretical means by which those topics can be confronted.

To say something has been neglected can also be to highlight a fundamental theoretical weakness. So, as well as suggesting a means by which to understand the social creation of the built environment, in what follows I will also criticise certain Marxist-inspired 'urban' theories. A major weakness in the new Marxist urban studies of the 1970s is apparent in its treatment of the built environment. Recognition of this weakness, I should like to suggest, opens up the possibility of reformulating Marxist approaches to some key urban issues.

The work of Castells, Lojkine, and Harvey will be taken as exemplars of a virtually universal trend, neglect of the social relations of building provision. The concept of collective consumption is argued to do the same. The point is not to go over

some well-known 'old hat' theories simply to criticise them (1). Instead, the theories are being treated as case studies of the role generally assigned to the built environment. They are being used because they are relatively well-known comprehensive views. Few 'new hat' theories have won widespread support, or provided general position statements (see the surveys in Lebas (1982) and Badcock (1984). Even so, to the best of my knowledge, most of the 'new hats' still fit the complaint I wish to make.

Having made the criticisms of urban theory, in the second principal part of the article, I outline an approach to the study of the built environment which focuses on the centrality of the social relations of building provision, and on the importance of seeing those social relations in a historically dynamic way. The broad content of the theoretical approach is discussed using the notion of 'structures of building provision'. The concept highlights the existence of specific sets of historically specific and country-specific social relations involved in the creation and use of particular types of buildings. Although careful specification is required, the broad content of particular structures of provision is familiar: for example, the social agents currently involved in building owner-occupied housing in a particular country or those involved in office development are generally well known.

Marxist urban theories and the built environment

The 'urban' has come to be recognised by many Marxists to be at best a pragmatic concept with which to deal with empirical material or one spatial level out of a series of highly interlinked ones (compare Ball, 1985b; Mingione, 1981). But a number of the main proponents of the Marxist urban critique in the early and mid-1970s did not stop at dismissing the old urban theories; instead they proposed new ones in their place. The most

(1) Harloe (1977) provides a useful introduction to the debate and Mingione (1981) provides a useful postscript which in the methods outlined, if sometimes not in practice, provides, I think, a useful way forward. Lebas 81982) gives an extensive commentary and bibliography on the traumas and tribulations of the new urban studies since the early 1970s.

well known were those of Harvey (1973), Castells (1977), and Lojkine (1976; 1977). The dating is particularly necessary, as all of these authors have moved onto new theoretical positions.

I shall argue that the relative neglect of the social relations of building provision in these and other urban theories has arisen because the built environment is usually seen in functionalist terms, with emphasis placed on the uses to which built structures are put. In some instances, such as the discussion of the evolution of land-use planning, the opposite of functionality-disfunctionality-is stressed (compare Scott, 1980). Yet rarely are the reasons for the creation of the built environment or the agencies who profit from its continual existence given prominence in analysis. Even when the providers of the built environment are discussed, they are treated in stylised ahistorical terms: for instance, as undifferientiated landed property or a 'backward' construction industry (for example Harvey, 1982; Lipietz, 1974; 1985; Lojkine, 1976). Attempts to produce general theories of the role of urban areas in advanced capitalist societies, or of aspects of them (such as the existence of urban land rents), have led to this neglect.

Castell's urban theory

Castells's early work on urbanism and collective consumption was an important influence on the new urban analysis (Castells, 1976; 1977; 1978). He argued that urban areas should be seen as the places where labour power is reproduced, and that many items of consumption necessary for that reproduction can only be made available by some form of collective action via the state. This action may necessitate direct state provision or some less direct intervention, such as a subsidy or land-use planning. The interaction between the state and items of personal consumption at the urban level is called by Castells 'collective consumption'. The question then becomes why and when does the state intervene in this way. The answer is because it benefits capital and is a means of containing struggles by urban social movements.

Castells's work on collective consumption and urban

social movements has generated considerable interest, providing as it does a substantive argument about the importance of the linkages between elements of personal consumption, political action, state intervention, and capital accumulation. A vast literature of critique and countercritique has resulted. The most fundamental critique has related to Castells's classification of urban areas as the site for the reproduction of labour power (Castells, 1977). The functionalism and arbitrariness of his classification have been criticised extensively, as has the structuralist method which he used (compare Harloe, 1977).

Similar problems arise with the classification of urban social movements, as their theoretical statusis unclear. If the question is asked - what is an urban social movements? - little information is provided. It seems to be any group of people with a coherent objection to contemporary state intervention into personal consumption activities. Their political response can be either acquiescence, pressure-group lobbying, protest via the ballot box or through some form of direct action. Such groups' status as political forces consequently is totally arbitrary: it could be substantial or inconsequential. Three cranks complaining about the flower displays in the local park are just as much an urban social movement as a sustained campaign by hospital workers and local people about cuts in the local health service (a campaign which itself might be only part of a wider national movement). It is difficult in many instances to see why such groupings once discovered should be given the status of an **urban** social movement; such a category seems either unreasonably to isolate political action to a local level or equally unreasonably to elevate trivia to political forces worthy of study (2).

(2) The attractiveness of urban social movements in legitimating much earlier urban sociology in the face of the Marxist critique, however, is clear. Studies of local groups and their politics, for instance, simply had to be relabelled.

Clearly, for the purposes of the discussion here, what is most important is that Castells's notions of collective consumption and political protest treat the built environment as merely a useful thing that appears whenever the state needs it to satisfy a political interest or function. Absence of consideration of the social relations associated with its provision is most glaring in Castells's analysis of urban planning in **The Urban Question** where neither landownership nor building production are mentioned in the chapter devoted to it.

Lojkine and the general conditions of production

Unlike Castells, Lojkine does not simply treat urban areas as the locus of consumption activities. Spatial concentration in the form of urban agglomerations directly influences the means of production (for example, offices and factories) and circulation (for example, transport) as well. As urban areas embody in their built environments the benefits of collective consumption facilities and agglomeration economies, they are of considerable advantage to capital. But there are also said to be barriers to accumulation within the urbanisation process. Three central ones are specified:

(1) the problems of financing the means of communication and the collective means of consumption privately, because of the characteristics of these items which make them inherently unprofitable to provide;

(2) the anarchy of competition, which produces inefficient (for overall accumulation) distributions of economic activity across space;

(3) the existence of landed property and its appropriation of ground rents which absorb potential profit and inhibit the reorganisation of space.

Criticism of Lojkine's work has been extensive. Harloe (1978) criticises Lojkine's theory of the state on the grounds of its instrumentalism and of the implicity assumed guaranteed effectivity of the actions of the state in the interests of capital. Both, amongst other things, deny any role for class struggle. Lebas (1983) examines the state-monopoly capital thesis in general, surveying the criticisms of it, including Lojkine's own growing disenchantment. Theret (1982) criticises Lojkine's urban theory in total, dismissing both his notion of the role of urban areas in the formation of the general conditions of production and his conception of collective consumption.

Before I turn to the collective consumption debate in more detail, it is worth making some general comments about the role assigned to the providers of the built environment in Lojkine's theory. The social agencies involved in building provision, apart from landed property, are shadowy figures of little consequence, unless they happen to be the state. The state intervenes in the financing, production, and circulation of 'built forms' as an instrument of the interests of big business, but precisely how it does so is rarely specified. Although the conditions under which the built environment is provided are central to Lojkine's analysis, he sees it in essentially functional terms of required uses for particular classes, and whether those uses get provided or not. Inherent deficiencies, for instance, arise in the provision of the collectice means of consumption and in the spatial distribution of land uses, yet the social relations of building provision do not feature in the argument as such. Landed property does appear as an appropriator of rent and as an inhibitor of spatial reorganisation, but it is treated as an undifferentiated barrier rather than as a historically changing social force, which at time allies with and benefits productive capital and at other times opposes it. So, once again, the social relations of building provision suffer from neglect and ahistorical theorisation.

The debate over collective consumption

Associated with the debates over Castells's and Lojkine's urban theories, there has been extensive discussion of collective consumption as a concept (compare Castells, 1977; 1978; Lojkine, 1976; Pahl, 1977; Preteceille, 1981; Theret, 1982). Housing provision and social relations associated with the built environment in general have featured extensively in this debate, both theoretically and in empirical work. Yet the analysis has focused on particular aspects of building provision to the exclusion of others. The inclusion of those missing social relations, to my mind, brings into question the whole notion of collective consumption as an identifiably separate category of consumption-related activities.

Despite some confusion in the literature (Theret, 1982), collective consumption is most satisfactorily associated with the creation of the entities to be consumed, rather than with the act of consumption itself (although with services, temporally, the two generally are indivisible). Collective consumption has then been variously defined on two distinct criteria. One emphasises the physical characteristics of particular consumption activities which make it impossible to provide them on an individualised consumption basis: roads, fresh air, spectator leisure activities, etc. (compare Lojkine, 1976). The other is not concerned with the physical nature of the activities undertaken by the state but with the existence of particular forms of state action whatever the area of intervention into consumption (compare Castells, 1977; Theret, 1982). Various mixes of the two criteria are possible, but a watertight definition of collective consumption has remained elusive.

In many aspects, the Marxist debate over the definition of collective consumption mirrors a similar inconclusive one in neoclassical economics over public (or collective consumption) goods (Head, 1962). Baumol and Oates (1975), for example, emphasise physical characteristics by defining a public good as as an 'undepletable externality'. Whereas others argue for the particular types of state-intervention line; Steiner (1974), for

instance, suggests that any publically induced or provided collective good is a public good.

The common threads between the debate over collective consumption in Marxist urban sociology and in neoclassical economics in many respects are not surprising, as both of them are trying to confront a particular set of historical events: namely the increasing intervention by the state into consumption activities during the postwar boom. In doing so, although they have different theories of state intervention, both fail to consider adequately the social relations associated with the provision of any good classified as 'collective consumption'.

Existence of state intervention seems the most convincing of the attempted definitions of collective consumption(3). Yet it has severe weaknesses. To define a sphere of consumption simply on the basis of some form of state intervention into its provision hardly distinguishes any activity because of the pervasive nature of the state. In building provision, for instance, it is difficult to find any structure of provision that has not been substantially influenced by the state. But to try and rescue the concept of collective consumption by limiting the form that state intervention may take when classifying an activity as 'collective' is both arbitrary and unreasonable. Theret (1982), for example, seems to be suggesting in his definition of collective consumption that state intervention has to be financial (involving a subsidy or other direct state expenditure). Even on immediate economic criteria alone, it is easy to see that the state might have a much greater financial effect on a structure of building provision through the legal apparatus and taxation policies. Laws that enabled particular social agents to appropriate enormous tax-free profits from urban development in the 19th century were common and their creation was an explicit policy of many governments. Such state-induced land gains acted as a greater stimulus to those structures of building provision than do many present-day direct subsidies.

(3) See Theret (1982) for an analysis of the pitfalls of the 'physical characteristics' approach.

Harvey's analysis of the built environment

In a series of writings stretching over a decade, Harvey has been interested in exploring the role of the built environment under capitalism. By focusing on the built environment - "by which I mean the totality of physical structures - houses, roads, factories, offices, sewage systems, parks, cultural institutions, education facilities, and so on" (1976, page 265)-he avoids all the problems of trying to define the urban as a theoretical object. As a real object, the built environment can hardly be more 'concrete'. Moreover, by looking at the role of the built environment under capitalism, Harvey has to look at the social agents that are involved.

In fact, Harvey's writings over the years can be interpreted as a series of attempts to examine different aspects of building provision, albeit with successive modifications to earlier positions. There is an initial interest in the theory of rent (Harvey, 1973); onto which is then transposed an examination of 'finance capital' (Harvey, 1974; Harvey and Chaterjee, 1974); following that there is an analysis of class struggle around the built environment between labour and capital (Harvey, 1976). Later writings switch emphasis towards a more global scale: the place of the built environment in the overall process of accumulation. Investment in the built environment is examined for its role as a sustainer of demand in a capitalist system said to be chronically short of markets. Suburbanisation in postwar USA, for example, is seen as performing the dual function of bolstering demand via consumerism and of sanitising key sections of the working class of anticapitalist political leanings (Harvey, 1975; 1976). The final phase is one of placing investment in the built environment by the state and private capital in the context of the temporal sequence of booms and slumps in accumulation as a whole. Initially, a substantial 'switching' of investment in and out of the built environment is envisaged, depending on whether the primary circuit of productive capital is booming or stagnating (Harvey, 1978).

The breadth of Harvey's analysis and his continual attempts to reformulate what he regards as the weakest elements of his earlier arguments are both impressive. Yet, consistently in his work an overhelming capital logic appears. The real-life 'mediations' and complications that the social relations of the built environment generate within capitalist societies are all shown to be chimeras (4); concealing, but only weakly, the fundamental struggle between capital and labour in which the first has not only got the upper hand but also a permanently decisive one. Capital-the big 'C' - always knows what it wants and always gets its own way (5).

The capital logic of Harvey's work is continually expressed in the functionalism assigned to the built environment. With only a degree of oversimplification, his general conclusion can be summarised as saying that whatever is happening in the built environment it will eventually be resolved to the benefit of the undifferentiated interests of capital in general, even if that resolution generates further problems that have to be resolved in turn.

Two examples can be used to illustrate the point:

(1) The growth of mass homeownership is said to benefit capital, as it gives workers property to defend and an ideology conducive to capitalism. Criticisms of this view of owner-occupation as an instrument of the capitalist class are now extensive (for example, Ball, 1983; Gray, 1982; Saunders, 1979).

(4) The reduction of social relations and struggles over the built environment to the capital-labour relation is clear in the following quote:

> "Conflicts in the living place are, we can conclude, mere reflections of the underlying tension between capital and labour. (Rent) Appropriators and the construction fraction mediate the forms of conflict-they stand between capital and labour and thereby shield the source of tension from view. The surface appearance of conflicts around the built environment-the struggle against the landlord or against the urban renewal-conceals a hidden essence that is nothing more than the struggle between capital and labour" (Harvey, 1976, page 289).

(5) For criticisms of capital logic in economic and political analysis see Fine and Harris (1979) and Jessop (1982).

(2) With regard to ground rent and the role of landed property, after some initial speculations on the effect of differential access to credit on the structure of urban residential patterns, culminating in the notion of class monopoly rent (Harvey, 1974), Harvey has concentrated on the potential benefits and barriers to accumulation represented by rent and landed property. Whilst recognising the potential problems posed by landed property, Harvey has tended to emphasise what he regards as the benefits. In particular, he has suggested that rent orders the spatial distribution of landed uses in the most profitable way: coming close in a number of key respects to neoclassical urban rent theory (Breugel, 1975). However, the search for the coordinating role seems teleologically to determine the conclusions reached rather than the arguments themselves, as they are devoid of the analysis of concrete situations that would be necessary to substantiate the claim, and this work contrasts sharply with other theoretical work. The point is most clearly seen in Harvey's argument that landed property must necessarily become purely a financial asset (Harvey, 1982, page 371), although it is theoretically difficult to understand why and contradicts the empirical work that has been done on the differentiations within landed property (compare Massey and Catalano, 1978).

Little in-depth analysis of the concrete forms of provision of the built environment is required. Once a function is theoretically deduced no further examination of the issue is required, so only schematic models of landed property, housing landlords, finance capital, and construction interests are required. Once again, therefore, the social relations of building provision in Harvey's work are relegated to an unjustified obscurity.

Political implications

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Treating the built environment in functional terms or as items of collective consumption leads to very limited political strategies. Take, for instance, the case of highlighting the need to give greater political support to a mass struggle over ~~of highlighting the need to give greater political support to a mass struggle over~~ some collective consumption good, say housing. The strategy envisaged by collective consumption theorists would be for mass struggles to be organised against the state, at local or national levels, to force state intervention. Analytically, the state is forced into the role of simply being an instrument for the social groupings that can grab the levers of power; a role that successive social democratic governments have found in practice the state cannot perform. But, in terms of political campaigning, by focusing on the role of the state, the current providers of the collective consumption good, housing, are not the central focus of criticism and attack. One consequence is that there is virtually no assessment of the reaction of those agencies to campaigns to improve mass housing provision. Yet those agencies will probably try to counteract political campaigns that threaten their interests. The strategies devised by the collective consumption theorists, in other words, fail to take adequate account of the relevant political forces that contemporarily exist and of the likely political alliances between them.

One final point should be made about the political implications of theories of collective consumption. They remain trapped in the ideologies and rhetoric of distributional struggle, rather than treating distributional issues as but one element in the transformation of forms of provision. Calculations are made of the effect on particular groupings of a level of collective consumption provision in terms of changes in living standards, ways of life, etc, or on forms of accumulation, rates of profit, etc. Such rsults are the effect of a redistribution of the social product by the state through collective consumption. For collective consumption theorists, it is the scale and forms

of collective consumption as use values that are of paramount importance, not the actual relations of provision of the entities classified as collective consumption. Yet surely one of the most important lessons of post-1945 welfare state mechanisms is that the social relations of provision are as important, if not more important, in producing long-term social transformations.

Wide differences in social relations can be seen, for example, in health care-compare insurance schemes versus direct state provision of health care facilities. With the built environment, social relations are similarly paramount: British council housing, for instance, is not the same as the limited-profit private companies that frequently dominate social housing in other Western European countries. Whereas to label state intervention into owner-occupation and rented housing as principally variations on the theme of collective consumption is to miss the significance of the differences in their structures of provision (Ball, 1983).

Why are the social relations of building provision ignored?

Why should the 'blind spot' over the built environment in Marxist urban studies have arisen? The gap arises from the theoretical way in which building provision has been understood. Building provision has been treated as the physical framework around which other social processes take place rather than as an integral element of them. This has led to built structures being conceptualised in functional terms alone. The usual types of questions asked bring out the functionalism clearly. Housing, for example, is a useful object as a means of shelter: so who needs housing and who is going to pay for it? Roads and mass-transmit systems similarly help to facilitate the spread of suburbanisation: with what effect on society and did it help put off a chronic lack of demand in post-1945 capitalism, as Harvey and others have argued?

The functionalism does not only relate to the uses to which buildings are put. The provision of buildings also can be treated as a functional means of making money. The role of 19th century landowners and land speculators in transforming the built environment for the financial benefits it gave them, for example, has been well documented (Cannadine, 1980; Gravejat, 1985, and Offer, 1981). Similarly, the attractiveness of property investments for certain types of financial capital over the past twenty years or so is now well known (Massey and Catalamo, 1978). But, theoretically, these features remain isolated rather than integral components of the place of the built environment under capitalism.

Isolation of the analysis of the built environment has remained despite the years of heart-searching over the content of urban studies. Lebas (1981) in her survey essay of over a decade of debate reproduces the theoretical passivity assigned to building provision:

> "Always uneasy with definitions of the 'urban',...this research, after a necessary and fruitful attempt at a theoretically rigorous recreation of the urban, may have found a truer and more immediate concern in the question of how urban social organisations discipline and order everyday life" (page xi).

Proctor (1983) in a survey of Castells's work from a non-Marxist perspective is even more sure of the dichotomy between the social creation of the built environment and the social processes that exist within that built space, and of the irrelevance of the first to the second.

> "Does 'spatial form' refer to the organisation of space or the organisation of social institutions in space? The former refers to the construction and organisation of the built environment. The latter refers to the articulation of organised social relationship within spatially defined units" (page 91).

Confusion over concepts, it seems, leads to the shunting of real processes into separate theoretical boxes, and on those boxes are written labels which state that only one box is to be opened at a time.

I do not want to knock the idea that functions exist. What I want to suggest instead is that functions alone are not enough. Built structures obviously have certain physical peculiarities which make it possible to identify them as such. But, in capitalist societies, those physical characteristics in combination with the dominant social relations of those societies create unique forms of provision. To remain at the level of functions ignores the peculiarities that this uniqueness creates.

The point at issue is fundamentally an economic one concerning the social relations through which buildings are produced. The longevity and spatial specificity of built structures makes it impossible for the capitalist producers of buildings to appropriate most of the revenue derived from their creation and existence. They try. But so do others-such as landowners, land speculators and developers, financiers, and property owners. The class struggle in the provision of the built environment, therefore, is not a simple one between capitalist and worker. Building capital moreover does not necessarily play the pivotal role. In other words, the situation of industrial capital is weaker for this particular component of capitalist societies than in most other spheres of production (Ball, forthcoming). This does not mean that capitalist builders necessarily earn a lower than average rate of profit. The weakness instead relates to the options open to them to alter and transform the economic environment in which they operate (Ball, 1985a). The consequences for the functional uses to which buildings are put are enormous. So, although it is recognised that the distinctiveness of the production of the built environment is one of degree only, it must be recognised theoretically that the production of buildings cannot be subsumed under a general model of industrial capital accumulation and ignored.

There are consequently good theoretical reasons, embedded within the Marxist theory of capital accumulation, for

suggesting that social relations of building provision are important when considering the uses to which buildings are put. Production and consumption cannot be divorced, as is indicated by use of the word **provision**. The argument above also suggests why it is important to define structures of building provision in terms of the economic relations between social agents.

Structures of building provision

Creating and using built structures involves particular sets of social agents defined by their economic relation to the physical process of provision itself. Each historically specific set of social agents can be defined as a structure of building provision. By provision is meant the production, exchange, distribution, and use of a built structure. Involved may be a landowner, a developer, a building firm, building workers, financiers, building owners, and final users. Office development in Britain, for instance, commonly links together a landowner, a property company, a building contractor, building workers, a financial institution as final owner of the property, and a private firm as final user and rent payer. Public infrastructure, on the other hand, generally involves a state agency as instigator and final owner, plus landowners, builders, and final users.

To give the notion of structures of building provision more than descriptive content, some formulation of the nature of the relations between the constituent social agents must be made. It is the economic interrelations between them that are central. Examining a structure of building provision consequently involves specifying the economic roles of particular social agents, their influence on each other, and evaluating the factors which determine those economic mechanisms. The determining factors themselves may or may not have an economic content; for example, the state could implement laws prescribing certain actions or give subsidies to one type of social agent.

To take another example as illustration, large-scale financial institutions (especially pension funds and insurance companies) in many countries have become substantial owners of office property. Their desire for safe investment returns encourages them to be office-rent receivers. Their intervention helps to determine the yields on office ownership and also affects the office-development cycle. Yields on alternative nonproperty investments influence institutions' interest in investing in property and, hence, the relative return from doing so. This leads to particular patterns of property yields over the course of general economic cycles, and helps to determine the timing of office booms when new supply races ahead of existing office demand. Such mechanisms of office ownership obviously have knock-on effects on the other social agents involved in this form of building provision. Similarly, land-use planning controls and building ordinances have an important influence on the possibility and types of office building at particular locations. These are cases of direct political intervention into a structure of provision.

From the brief description of office development just given, it is clear that the social relations of building provision cannot be isolated from the wider social context in which they exist. The linkages between any particular structure of building provision and the wider social environment can be categorised in many ways depending on the questions being asked. Here I should like to concentrate on only three of them. The first type of linkage is **functional**; for example, the usefulness of office property as a sphere of investment for the particular financial institutions described above. A myriad of potential functions exists and they have been widely explored in the urban studies literature. The second type of linkage can broadly be described as **historical**. Built structures last for a long time and once in existence they influence the pattern of life within a city and also economic and social interaction at a much wider scale. The fixity of the physical structure of towns is an obvious example. And the sheer cost of creating and transforming the built environment gives cumulative inertia to many urban hierarchies (though not permanence as the problem of inner-city

decline in Britain has shown). The final broad category is that of the **political**. State intervention into the built environment and struggles over the content of that intervention obviously are major influences on the pattern and magnitude of development and in determining which social agents are the main beneficiaries as the history of land-use planning or the cycle of expansion and decline of state construction expenditure since World War 2 illustrate.

None of the three types of linkage can be understood in the absense of the others. One example of the interdependency of the three is the issue of slum clearance. The demolition of slums may involve one or more of many potential structures of building provision. The history of British slum clearance exhibits such diversity. In the early 19th century, for instance, in the comparatively rare instances when slums were demolished rather than created, clearance was undertaken solely for the profitability of the redevelopment. Slums, however, were not simply a physical impediment, the cost of whose demolition had to be included in the financing of the new project. Often the existence of slums could determine the location and viability of a development scheme. This was the case with St. Pancras station in London. Built in the 1870s, the route of the railway deliberately went through poor housing areas to minimise land costs and political protest (Kellett, 1969). (Modern urban motorways have a propensity to do the same). Towards the end of the 19th century, state bodies, such as the Metropolitan Board of Works in London, combined with charitable housing associations to deal with poor housing conditions (Wohl, 1977) whereas in the 20th century, the state, especially through council housing provision, has been the central agent.

Whatever type of building provision is involved, however, it is associated with wider social processes. Slum clearance, for instance, may improve the productive potential of a work force; the manner in which it is undertaken may also reproduce or transform particular ways of living and the ideologies and community organisations associated with them; slum clearance may head off political discontent (via the 'bulldozer' strategy of Haussmann or the 'Home for Heroes' approach of Lloyd

George or its 'New Deal' variant in the USA); more generally, such state-initiated land-use transformations way bolster the image of political reformism. Whatever the structures of building provision involved and the functional and political effects of slum clearance, their historical contingency should be obvious if for no other reason than that slums must exist in the first place to be cleared.

Competition between structures of building provision

Two forms of social struggle over building provision have been discussed so far; (1) conflicts between the social agents involved in a structure of building provision, and (2) conflicts involving one or more of those agents and wider social and economic processes. Another dimension is competition between agents in different structures of provision. Such competition may occur over land, producing the distinct hierarchy of land use common to most large cities and towns. This type of competition is frequently located in the land market, where one type of building provision has to pay a price high enough to commandeer the land for its product.

Competition between structures of building provision, however, is not simply spatial. Different social relations associated with the same useful building product may exist at any point in time. This may generate a struggle for dominance by one of them. The history of housing provision shows many examples. Sometimes the competition takes an overtly economic form as in the transition from feudal to capitalist housing provision in the early 19th century (Ball, 1981) or in the demise of private renting and the growth of owner-occupation in the first quarter of 20th century Britain. Usually, in such cases, *political* interventions have created the conditions under *which economic* competition takes place. At other times, *some of the social* agents involved in one structure *of provision may* support political and ideological *campaigns* against others (owner-occupation versus council *housing* in post-1945 Britain is a good example). Building users can have an important influence

on such over political competition. Council housing instead of private rental provision, for example, was the principal working-class political demand over housing in Britain from the 1900s to the 1960s. Most political activity is likely to involve changing the economic conditions affecting forms of building provision via state credit and direct subsidies, taxation policies, state infrastructure spending, land-use planning, building bylaws, and other legislative measures.

It is important not to restrict the notion of competition to that between knowing subject with clearly articulated aims. Sometimes agencies do adopt that mantle. British building societies, for instance, have taken it upon themselves to popularise owner-occupation and steadfastly to support the present way it is provided in Britain. Frequently, they espouse their cause through criticism of other forms of housing provision especially council housing. But building societies do this in their own interests and in their own ideological discourse. They are not the personified representatives of a structure of provision, being instead merely self-appointed ones.

Structures of building provision have no subjectivity. Their form or coherence may not even be recognised by the agents operating within them. Competition between structures of building provision instead, in general terms, means that the existence of one affects others. That competition may be for land, over political influence and state intervention, or for product markets, or over other key aspects of commodity exchange and production.

Inability to discover individual social agents who can articulate the nature of competition between structures of building provision imposes limits on empirical study. The nature and content of competition has to be deduced through analysis of given historical situations, as part of the overall process of unravelling the dynamic of particular structures of provision. This approach contrasts sharply with many theories of land-use change which start off with preconceived fixed notions of the competition between land uses. Functionalism and distributional conflict consequently dominate their conclusions.

Theoretical status

What type of theoretical explanation is being suggested in this approach? Does it necessarily imply a hierarchy of explanatory factors, running from the economic to the political, for instance?

I would argue that the analysis of structures of building provision is a means of ordering and evaluating particular sets of empirical material rather than an explanation in itself. The analysis enables the potential influence of a particular set of social relations on certain to be considered. The conclusion might be that those social relations have considerable or little role to play for the issue in question: they do, however, stop the provision of the built environment from being ignored.

Explanations obviously depend on the theoretical approach adopted. Marxist theory suggests a particular ordering of relationships between social agents within structures of provision. Each type of agent has definable economic interests; those interests may bring them into periodic conflict with others, such as can occur between capitalist building firms and landowners. Alternatively, interests may be so different that they are fundamantally in contradiction, such as between capitalist building firms and building workers (though such a statement, of course, does not rule out the possibility of collaboration and incorporation of workers' demands with those of capital at specific conjunctures). Such conflicts and contradictions give structures of building provision an internal dynamic. They have a history, in other words. That history is recorded in attempts by social agents to overcome difficulties produced by conflict and to ameliorate in their own interest contradictions within structures of provision.

The possibility of conflict and the inevitability of contradiction can be deduced theoretically. The theory of rent, for example, highlights a potential antagonism between landowners and building firms (Ball, 1985b); whereas the theory of capital

accumulation indicates the contradictions between capitalist and worker inherent in the accumulation process. Yet such theories can provide only a starting point and/or means of exploration of the content of actual structures of building provision. Particular historical situations created their own dynamics and they must be analysed specifically rather than subsumed under erroneous sweeping generalisations.

An important implication of historical specificity is that there can be no general theory of the evolution of building provision (capitalist or otherwise). Nor is it possible to have a general theory of urban development or some notion of the capitalist (or socialist) city. To do so would be to reintroduce a purely functionalist perspective and deny the primacy and effectivity of social (or class) struggle. Such a general theory would imply that outcomes in terms of the built environment were known prior to (and therefore independent of) the struggles between the social agents involved.

This is not to deny the importance of a clear theoretical perspective when investigating the social creation of the built environment. Theory and theoretical deductions are vital if particular concrete situations are to be understood. Otherwise they simply remain particular with no understanding of what caused them. The voluminous literature on urban history illustrates that, although newly dug up historical facts are fascinating, little progress can be made in understanding social developments without a clearly articulated theory(6).

(6) The gradualism of much social history has similar roots in the complexity of particular empirical events. Slow evolution over time seems to be the only process linking those events together (compare Fraser (1973) on the evolution of the British welfare state).

The state

The role of the state in the creation of the built environment is substantial. Earlier sections have highlighted its role in terms of direct intervention as land-use planner, infraestructure generator, and in the creation of state-orchestrated forms of provision, such as British council housing. Similarly, the indirect role of the state as guarantor of key components of specific forms of provision is important. The significance of this indirect role can be seen with respect to land development. The creation of a legal basis for easy land transfer (not always an easy task as Offer (1977; 1981) has shown); the opening up of land sites via infrastructure expenditure; the maintenance of their subsequent value via land-use controls; and the nearly total absence of land-development taxation in many advanced capitalist countries have all played major roles in determining the patterns and enourmous cost of urban development. Land-development policies do not, of course, refer to land itself but to the creation and reproduction of social relations associated with the development of land (McMahon, 1985).

The role of the state with respect to particular social agents associated with building provision has been substantial. In many cases, state actions have been one of the ways by which specific agencies have gained dominance over aspects of building provision; for instance, in Britain by aiding building capital over precapitalist forms of building in the 18th and 19th centuries and in facilitating the growth of the building society movement over other potential forms of owner-occupied housing finance. More generally, state actions have ensured the reproduction of the dominance of capital over building provision in situations where that dominance was politically or economically under threat - as, for instance, bailing out financial institutions from their reckless speculation in office developments in the mid-1970s, and in the ways in which social housing has been set up in Western Europe (where rather than

removing capitalist relations from housing provision, capital always has played a key role in financing and building social housing-only private landlords have, in effect, been replaced by the state or private nonprofit or low-profit institutions). Most money-dealing institutions associated with land development are similarly either the consequence of state actions (such as Crédit Foncier in France) or are protected and proscribed by state laws. Building professionals, such as architects and surveyors, depend on benevolent state control for the maintenance of their status, their power, and their quasi-monopolistic position. The weak position of building workers, on the other hand, has partially been created by that other aspect of state power: the iron first of repression (Ball, forthcoming).

Within the context of structures of building provision it is importante to be aware of the limitations as well as the strengths of state power. The state is not some omnipotent agency able to dictate its will to the rest of society. It instead is a site (but only one of them) of struggle between social agents. The fallacy of the overwhelming power of the state, however, has had an enormous effect on social research, from which building provision has not been exempt. The neglect of the social creation of the built environment in urban studies owes much to the idea that the state can do what it wants in this sphere. The history of land-use planning theories and policies illustrates this characteristic clearly (Ball, 1983). Debate over housing provision has also been narrowly limited to discussion of state policies towards specific tenures on the assumption that, once the state has decided on a particular course of action, such as encouraging owner-occupation, the programme rapidly comes to fruition. Analysis of structures of building provision helps to put the role of the state in perspective.

A common characteristics of advanced capitalist societies since World War 2 has been growing intervention by the state into building provision (although there has been a substantial restructuring of its role in most advanced capitalist countries during the 1980s, including a sharp cutback in direct expenditure on new construction).

What is most noticeable about the postwar years of major state intervention is that they confound the frequently expounded dichotomy between public intervention and the capitalist interests dominating most structures of building provision. Prime beneficiaries of state involvment have been the large capitals active in building provision. In particular, three types of capital can be identified as gainers (often the categories overlap in practice). Financial capital, in the form of interest-bearing capital, such as insurance companies and pension funds, have gained from the meteoric rise of property as a sphere of investment. Financial capital, in the form of money-dealing capital, has also gained tremendously from the evolution of housing markets (that is, mortgage institutions, etc) and through being key agents in setting up the financial side of property deals (that is, banks, etc). Other types of merchant capital have gained as well: such as property developers and land dealers. A glance at the curriculum vitaes of the leading politicians in the 1980-84 Reagan Administration would demonstrate how successful such merchants have been in some advanced capitalist countries. Last, building firms have benefitted substantially; their frequent criticism of the way various governments have planned state construction expenditure illustrates the importance of the public sector to them.

Common trends in capitalist countries since the 1940s over the role of the state in the built environment makes the postulation of a general theory of state intervention tempting. Such temptations, I would suggest, should be resisted. It is difficult to see how a supposed theory of the capitalist state can be presented in anything but functionalist terms, reproducing the difficulties and absences of functionalism raised earlier. I would agree with Mingione that

> "it is impossible to establish a fixed typology of relations between class struggles and the accumulation process, on the side, and the state and political actions and organisations on the other" (1981, page 34).

Such a position on the state, of course, applies to any particular sphere of its actions, including land-use planning. So, once again, it must be said, for example, that there can be no general theory of land-use planning in capitalist societies. Such planning can, and does, take many forms depending on the precise content of social relations within individual countries (7).

Certain pressures on state intervention into land use, nevertheless, can be identified from the dynamic of capital accumulation. Competition between structures of building provision and between individual agents within them makes some form of state intervention imperative. To an extent, the need for intervention results from the spatial characteristics of land use (in particular, spatial proximity and the fact that the gains from transformations of localities cannot be entirely privately appropriated). Fragmented landownership and the benefits to be derived from some type of coordination of land use impose pressures on the state to use its legal powers to overcome the barriers of private ownership. It can ban specified land uses, compulsorily purchase land, or insist that uses conform to some sort of plan. Large sources of credit are also needed for many aspects of urban infrastructure (water, sewerage, transportation, etc). The state is in a unique position to assemble credit and to ensure, through its powers of general taxation, that when private agencies make the funds available to the state those private interests get at least the going rate of return on their capital.

It is frequently argued that when the state builds public facilities (such as roads) for which little or no charge is made the expenditure is devalorised capital (compare Lojkine, 1976). Such arguments, however, confuse the definitions of capital used in neoclasical economics-anything not used up within a given period-with Marxist notions of use value, exchange value, revenue, and capital. When the state borrows capital from private agencies to fund, say, a road, that capital is not

(7) On the development of the British land-use planning system from within this theoretical perspective, see Ball (1983, chapters 7 and 8).

devalorised. It earns a rate of interest and is paid back in full under the agreed terms of the loan. Once the state has received the loan as one source of its revenue, the money no longer constitutes capital. The state simply spends this income, in the same way that an individual spends his or her income, on a useful product: in this case, a road. The road constitutes a use value with no exchange value and hence cannot be capital. Others may profit from the existence of the road, but their profit from their capital should not be confused with the state expenditure. Beneficiaries and benefactors are not interchangeable, as anyone who writes a will is aware.

Competition between structures of building provision can lead to state intervention. This may occur when the competition affects patterns of land use in ways that impose substantial economic and social costs on particular social groups as users of urban space. Where the latter have some form of political power, they may force action out of the state through land-use controls, public provision of facilities and services, or the allocation of land to specific uses. Some of the struggles that have arisen have been well documented, if frequently misspecified, in the literature on urban social movements (Castells, 1977; 1983; Pickvance, 1976).

Often the land market rather than the state is seen as the main spatial organiser of urban land-uses. Neoclassical economists generally claim that the operations of the land market produce reasonably socially efficient land-use configurations. From within their perspective, the state has to intervene only to correct market failures. Such failures arise because of externalities, where some of the costs or benefits of a private agent's economic actions are not reflected in the economic calculation that affects his or her actions. Market failure occurs, for example, with the creation of beautiful views which cannot be charged for, or when some of the costs of an activity are imposed on others, as with air pollution. Where a high degree of externality prevails and the investment is large scale and indivisible, a public (or collective consumption) good is created (Baumol and Oates, 1975; Head, 1962; Samuelson, 1954). Neoclassical economics, in this way, finds partial justification

for state intervention in the provision of urban facilities and for limited state control of the land market (Foster, 1973). Justification has been achieved, however, through externalising state actions from the operation of the land market itself. Like the US cavalry of B-movie fame, the state is only supposed to appear when all else has failed. This idea contrasts strongly with the view expressed here that state intervention is a necessary condition for most structures of building provision to exist. The land market, moreover, is not a starting point but a consequence of the interaction of competing structures of building provision. The concept of externality correctly grasps some of the physical consequences of social interaction but then promptly proceeds to abstract them from the social context in which they exist.

Specifying mechanisms which lead to pressures for state intervention obviously is not the same as concluding that state intervention will occur or knowing what form it will take. That depends on specific historic conjunctures. Even spatial proximity and the need for large-scale credit need not necessarily result in state intervention. For instance, many estate developments in 18th and 19th century London or the factory towns of the 19th and 20th centuries emerged without direct state intervention. Although it should be noted for both cases that the localities sometimes resembled states within states, under the control of a landed aristocracy (like the Bedford Estate in London's Bloomsbury) or under the control of a capitalist patriarch (like Saltaire, Pullman, and Port Sunlight).

What is clear from the development of capitalism is that the pressures for state intervention in building provision have changed over time. The scale of capitalist production, the ability of financial capital to switch enormous funds into and out of property ownership and development, the growth of motorised transport, the emergence of articulate and effective local political protest, and the development of welfare state style mechanisms, amongst other things, have led since the 1940s to new dimensions of state intervention into building provision. Forms of state intervention, however, continually change. It would be a mistake to assume on the basis of events from the

1940s though to the 1970s that increased state intervention in this sphere is here to stay; as though advanced capitalist countries have reached a particular stage in the extent of state involvment in building provision and that a 'higher' one was just around the corner. Only the outcomes of concrete social struggles can determine the future path of state action.

Conclusions

It should be stressed again that an alternative urban theory is not being proposed here. The concepts being argued for, rather than constituting an all-embracing general theory, are a means of ordering material so that it may be investigated. Many topics might not even require analysis of the built environment, but a lot do. Nor does this approach suggest that economic processes are the dominant cause of any event. It simply provides a means by which that possibility may be invesrigated. If the influence of economic processes is not explicity considered, they have an alarming tendency to slip in as dominant explanations through the 'back door' of nonexplanation. Underconsumptionist theories of capitalist economic crisis seem, for instance, to play this role in much of the Marxist urban studies literature (compare Castells, 1977 and Mingione, 1981).

Ultimately, the importance of structures of building provision on any social event is an empirical question. I find it difficult, for example, to see how many housing questions can be considered in their absence. Yet, any such statement must remain contingent. Theory will not let us off the hook of doing the donkey work of empirical analysis, it can only make the analysis worthwhile.

Fortunately, a growing, if still small, literature has emerged over the past decade on the social agents involved in the creation of the built environment in advanced capitalist societies. Landowners, land developers property companies, financial institutions, building contractors, speculative housebuilders, building workers, and the state as land-use planning authority and major spender on the built environment

have all been subject to various degrees of scrunity, especially in Britain and France (8).

Looking at the social relations of building provision not only puts focus on some key 'urban' problems, but also necessitates confronting the issues of historical and spatial specificity. The histories of individual cities have echoes in the built forms that make up their physical structure. More important, the existence of those forms depends on the social agents involved in providing them, and the use they are now put to depends on the current social relations of building provision.

Within the social relations of building provision are agents whose actions can only be understood by exploring theoretical issues which have been regarded as central in the urban debates of recent years. The uses to which buildings are put raise all of the issues associated with the role of urban areas in the spheres of production, exchange and consumption. The state enters both in terms of its interventions into orchestrating the uses of the built environment and also in terms of its attempts to control how and where they provided through land-use planning, housing and land policies, etc. The position of landed property in influencing the provision of buildings raises the problem of the effects of land rent. The construction

(8) Massey and Catalano (1978) examine the various types of landownership in Britain. Topalov (1973; 1981) has considered the position of the state landowners, promoters, and financiers in French housing development. Ball (1983) provides an analysis of the role of speculative housebuilders and others involved in owner-occupied housing provision in Britain. Minns (1980) in a wider analysis of British pension funds and insurance companies has examined their role in office commercial development and ownership. Ambrose and Colenutt (1975) explore the UK property world in the early years of the 1970s. See also Barlett Inernational Summer Schools (1979-1985).
Although this list is by no means exhaustive for France and the United Kingdom, the situation in other countries is less well known (at least in the English-language literature). Three important sources for the USA in a generally sparse literature are Checkoway (1980), Clawson (1971), and Grebler (1973). With the phenomenal growth of research on urban history since the 1960s more, surprisingly, is often known about 19th century development processes than about those today (see literature survey by Johnson and Pooley (1982)).

industry is the point of production of the built environment. The role of each of these social agents and others has to be explored and the interlinkages between them understood. But this has to be done with the knowledge that those relationships are subject to continuous historical change and so cannot be mapped out in an abstract and static way. In addition, these social relations should not be simply seen in terms of distributional struggle, in which one agent 'gains' economically or politically at the expense of another in an otherwise static context. Instead, struggles between social agents affect the whole way in which buildings are provided-which includes production and exchange as well as distribution.

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