

Harvey, David. *Consciousness and the Urban Experience: Studies in the History and Theory of Capitalist Urbanization*. Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985. Pp. xix, 293. Tables, maps, illustrations, index. \$22.50 (U.S.)
Harvey David. *The Urbanization of Capital: Studies in the History and Theory of Capitalist Urbanization*. Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985. Pp. xvii, 239. Tables, maps, index. \$22.50 (U.S.)

David G. Burley

Volume 15, numéro 1, june 1986

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1018918ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1018918ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine

ISSN

0703-0428 (imprimé)

1918-5138 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Burley, D. G. (1986). Compte rendu de [Harvey, David. *Consciousness and the Urban Experience: Studies in the History and Theory of Capitalist Urbanization*. Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985. Pp. xix, 293. Tables, maps, illustrations, index. \$22.50 (U.S.) / Harvey David. *The Urbanization of Capital: Studies in the History and Theory of Capitalist Urbanization*. Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985. Pp. xvii, 239. Tables, maps, index. \$22.50 (U.S.)]. *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*, 15(1), 115-117. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1018918ar>

functions to perform that do not necessarily relate to the socio-demographic characteristics of the population, better measures must be found to see how socio-economic factors are translated into policies. In order to do so, Sharpe and Newton make use of two criteria that relate to cities as entities — their position in the urban hierarchy and their social and economic role within the national economic system.

Relating services and expenditures to the city's position in the urban hierarchy is done to take account of the fact that bigger cities offer a wider range of services. The authors' empirical examination bears this out — certain services (libraries, refuse, special education, police) have high levels of spending from cities high in the urban hierarchy. The authors argue two reasons for these links — larger cities do provide certain specialized services and larger cities are used by a wider network of population which, in itself, increases the cost of certain services.

The second criteria used is that of the particular social and economic role played by the city in the national economic system. Cities differ in their economic base and these differences are of importance in determining the kinds of expenditures and service levels that the governments engage in. The authors determine four types of cities — industrial, commercial, residential and, a somewhat special case, cities where tourism is particularly important. The influence of these types on expenditure levels partly relates to demographic considerations (seaside resort towns have the largest retired population and they also spend the least on children and education), but also partly to constraints imposed by the role the city plays in national economic terms. Once again the measurement used is compatible with the authors' understanding of the political process — local governments decide on a package of services to be offered and these decisions are not merely an abstract transmission of the individual characteristics of the population, they imply a decision of the government. The city has therefore a collective identity and this is what Sharpe and Newton have reflected in their measures.

The book also contributes to the debate over the determination of policy outcomes by refining the way in which political variables are measured. Sharpe and Newton distinguish between the influence of the parties and the influence of the party system. The results of their empirical investigation indicate the importance of politics — both parties and the party system influence expenditures. According to the authors' results it does make a difference who governs — “the Left party (Labour) tended to spend more on the ameliorative and redistributive services and the party of the Right (Conservative) tended to spend less on such services and more on the non-distributive services” (p. 214). But when parties have only narrow majorities they tend to be cautious and the link between ideology and spending is less evident. Perhaps not surprising results, but considering the number of studies that have argued that political factors are of little

significance to policy outcomes, it is important to see confirmation of the importance of politics.

It is interesting to reflect on the application of these findings to the Canadian context, particularly given the still existing built-in resistance to considering local government as political in this country. True we don't have Labour and Conservative parties as such at the local level but we do have municipal councils with people on them holding very different views on priority service areas and on the appropriate role for government. Yet the public sees only very vaguely that these differing views translate themselves into differences in what the local government decides to do. Arguments for the introduction of more organized parties at the local level here have often been made in terms of voter clarification. *Does Politics Matter?* reminds us that differing political visions also influence policy outcomes. This is an important conclusion given what looks to be a slow but persistent movement towards the more formal representation of political parties at the local level in the largest Canadian centres.

Does Politics Matter? is an important question. Sharpe and Newton do not resolve this question but their book does permit us to see how an analysis of policy outcomes can provide useful material for those of us who prefer to answer in the affirmative.

Caroline Andrew
Department of Political Science
Ottawa University

Harvey, David. *Consciousness and the Urban Experience: Studies in the History and Theory of Capitalist Urbanization*. Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985. Pp. xix, 293. Tables, maps, illustrations, index. \$22.50 (U.S.).

Harvey David. *The Urbanization of Capital: Studies in the History and Theory of Capitalist Urbanization*. Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985. Pp. xvii, 239. Tables, maps, index. \$22.50 (U.S.).

“The question of space,” David Harvey declares, “is surely too important to be left exclusively to geographers.” To argue this, Harvey has gathered together, and in some cases revised, a number of his previously published articles; supplementing these are several new studies, including an essay on mid-nineteenth-century Paris adumbrated in his last book, *The Limits to Capital* (Chicago, 1982). Indeed, as a whole, these two volumes follow that recent contribution to Marxist theory, elaborating at greater length upon the operation of capitalism in and across space. Too great a concern for the production process and insufficient for the circulation of capital, especially in consumption, have obscured the signif-

icance of spatial factors, Harvey contends. Only from the consumption of use values at the point of reproduction — separated from the point of production in space by market exchange and money — can the capitalist realize as profit surplus value created in production. Moreover, the capitalist has no immediate control over the social relations under which labour power, the commodity crucial for the production of surplus value, is produced and reproduced through consumption. Capitalists must strive to exert influence over workers at their point of reproduction if they wish control in production, and, thus, struggles in the living space over such issues as housing, education and health can reverberate through the work place. For Harvey, study of this necessitates an appreciation of space. But, more than the uneven geography of the location of production or the distance from production to consumption or the landscape within which labour power is reproduced, Harvey urges recognition of space as a basis for consciousness: if, as he argues, the urbanization of capital has created a second nature of built environments in the image of capitalism, then perception of that image, founded in consumers' struggles at the point of reproduction, can sustain class struggle and promote revolution.

The studies presented in *The Urbanization of Capital* explore in various ways the ongoing process whereby the circulation of capital creates physical and social landscapes in the image of capitalism at a certain time, only to destroy them as capitalism itself changes over time. This "creative destruction" arises from the contradictions inherent in the "spatial fixes" sought for problems of overaccumulation. Investment in the built environment — conceived by Harvey as a secondary circuit in the circulation of capital — switches surplus capital and labour out of production — the primary circuit. Contradictions, however, are inherent in this. Transportation facilities are built to export surpluses to peripheral areas and thereby create opportunities for the exploitation of uneven development. But, the drive of capital to shorten its circulation time across the spatial configurations separating the buying and selling of commodities impels capitalism to "annihilate space by time" through transportation and communication improvements. To the extent that time is shortened, uneven development and the vent for overaccumulation disappears.

Further, the ascendancy of finance capital in the twentieth century has involved the interpretation of overaccumulation as underconsumption to be resolved through the formation of and control over consumption habits at the point of reproduction — the city. In this, Harvey emphasizes the importance of housing and follows Henri Lefebvre who has argued in *La révolution urbaine* (Paris, 1970), that an increasing proportion of surplus value has been realized through the switch of surplus capital and labour to real estate development. But, consumption also presents potential contradictions. The value of capital invested in the production and delivery of existing consumption preferences

must be amortized before crises of overaccumulation demand the formation of new modes of consumption; if not, capital risks devaluation and destruction. Moreover, finance capital, by concentrating upon the mode of consumption, diverts capital from the production process and, thereby, diminishes the production of surplus value.

This association of finance capital with the city is necessary for Harvey to confront the recent challenge to the relevance of Marxist theory to urban politics voiced by Manuel Castells in *The City and the Grassroots* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1983). At issue is the apparent autonomy of urban politics from the historical process of class struggle. This Harvey accepts; but in one of the new articles in this volume "The Place of Urban Politics in the Geography of Uneven Capitalist Development," he argues that this autonomy is necessary for capitalist accumulation. Class-alliance urban politics derive from a common interest in social reproduction. Capital needs to reproduce, in the face of interurban competition, those spatial and locational conditions which segment labour markets regionally and contribute to that uneven development which present monopoly privileges at the level of production. Some factions of labour strive to protect those islands of relatively privileged consumption that through organization and struggle they have raised within "a sea of exploitation." As a result, urban governments act as entrepreneurs competing with each other to produce the preconditions for subsequent accumulation. Alliances, however, are unstable as class factions are pulled in different directions by self-interest and accommodation. Moreover, the tendency toward a "structured coherence" between modes of consumption and modes of production further threatens disruption: the unity of job and consumption opportunities within the urban area fixes a norm against which relative deprivation may be measured and which may stimulate class conflict.

This discussion of class-alliance politics provides the theoretical link to the companion volume, *Consciousness and the Urban Experience*, which argues that the urbanization of consciousness, which has accompanied, reinforced and been reinforced by the urbanization of capital, "splits the social and psychological foundations" for class struggle in political action. "Demand-side" capitalism stimulates consumption by attaching individualism and the realization of individuality to spending money: money spent in consumption purchases freedom from the alienation in production arising from the sale of labour power to earn money. "Narcissistic consumerism and inner longings for self-realization" are merged, then, in an urban consciousness that is individualistic and fragmented. Because of its real material base in the daily reproduction of labour power, Harvey claims that this cannot be dismissed as a false consciousness, although it is necessarily fickle in substance. Capitalism, as Marx explained, bestows material objects with the appearance of inherent qualities which obscure the social relations of their production. To Harvey, the city as fetish, then, necessitates

study of its semiotics, its system of signification, of the symbols which mediate consciousness and, by investing commodities with distinctive values, structures social relationships. To exemplify this approach, the volume reprints a study of the controversial building of the Basilica of Sacre-Coeur which followed the Paris Commune.

More ambitious is the 160 page essay on Paris from the 1848 Revolution to the Commune. During this period, following what Harvey identifies as the first full-fledged crisis of overaccumulation, the urbanization of capital began to reshape the Parisian landscape. Baron Hausmann's grand works and the attraction of finance capital to investments in the built environment liberated the city from "the almost medieval physical infrastructures" which constrained capitalist accumulation, from its old landscape and from those memories attached to it. In their stead, the segmentation of residential areas and the segregation of functions within the city supported contradictory consciousnesses. Hausmann and the *haute bourgeoisie* refused to conceive of Paris as more than a composite of diverse, shifting and nomadic individuals and interests from which no permanent community could form beyond that expressed in loyalty to the authority of Empire and the symbols of money. Though the spatial transformation destroyed the old Parisian neighbourhoods and *quartiers*, the specialization that its fine gradient of land rent imposed, concentrated in space class reproduction fragment by fragment. The "structured coherence" that this created formed a consciousness which penetrated "the veil of fetishism" of urban life. This was expressed in the production of symbols and the invention of traditions that created a new imagination and memory linking together disparate fragments of the working class and radical elements of the bourgeoisie. From this, and upon the new material base, sprang "the greatest class-based communal uprising in capitalist history" — the Paris Commune.

Harvey's defence of a material base for urban consciousness will be debated by theoreticians, more able and more inclined than this reviewer to question whether, in the final instance, consciousness formed in the social relations of production is more important. Still, his two volumes have persuaded this student of the history of capitalism to ignore less blithely the problems of space.

David G. Burley
Department of History
University of Winnipeg

Bodnar, John. *The Transplanted: A History of Immigrants in Urban America*. Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1985. Pp. xxi, 294. 17 Illustrations. \$27.50.

About twenty years ago a prominent historian lamented that immigration was one of the least studied chapters in American history. Since then there has been a great proliferation of studies, most of them conducted by new breeds of immigrant historians, labour historians, family historians, and ethnic historians of various stripes. *The Transplanted* is an attempt "to make something of a summary statement" (p. xv). Though limited to urban America, it is a synthesis of the voluminous research on this subject (some 400 titles are listed in a "selected" bibliography). Since most of these are narrow empirical studies of particular groups in particular times and places, there is obvious need for more general studies that not only synthesize, but also raise the analytical focus to a higher level of generality, one that hopefully will add theoretical perspective and new insight. Does *The Transplanted* succeed in this endeavor?

In his introduction Bodnar acknowledges the need "to move beyond the restricted field of vision" and "to move beyond the older framework of analysis" (p. xvii). In this respect, however, the book is disappointing. Bodnar seems to be groping for a framework of analysis. The term "capitalism" is invoked in the first two sentences of every chapter, but rarely appears again until the conclusion. Bodnar's stated objective is to examine how "capitalism was encountered in urban neighbourhoods, factories, mills, offices, mines, and homesteads," but there is only a thin analysis of structure and process. Rather the unit of analysis is the individual, and the focus is on how immigrants, as individuals and as members of groups, adjusted to the circumstances and exigencies of their immediate situation. For example, the chapter, Workers, Unions, and Radicals, examines how immigrants responded to the "political ideologies which pervaded the world of the immigrant worker and awaited selection" (p. 85). Only scant attention is given to the social forces and historical developments that defined these ideological choices in the first place. With his vague allusions to capitalism, Bodnar flirts with a larger theoretical framework, but it is not one that is integral to his rendering and analysis of immigrant history.

What Bodnar *does* do is to marshal together findings from disparate studies under a number of general headings, thus allowing for relevant comparisons and contrasts. For example, the first and longest chapter, The Homeland and Capitalism, describes conditions that different immigrant groups experienced in their respective countries of origin, and that induced them to emigrate. Successive chapters focus on families, workers, the immigrant middle class, the church, and immigrant relations to their native cultures and the cultural institutions of their adopted society. Here the book is at its synthetic best. Bodnar has sifted through the voluminous literature, organizing his empirical materials to point up areas of similarity and difference among groups on these selected topics. The density with which these facts are presented is not always conducive to readability, but there is much information compiled in these pages that will be of