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The City as a Social System

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Planners and social scientists tend to view the city from quite different perspectives. Most research in urban areas by social scientists, and anthropologists in particular, has been confined to small, manageable units of analysis such as distinct neighborhoods—most often a slum or shantytown, or single urban institutions, such as a school, a hospital, or a political party. The anthropologist analyzes this urban population in much the same way he would describe a primitive band or peasant village; he recognizes the need for relating his sample population to the larger urban complex of which they form a part, but he lacks the appropriate analytical tools or methodologies to deal with this larger framework. Hence the social scientist generally looks at the city from the viewpoint of “his” people, be they residents of a particular neighborhood, members of a political party, or patients in a mental hospital. The social scientist is the insider looking outward at the city from his particular vantage point.

The planner, however, has traditionally been more concerned with macroscopic rather than microscopic analysis. The problems with which the planner has had to deal, such as water supply, transportation systems, or municipal government, have forced the planner to concentrate his attention upon the

larger whole and to adopt a systems approach to the study of urban problems. The planner thus looks at the city from the point of view of the outsider; he is less concerned with one school, or one hospital, or even one neighborhood than with the rational allocation of resources over the total urban complex.

Clearly both approaches are inadequate to deal with the complexities of the urban milieu. Since the social scientist often fails to relate this data to the larger urban whole of which it forms a part, the impact of external forces upon his sample population is often neglected. Thus, a labor dispute in a factory or a clash over community control of a local school must be seen in terms of the power structure in the city as a whole. Similarly, a problem in unemployment in a slum neighborhood cannot be understood without reference to the total urban economic structure. The planner, on the other hand, often proposes solutions to urban problems based upon abstract concepts of “the public interest” or some other ideal definition of their client population. Since planners have been concerned almost exclusively with the larger whole, they have neglected the diversity of class differences, ethnic subcultures, age groups, and other factors within the city, all of whom express different

needs and demand different solutions.

How then can we reconcile the approaches of the planner and social scientist in order to bring about a more realistic picture of the city as a total social system? How can we combine the tools of both disciplines so as to enrich our picture of the urban milieu with the detailed, in-depth analysis of the social scientist and the capacity for large-scale analysis of the planner? These are some of the questions to which this symposium hopes to address itself. We have sought the cooperation of a variety of urban specialists so as to bring together the resources and viewpoints of a number of disciplines on this important problem. All of the speakers, however, share a concern with viewing the city as a total social unit rather than as fragmented institutions or isolated neighborhoods.

Several of the speakers look upon the power structure as providing the unifying framework for viewing the city as a social system. Badi Foster’s paper on “Urban Power Structure: A View from the Bottom” is based upon a year’s research in a Moroccan *bidonville* or shantytown, where he traced the power relations of 15 individuals as they extended through the urban milieu. Lisa Peattie’s paper on “Community, Interest Group, and Political Staging” will deal with the social and political

Speakers and Topics

Morning

The City as a Social System: Some Preliminary Remarks, Helen I. Safa (Rutgers University).

Urban Power Structure: A View from the Bottom, Badi Foster (Rutgers University).

Community, Interest Group, and Political Staging, Lisa Peattie (Massachusetts Institute of Technology).

Social Theory and Urban Policy, Howard Stanton (Clark University).

Ideologies in Social Research Ur-

ban Planning, Jane Reiner (visiting lecturer, Cornell University).

The Black Movement in Its Urban Context, Roy S. Bryce-Laporte (Yale University).

Afternoon

Housing as an Ecosystem, John F. C. Turner (Massachusetts Institute of Technology).

Housing, Settlement Types, Proletarianization, and Urban Social Organization: Rio and Lima, An-

thony Leeds (University of Texas).

Hippie Neighborhoods and Urban Spatial Systems, George Carey (Rutgers University).

Residential Neighborhoods and Urban Societies, Marc Fried (Boston College).

What Is Urban Social Organization?, Aidan Southall (University of Wisconsin).

Beyond the City: Need for a Theory, Suzanne Keller (Princeton University).

processes involved in advocacy planning in this country, particularly in the Boston area, where she has been an active participant. She has described the effect of the planning process upon the residents of a lower-class settlement in the new city of Ciudad Guyana, Venezuela, in her book *A View from the Barrio*.

Howard Stanton has worked extensively with Model Cities programs and other applied urban programs. His paper will address itself to the broad relations between "Social Theory and Urban Policy." He will be followed by Roy S. Bryce-Laporte who will speak on "The Black Movement in Its Urban Context." Bryce-Laporte has worked in Watts, in various cities of the United States, and in the Caribbean area.

A number of papers in the symposium relate to the spatial aspects of cities as forming the framework for holistic analysis. Thus, Anthony Leeds' paper on "Housing, Settlement Types, Proletarianization, and Urban Social Organization" compares different types of lower-class neighborhoods in Lima and Rio de Janeiro, where he is currently continuing his research on strati-

fication and urban power structures. Leeds has published extensively on Latin America and urbanization. John Turner has also worked in Latin America on squatter settlements as well as on low-cost housing programs in the United States. His paper on "Housing as an Ecosystem" will point out the policy implications of viewing housing as an open system (that is, related to other aspects of urban social organization) for areas undergoing rapid change.

George Carey's paper on "Hippie Neighborhoods and Urban Spatial Systems" looks upon hippies as an instrument for spontaneous renewal of blighted neighborhoods heretofore rejected by the middle class; this type of hippie "vanguard" movement is illustrated with reference to the Greenwich Village-East Village-Two Bridges sequence in New York City. Marc Fried has done extensive research in low-income areas, particularly in the Boston area. His paper on "Residential Neighborhoods and Urban Societies" will attempt to relate these two units of analysis within a meaningful framework.

The last two speakers in the sym-

posium address themselves to broad theoretical issues concerning the city as a social system. Aidan Southall's paper asks "What Is Urban Social Organization?," implying that we have not yet properly defined the field of urban research, nor have we determined what makes the city different from other forms of social organization. Southall has done extensive research on urbanization in East Africa, and is well known for his book *Townsmen in the Making* (co-authored by Peter Gutkind).

In her paper "Beyond the City: Need for a Theory," Suzanne Keller questions whether the city itself is the appropriate unit of analysis or whether we should look beyond the city toward a metropolitan or regional frame of reference.

The wealth of cross-cultural experience of the participants in this symposium, as well as their interdisciplinary perspective, should yield new and exciting insights into the city as a social system.

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Program information and registration forms for the meeting, hotels, and tours appear in the 21 November issue of Science. Information about tours, special exhibits, educational exhibits, the Science Film Theater, and musical events appear in the 31 October issue. Reports about symposia appear in the following issues: 19 Sept., "Tektite: A Study of Human Behavior in a Hostile Environment"; 26 Sept., "Expanding Horizons in Medical Education"; 3 Oct., "Education of the Infant and Young Child"; 10 Oct., "Is There An Optimum Level of Population?," "Approaches to Policy Sciences," and "Sea-Level Panama Canal"; 17 Oct., "Quantitative Studies of Urban Problems" and "Our Food Supply"; 24 Oct., "Physiological Effects of Audible Sound," "Climate and Man," and "Rational Use of Water"; 31 Oct., "Technology Assessment and Human Possibilities," "Pattern Perception," and "Youth: Ego-Ideals and Impact of Culture"; 7 Nov., "Space Astronomy," "Science Policy and State Government," "The Nature and Dignity of Man," and "Behavioral and Social Sciences: Outlook and Needs"; and 14 Nov., "School Science—Past and Future," "Power Generation and Environmental Change," and "Effects of Nutrition on Behavior."