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E. Anderson

Urban Geography

For the first time in human history, the majority of the world's population lives in cities. Metropolitan areas will soon become the immediate sphere of human existence and experiences, and this sphere is changing rapidly. The megacities of low-income countries are subject to stark urban population growth and as a result are increasingly difficult to command and to control. Urban/metropolitan areas of the highly industrialized nations are likewise undergoing a historical change: in the light of global trends in economics, society, and politics, they are facing challenges which require new and extensive economic and local policies in order to meet increasing intra-urban competition for investments and taxpayers.

Theoretically informed social science research is absolutely necessary to monitor trends of urban development, to provide basic information for the optimization of local strengths, to design urban development concepts which adequately provide for local needs and demands, and for urban planning which equally respects collective decisions, increased competition, modern urban structures, and the individual 'feeling' of the city. Social science research defines and analyzes control factors of urban development, brings to light basic data and information about urban structures, and processes, perceptions and the attractiveness of the cities. This is where urban geography has an important role to play.

1. Urban Geography: Tasks and Approaches of a Social Science Discipline

1.1 The Scope of Urban Geography

Urban geography is a specialized discipline within human geography. It deals with the analysis, explanation, and prognosis of urban forms, urban social fabric, and economic structures and functions. Urban geography addresses research questions from economic, political, social, and ecosystem geography in

their urban contexts at various scales. The scientific results of urban research increasingly serve as a basis for decisions on public investment, allocation of resources, and socioeconomic and urban development planning. Urban research can be broken down into interurban (system of cities) and intra-urban analyses, which address the processes going on within cities (see *Cities, Internal Organization of*).

1.2 Conceptual Approaches and Types of Research Areas in Urban Geography

A large number of conceptual approaches are utilized in urban geography. Each addresses different types of research questions that may contribute to the understanding of the complexity and complementarity of factors influencing the urban system. The approaches pertain to urban form and urban morphology, the urban social fabric and economic structures, urban development, and urban policy.

1.2.1 Urban form and urban morphology. This approach deals with the analysis of the built environment. The changing urban morphology, including historic/heritage preservation, the creative reuse of landmark buildings, the architectural and technological upgrading of dilapidated buildings and urban revitalization, have gained importance in recent years. These measures can improve a city's attractiveness for investors and high-income earners, hence the city's fiscal base, by increasing the emotional and intellectual attachment of the target population to the city.

Whereas revitalization has been shown to increase the attractiveness of the townscape and urban image, this form of urban redevelopment is not without social costs. Gentrification and urban sub-area revitalization, incumbent upgrading, and the dislocation/displacement of the lower-income population are all interrelated. The study of changes in urban form and the built environment and the effects on local population groups and businesses is but one aspect of understanding urban decline or urban fortunes, social restructuring, and population and neighborhood change.

In European countries, urban morphology is of particular relevance in historic cities, for example, in cities built during the medieval period. Here, the knowledge of the historic urban structure and design aids in finding and identifying historic sites that have either been buried by construction activities of later centuries, or that need to be preserved and protected from contemporary rezoning and/or construction activity.

Urban form and urban morphology have also been taken up by Neo-Marxian/Neo-Marxist urban geographers. The regulationist school, for example, tries to

uncover the power structures and the functioning of urban regimes. According to this school of thought, urban form and the 'turning of skylines and CBD's is a means of accumulating capital at the cost of other urban sub-areas, a process accompanied by policies of neglect and disinvestment. Social and welfare disparities as are manifest in differing morphologies across urban space have thus become another major area of urban research.

1.2.2 Urban function and urban social structure. Analysis of urban land use development, urban functions, and specializations: specialized economic activities seek locations with the greatest competitive advantage. This approach helps to understand urban land use development and to determine those land use patterns that most competitively provide basic support for the city. The internal structures of specialized urban functions (wholesale, retail, service activity, etc.) within the city and their market orientation, i.e., urban locations that are best suited to meet the city's needs, are points of focus. On the micro scale of the city, the analysis of central business districts and neighborhood business/convenience centers have received priority. On the meso and macro scales of urban systems analysis, the degree of specialization in and between cities is considered the base for identifying a city's market potentials, strengths, and niches within a regional or national hierarchy of cities.

Empirical examination of factors organizing space and megalopolitan structure deals with the metropolis as a changing configuration and the processes by which metropolitan areas grow and expand beyond their rigid corporate limits. Studies of metropolitan patterning examine the functional differentiation of suburbs, the interrelation of the city and its surrounding area through economic linkages and commuting, and the way metropolitan communities reorganize themselves into supra-metropolitan areas. The development of megalopolis, the increasing functional specialization of metropolitan centers and communities, and their growing interdependency are key research issues.

Urban social geography and the factorial ecology of cities, social status differentiation, and segregation: urban areas are highly differentiated complex systems (see also *Cities, Internal Organization of* in this volume). These approaches deal with urban sub-areas, urban subpopulations, social and economic characteristics of urban neighborhoods, the social patterning of local residents by race, ethnicity, and class, and the behavior of subpopulations as a function of their social group, race, and class, or as mediated by the characteristics of the neighborhood, urban sub-area, and the urban system.

Urban sub-area characteristics and urban social and spatial differentiation are commonly analyzed

using factorial ecology. This term refers to various statistical approaches using factor analytic methods. Small area analyses with a limited set of variables grounded in social theory are common. Factor analysis, on the other hand, depends on a large number of variables that are then reduced in an exploratory way to essential properties of a particular phenomenon of urban sub-areas or urban space. It determines urban sub-areas according to common social characteristics or in terms of households or individuals with common characteristics.

The urban ecologist or social geographer does not focus on spatial differentiation *per se*. Rather, social and spatial patterns are regarded as the manifestation of a social process. Indeed, the urban social geographer or urban ecologist studies such patterns with a view to uncovering the social, political, economic, or cultural processes that may be responsible for these patterns. Residential segregation of different social status groups, for example, occurs in many different cultural settings and reveals the most residentially segregated social groups, for example, as those at the top and at the bottom of the social status hierarchy. In increasingly multicultural societies, patterns of differentiation among social groups and neighborhoods and their particular spatial geometry are becoming a growing problem. Factorial ecological investigations that use a variety of computational techniques help identify the differences between social, demographic, and economic characteristics in urban space. They help to monitor processes of social distance as reflected in the degree of physical distance and residential separation.

Perception of the urban environment: this approach sees age and social status-related perceptions of the urban environment, personal activity radius, and spatial behavior as related variables. Individual perceptions of reality affect spatial behavior, be it shopping trips or intra-urban migration. For example, characteristics of the automobile society, such as the monotonous urban landscape, can negatively affect an individual's identification with the physical urban environment and may induce him/her to move, thus contributing to the erosion of a city's tax base and concomitant inner city decline.

Differing social and age groups, for example, the elderly, the youth, the poor, have distinct ranges of activities and different patterns of spatial behavior in urban space. Market research utilizes the results of studies on the perception of the urban environment and spatial behavior. At the micro scale of individual urban geography, studies concentrate on activities that a person does regularly and urban places that are visited regularly, i.e., daily or weekly, as they form the basis of the personal contact field and average information field. These may be analyzed using the methods of time geography and indicate an individual's capabilities to overcome distance by means of mobility and communication. At the macro scale, the

collective spatial behavior of social groups and the spatial geometries of social group behavior are focused upon. Decisions regarding distances between shopping centers and other central urban functions, for example, make use of empirical findings of collective spatial behaviors (see *Behavioral Geography; Urban Activity Patterns*).

Personal mental/cognitive pictures of space are also referred to as images. The analysis of these images focuses on the subjective evaluation of urban space by residents, visitors, business people, and potential investors. Perceptual geographic urban analysis upholds the theory that spatial behavior, like intra-urban migration or shopping and recreational activity, is often limited to a closed field of perception and reference, and it is affected by personal spatial evaluation. The overall image of a city from the point of view of a commercial interest is affected by the 'soft' locational factors (e.g., amenities, attractiveness of the urban environment, social and demographic processes in the city, or business climate). Image analysis can contribute significantly towards finding reasons for the exodus of population, companies, and enterprises, or disinvestment. Moreover, measures for the improvement of a negative city image or for instigating desired development can be recommended (see *Spatial Cognition*).

1.2.3 Urban development. The analysis of urban development as related to historical, political, and geographic peculiarities: this approach deals in particular with the development dynamics of the city and the determinants of that development. Different historical-political systems of society, socioeconomic factors and urban politics (see Sect. 1.2.4) fall into this category. Urban development analysis takes the positive consequences (e.g., concentration of social and economic performance, importance as center of innovation/innovation hub) and negative consequences of development (e.g., environmental problems or urban blight) into consideration. This approach can offer important impulses for the political, economic, and social components of urban development planning.

Urban cultural geography, intercultural comparison of cities and urbanism: this approach places the historical and cultural context of cities in the foreground. Processes of urbanization and the current physical urban structures of cities, including the inner differentiation, are assumed to be products of a series of sociopolitical systems. In cultural genetic urban geography, persistent historical urban structures are identified according to the appropriate historical social system and cultural sphere of influence. The understanding of current structures and processes that have evolved through construction, reproduction, renovations, and rebuilding during several cycles of social change, is easier if seen in the context of the past.

However, society changes faster than physical urban structures. Thus, the reflection of changes in society in old buildings and in the urban fabric, as well as the intercultural comparisons in society in old buildings and in the urban fabric, as well as the intercultural comparisons of these generation influences are amongst the most interesting topics of research in cultural genetic urban geography.

1.2.4 Urban policy. Globalization and urban policy: cities are social systems in space and as systems they react to any changes that result from both local and supralocal or global developments. Such supralocal trends include:

Increasing competition between metropolitan areas due to globalization of the economy and international competition.

Deregulation, separation of social politics from trade and industrial politics, leading to a decline of the welfare and possible intensification of social problems.

Economic and political integration, political change and crises that initiate migration flows. These result in increasing polarization of society and affect the perceived quality of the urban environment.

Change of societal values and pluralism of life styles. These encourage urban exodus and the concentration of marginal groups in the inner city.

Global economic restructuring, the increased competition between cities, and the decline of the welfare state force cities to pursue entrepreneurial urban development strategies. These may include economic incentives, the promotion of investments or megaprojects to increase urban attractiveness, and the decision to promote growth rather than redistributive urban development. Also, new entrepreneurial public-private partnerships or rigid urban regimes that place a great emphasis on private sector planning have emerged.

Urban regimes follow different approaches to development; some implicitly exclude or include social policies as part of their overall strategy, with different levels of impact on long-term development processes. On the micro scale of the individual city, the analysis of the interrelationships between urban policy, urban development, urban sub-area development, and the changing geometries of segregation helps to understand how and why planning may become unintentionally a determinant of social and spatial polarization. Given the adoption of Western urban policy and planning models in other countries, it is important to understand the social, spatial, and economic implications of each type of policy for urban development as such and in different cultural settings.

Government devolution, the state and local response: on the macro scale of the national urban systems, the relationship between national/federal urban policy and local policy and local urban de-

velopment is of interest to urban geographers. Their main interest is what happens in cities when federal policies change. For several years now, one of the more noticeable national trends has been the shifting of financial responsibility away from the federal government toward state and local governments. This trend has been observed particularly in the US and Western European federal systems. Known as 'devolution,' it has led scientists and observers to believe that social problems may worsen if the federal/national role of counterbalancing unfavorable social and economic developments is restricted. To place theoretical concerns and real world developments under a policy of devolution into proper perspective, it is important to look at the actual situation and local responses. Federal/national policies may at first glance adversely affect inner city and other poverty areas, but one must also look at local policies and responses to federal/national policy in order to get a more balanced view of long-term adjustments and trends in societal development.

Policy-oriented urban geography deals with urban problems, such as social and economic disparities, caused by policies at various levels. In research on attempts at restoring run-down inner city neighborhoods in the US, one can find many examples of innovative community concern expressed by both the public and private sectors with the potential to counterbalance public sector devolvement to some extent. European nations, amongst others, have developed interesting local policy mechanisms to deal with the ills and imbalances of society manifest in urban areas. Policy-oriented urban geography thus studies and uncovers the problems and potentials of local planning responses to current problems of urbanism and federal and state policies.

2. The Operational Methods of Urban Geography

It is clear, then, that the differing conceptual approaches largely focus on two types of research issues:

those related to urban space and urban sub-area characteristics, the basic dimensions of city patterning, and the determinants and processes behind changing structural characteristics of urban space over time. The attributes may refer to physical, social, economic, or demographic phenomena and their differentiation (their concentration, densities, distribution, growth) in urban space;

those related to people in urban space, i.e., individual and collective spatial behavior (for example shopping trips, commuting, daily activity ranges), moreover, perceptions, images of urban space, and planning.

Concomitantly, there are two major methodological approaches: those of empirical regional/urban sub-area analysis, and those of empirical social science, here in particular the survey methods. These methodologies are, of course, not mutually exclusive, but

rather, complementary. Each sheds light on issues that would otherwise be impenetrable. Not only urban geography but also urban research in general makes use of these methodological approaches.

2.1 Methods of Empirical Regional/Urban Sub-area Analysis: 'Urban Social Monitoring'

Social and societal developments have their real world manifestations in urban space, and social and economic developments in urban areas are reflected in the structural characteristics of urban sub-areas. Urban geography is well suited to examine attributes and developments of structural characteristics by means of analytical techniques. These analyze the areal structure of urban communities in terms of attributes. Empirical urban research is both regional research specifically in urban areas and social or socio-spatial research. The methods correspond to those found in regional geography in so far as they are utilized for delineation and observation of structural change of agglomerations, city centers/cores, urban expansions, and suburban areas. Within the city itself, the research units are districts and neighborhoods as well as other 'official' spatial units of division, be they for planning, political, or statistical purposes (e.g., planning units), school and electoral districts, street rows and blocks. Urban sub-areas may be of any scale: census tracts are commonly used as statistical reference areas. Micro scale urban social geography also makes use of block level data to characterize the increasing differentiation of urban social milieus.

The methods of empirical urban sub-area analysis allow for urban social monitoring. This refers to the inventory, documentation and analysis of detailed socioeconomic structural patterns and processes of change. Complex spatial processes are broken down into individual components.

Statistical techniques aim to characterize and analyze urban space, urban sub-areas, and urban structural developments comprehensively. Three approaches are important:

(a) For descriptive purposes, methods include computer-assisted cartography and the refined cartographic and analytic methods enabled by Geographic Information Systems (GIS). These may produce uni-dimensional or multidimensional maps of social, demographic, or other phenomena as differentiated in urban space. GIS, of course, is also suited for the establishment of a long-term statistical cartographic database, which can be periodically updated. Such a database would simplify thematic longitudinal onsite analysis of the target urban region with regard to social, economic, and demographic processes and forecasts.

(b) In a more exploratory sense, factorial ecological investigations use a number of multivariate descriptive statistical techniques (the methods of factor analysis) to identify the essential dimensions that characterize

and differentiate one urban sub-area from another in terms of social science variables. Underlying the concept of urban social areas is the assumption that societal processes reflect natural processes in that they have a competitive dimension that can lead to processes of selection. Social structures and social change in space are seen as the result of mutual adaptation of competing species. According to R. E. Park (1936), socio-ecological studies deal with processes that either uphold an existing social balance or that disturb the existing order in order to reach a new, relatively stable existence. One specific type of factorial ecology is social area analysis. Social area analysis is based on the theory of Shevky and Bell who understood urban social space as being primarily characterized by social rank, urbanism, and ethnicity. As such it only works with a limited set of input variables. Cluster analyses subsequently performed on factor analyzed urban sub-areas can help identify groups of sub-areas with common patterns of variability.

(c) In order to understand the determinants of and processes responsible for such patterns, one may combine descriptive and analytical statistical techniques. Factor scores from factorial analyses may, for example, be used as input data in multiple regression analyses that relate these aggregate characteristics to explanatory variables.

Social monitoring of urban sub-area characteristics over time enables a scientifically sound evaluation of the current structural change: urban geography falls back on existing statistical data collected by public and private institutions or public welfare organizations. As the data reflects institutional norms and goals, urban geography has no influence on either the exact questions, the survey method, or the aggregation and systematization of the indicators. Consequently, theoretically informed urban research is limited by the quality of these (secondary) data sources. However, the quality of official data banks and the methodology of secondary research in the field of spatial and thematic aggregation of data are improving continually.

2.2 Survey Methods—Empirical Social Science Research

Urban space is not only an attribute of space but also an area of activity. In order to analyze activity systems/patterns of individuals or households, as well as preferences, felt needs, perceived quality of the urban environment, locational/residential behavior, or general spatial behavior in a specific urban context, the urban geographer has to use survey methods.

Empirical social science research collects social data by means of survey methods, experiments, 'pure' observation, or 'participative' observation. In human geography, empirical social science research is applied to identify and investigate areas of perception and activity, as well as opinions and attitudes to values and

norms in society, as these form the framework of spatial behavior. Survey research methods in social geography concentrate on the interrelationship/correlation between spaces and social group behavioral patterns, designation and appraisal, group perception, and evaluation of spaces.

The advantages of incorporating surveys into the initial stages of research are that important issues can be identified at an early stage, and the survey allows for a differentiation and consolidation of research aspects. At the same time, preparation of standardized methods for covering the chosen topic continues unhindered or alternative and appropriate research methods (i.e., not from within empirical social science research) may be sought. Generally, the social surveys of empirical social science research open the door to a greater spectrum of human geographic research issues than would be possible with official statistics.

Research questions of urban geography thus deal with different sets of issues:

either the physical attributes of spaces or the indicators of their functional interconnection; or

immaterial aspects (spatial perception or space-related activity); or

both; or

those aspects of spatial change that result from the interaction between immaterial and physical elements (e.g., the physical results of political visions for the urban area and the consequent measures, or socio-spatial disparities caused by power relations in society).

The selected database depends on the research question. Studies of objective reality (e.g., socio-geographic structural analysis) use data that reflect numerically definable spatial characteristics (as opposed to subjectively perceived spatial attributes). This data is mostly found in official statistical material, published and unpublished, the basis of which is extensive censuses (e.g., of population) or surveys (e.g., of enterprises). Personal, small-scale, and tailored surveys are necessary if the time lapse between official censuses is too great or if certain details are missing (e.g., in order to incorporate structural, socio-spatial, and economic aspects, entrepreneur surveys or mappings of building conditions in different neighborhoods, of spatial use, or overall inner city differentiation may be necessary). However, if the research focus lies in the perceived surface and activity area of individuals and groups, then interviews are necessary if spatially related behavior, behavioral background, and possible consequences of behavioral patterns are to be dealt with.

Methodological procedures in urban geography stand out for their broad range. Some procedures overlap, thus hindering the exclusivity of subfield methodology. For this reason, it is not possible to refer to a particular methodology for economic geography, social geography or, for that matter, urban geography. However, within human geographic research of urban

areas, the methodical–methodological approach of dealing with different issues is basically the same. Geographic scale, spatial delineation, and weighing of indices are the main differences. Between factorial ecology and survey methods, only the data sources and the scale of the evaluation differ. Even though the goals may vary, the basic principle of preparing and evaluating official or specifically collected social data from survey research in a descriptive and/or quantitative analytical manner stays the same.

3. Outstanding Features of Urban Geography

The standing of urban geography within the social sciences in general draws essentially on two things that the other disciplines dealing with urbanism do not share to the same extent.

3.1 The Combination of Cognitive and Methodical Capabilities

(a) Empirically and theoretically informed research from an integrational/holistic perspective.

(b) Relevance to society.

(c) Diversity of urban research topics in social, economic and environmental fields, amongst others. The range of urban research topics includes, for example:

(i) problems of increasing social differentiation in urban sub-areas and the development of an urban underclass, urban ethnic-cultural and lifestyle milieus, long-term urban unemployment, the welfare poor, the working poor;

(ii) population change (socio-demographic, socio-economic and socio-cultural), infrastructural, and policy adjustments;

(iii) housing and urban labor market developments;

(iv) urban environmental quality and urban sub-areas, questions of environmental racism;

(v) functional interrelatedness of cities and their suburban areas;

(vi) the territoriality of each context, the unique and unrepeatable set of social and economic relations, local networks in urban areas and development; the territorial embeddedness of global impacts;

(vii) local policy responses to supralocal trends;

(viii) entrepreneurial urban policy and micro-scale urban social development;

(ix) cross-cultural urban development; and

(x) urban systems development.

3.2 The Specific Methodological Competence and Diversity of Analytical Responses

(a) Empirical research: primary survey methods, such as monitoring, mapping, or field surveys;

(b) statistics: the scientific approach for drawing conclusions about research questions/hypotheses by means of processing spatial primary data and official-statistical secondary data;

(c) cartography: tool for working with and presenting spatially located and differentiated phenomena;

(d) remote sensing: interpretation of aerial photos and satellite photos as a further important source of information; and

(e) utilization of geographic information systems (GIS) to present and analyze data and developments in space.

4. Conclusions

Global economic restructuring, political change, government devolution, and social restructuring alter urban and regional fortunes and give rise to new socio-spatial patterns of development. Fragmentation, polarization, and new local spatial identities form new urban realities. Formerly prosperous cities may lose their comparative locational advantage. In order to retain competitiveness and build up local (endogenous) potentials, or to govern uncontrollable cities, new models, modes, and mechanisms of planning are being developed. In cities of the Western world, public-private partnerships—coalitions of major local economic and political players—have been outlining/developing and implementing grand visions of development. Megacities of low-income countries have yet to cope with the more basic infrastructural needs of their populations.

Thus increasingly, in cities worldwide, both urban planning and the prevailing urban regime, its orientation, and complex interaction with the regional, national, or supranational economic and political systems, have a significant effect on the development of a city. In order to deal with contemporary urbanism, decision makers will need to rethink urban processes, structures, and policies. What is needed is an understanding of the city from a systems perspective. This views urban developments, form, and social and economic structure as interrelated with the systems of society, economy, and politics. It also understands the city as an organism/entity with enormous local capacities and strengths that might successfully counteract the local or regional effects of globalization or other supralocal forces.

Urban geography is a systems-oriented social science discipline with great relevance to interdisciplinary solutions of problems of urbanism and urban areas. The systems perspective, the skills required, and the variety of research questions and applied research in urban geography make this discipline preeminently suited to understand and deal with problems of contemporary urbanism.

See also: Behavioral Geography; Cities, Internal Organization of; Development and Urbanization;

Globalization: Geographical Aspects; Migration, Economics of; Spatial Cognition; Urban Activity Patterns; Urban Anthropology; Urban Growth Models; Urban History; Urban Poverty in Neighborhoods; Urban Sprawl; Urban Studies: Overview; Urban System in Geography

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Urban Government: Europe

Urban governments are defined first as political arena and instrument for enhancing democracy, participation, and steering local societies and second in terms of services provision and public policy. They are back on the political agenda of Europe, not as the old medieval city, but as more autonomous political authorities within a European governance in the making. Urban governments usually are related to the nation–state in terms of democratization and legitimization of forms of territorial management.

1. Urban Government and the making of the Nation–State in Europe

Weber famously emphasized what he saw as the distinctive characteristics of European societies, that is, the medieval occidental city defined in terms of ‘sworn confraternisation’ based upon a fortress, a market, bourgeois associations, specific rules in terms of land ownership and tax, and sometimes courts and armies (Weber 1978). The importance of the urban government was stressed as the city developed upon the movement of medieval ‘communalisation’ (i.e., communes being formed through acquiring a *charter*). Cities became institutionalized associations, autonomous and autocephalous, active territorial corporation characterized by autonomy and capacity for action towards the outside (the lord, the prince, the state, the emperor, rival cities) and led by urban officials. Medieval urban governments developed democratic institutions, and commerce left its mark through the edification of monuments symbolizing this power: squares, town halls, belfries or bell-towers.

In due course, ‘voracious states’ consolidated with or against ‘obstructing cities’ (Tilly and Blockmans 1994). The making of the modern state and the coming age of the second (industrial capitalism) marked the end of the golden age and autonomy of occidental cities.

Later, in industrial cities, for instance in the UK but also in Germany, France, and Scandinavia, the scope of social problems became such that elites in urban government pioneered policy programs in housing, planning, basic elements of welfare, education (De Swaan 1988) and hygienist concerns led to the ‘Haussmanisation’ movement of city rebuilding, that is, the emergence of local public goods. Urban governments

played a key role in providing basic utilities and services such as water, sewage, street lighting, and, later, gas and electricity, firemen, and transport, not to mention slaughterhouses. This development was diverse, fragmented, contested between a conservative petty bourgeoisie and the municipal socialism movement, and more consistent in the North of Europe than in the South. Most local government in Europe gained legal recognition in the second part of the nineteenth century. Gradually, a professional local bureaucracy emerged to deal with those developments. The rise of urban government was not just a local or national phenomenon. Exchanges of experiences of ideas, for instance in planning and social housing, were crucial.

Later, in most of the post-1945 period, the category ‘European urban government’ did not make much sense, and was not an issue. Within the social democratic compromise of most European states, the role of urban government was understood within the center-periphery paradigm (Mény and Wright 1985), that is, in national terms and as part of local government. Urban governments differed in Europe because each country had a different constitutional setting, different rules, different public finances systems, different political systems and traditions, and different organizations to provide services. Sometimes, variations within a country were also important (Germany or Italy).

Urban governments were understood either as a functional entity to deliver services, in particular welfare services (hence the long-lasting debate on size and amalgamation), or as a political unit. In their classic comparative research, Goldsmith and Page (1987) have suggested that local government autonomy in Europe should be analyzed in terms of autonomy through two major criteria which encompass or are closely related to other dimensions: legal status and political status).

That analysis clearly stressed the differences between the welfarist northern European urban governments and the more political (sometimes clientelistic) southern European urban governments.

2. A New Pattern of Constraints and Opportunities for European Urban Governments

These classic distinctions are now under question because a common set of pressures and opportunities (Europe, fragmentation, state reorganization, economic restructuring, social tensions) tends to blur the frontiers between existing national models of urban governments and to reinforce differences within nation–states. Several pressures for changes are put forward.

Urban governments were contested in the 1970s and 1980s by urban social movements. The bureaucratization, hierarchies, urban regeneration projects, com-