

PLACE AND SPACE IN CONTEMPORARY EUROPE: SOME LESSONS AND REFLECTIONS*

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Introduction

There are undoubtedly forces at work which will exacerbate spatial inequalities within Europe and pose a serious threat to many cities and regions in the 1990s. The continuing, though problematic, deepening of economic and political integration within the European Community (EC) will create more room in which market forces can operate, intensifying processes of economic restructuring. At the same time, there are growing pressures for enlargement of the EC, from the countries of the European Free Trade Area and, more significantly, those of eastern Europe, where profound political changes are opening up these economies to international capital. One result of these changes will be to accelerate the movement of capital, and with it the process of plants closing and relocating which became familiar in the 1970s and 1980s.

The dangers that these changes pose to many existing urban areas and regions within the EC are recognized by the Community's decision to allocate more resources to its structural funds (such as the regional development and social funds) to increase investment in infrastructure, education and training facilities in peripheral areas (Millan, 1991). It is hoped that this will provide a basis from which peripheral regions will be able to pursue their own development strategies and narrow the gap between them and the Community's more affluent regions.

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However, in our view this will be insufficient to prevent spatial inequalities increasing. Empowering regions and urban areas to determine their own development trajectories via competition within a free market will simply amplify such inequalities. For all the optimistic talk of "A Europe of the Regions," the future is likely to be one of growing disparities, of more losers than winners amongst the EC's towns, cities and regions as they strive to position themselves more favorably in relation to the processes of economic restructuring. What we face is a growing threat to the economic rationale for, and social viability of, many areas in the 1990s. This conclusion holds *a fortiori* over the larger European space of eastern and western Europe combined, and it raises many challenging questions.

While these changes are dramatic they are not entirely new, and clearly some lessons might be learned from recent theoretical discussion and from the actions of people seeking to defend their jobs and their regional economies in the past. During the 1970s and 1980s we were involved in several campaigns in northern England, primarily working through the institutional frameworks of local governments and trades unions. These campaigns attempted to contest plant closure and job losses in industries such as coal mining, engineering, textiles, and steel, and the threat to the communities, people, and places that this posed. In some cases, such protests developed widely beyond the people and places under immediate threat. More typically, these anti-closure campaigns drew upon a limited repertoire of political tactics and social practices. Without exception, all failed in their own terms. These campaigns provided visible evidence that workers, their families and communities were not passively accepting the negative local impacts of corporate and state strategies. Nevertheless, in their attempts to defend their interests (as "pro-active localities" perhaps), they consistently failed. In contrast, elsewhere in the United Kingdom and western Europe it seemed possible to successfully pursue local economic development strategies. This contrast raised important questions for us as to *why* there should be these differences, and how local experiences related to more general processes of change in the political economy of capitalism. These questions became all the more important as (in the wake of unsuccessful attempts to prevent plant closures and job losses) trade unions and local authorities in Northern England attempted to develop new regenerative strategies.

Around this time in the United Kingdom the Economic and Social Research Council launched its "Changing Urban and Regional Systems" (CURS) program. Originating in Massey's (1984) innovative work on spatial divisions of labor, the CURS program was intended to interrogate the links between localized changes and the changing currents of the global accumulation process. The program developed as a series of

"localities projects" (we were involved in the study of Teesside, and South Durham; see Beynon et. al., 1991, 1992 and Cooke, 1989a) and in turn stimulated a broader "localities debate," much of it conducted with vigor in the pages of *Antipode* and *Society and Space*, though it was by no means confined to these arenas (for example, see Bagguley et al., 1990). The debate focused upon alternative ways of conceptualizing relationships between agents, structures and spatially uneven development; or, as Warde (1989) has put it (commenting, ironically on Cooke's view that "the proof would be in the eating"), upon recipes for pudding. It became increasingly fractious, generating rather more heat than light, as the advocates of structural determinism and those of local pro-activity assumed increasingly entrenched positions. Consequently, the debate quickly became tangential to key issues of theory and practice which presupposed serious consideration of *how* agents and structures interrelated in varying ways in different times and locations.

In this paper we draw upon these various experiences of ours through an admittedly selective consideration of three issues linked to the "localities debate." These issues are of relevance to future attempts to defend vulnerable places, both in Europe and elsewhere.

Agents, Structures, the Production of Space and the Material Bases of Place: Some Issues of Theory

The "localities debate" echoed earlier controversies over the relative importance of, and the relationships between, agents and structures in the determination of social action. It threw into sharp relief many of the difficulties associated with our understanding of the production of place and the production of space and of that process, central to capitalism – spatially uneven development. The debate itself involved a rather sterile polarization between the proponents of structural determinism (such as Duncan and Savage, 1989) and those of voluntaristic, politically progressive, pro-activity (such as Cooke, 1989b). In much of this, politically contentious claims were made whilst trawling through familiar, and increasingly depleted, theoretical waters. In a way, this discussion simply re-played the issues outlined at a more general level in the 1970s as Thompson (1978) and Miliband (1972) took issue with Althusser (1969) and Poulantzas (1972). As a result, crucial questions to do with spatially uneven development, the (re)production of place, and the material bases of places and their relation to the structurally situated strategies of key social actors have largely been avoided. Equally, the *content* of local politics has been ignored and with it the circumstances under which place-based political movements become socially progres-

sive as opposed to those socially regressive ones which simply amplify the competition between places. Such questions only began to enter the debate with the contribution of Cox and Mair (1989), and even here the approach is distinctly limited.

Cox and Mair develop their argument as follows: given the uncertainties inherent to capitalism, it is a contingent matter as to whether or not value continues to flow through particular socio-spatial structures so as to ensure their reproduction. Recognizing this, *one* way in which agents in a given location may try to contain uncertainty is through some sort of collective action, via a territorial coalition. Such coalitions frequently aim to harness state powers or to capture resources allocated by the state for "their place" or to restructure the state itself, typically via seeking greater decentralization of powers and resources and more local autonomy. The way in which such projects are formulated, and whether they are realized, depends upon the shifting interplay of attachments to class and place and, more generally, of social and spatial loyalties, and upon the links between objective social processes and subjective understandings of these. One consequence of the formation of these territorially-defined (cross-class) coalitions is that, "localities *can* appear active in their own right" (Cox and Mair (1989, p. 129).¹

This approach is an interesting one and we share Warde's (1989, p. 276) view that it is "constructive" in the way it situates the substance of a locality in routinized social relationships, reproduced over time as a result of the dependency of actors condemned to geographical immobility. However, it has its problems. To begin with, by focusing upon reproduction, it avoids questions about their initial production as significant "places." Furthermore, in the area of politics and given the uncertainties of capitalism, they perhaps overemphasize the extent to which such territorial interests will emerge – locations can as easily be characterized by conflicts between groups and classes as by cross-class consensus. If locality-based movements emerge they may not be able to successfully prosecute their interests; nor is it certain that these interests will be politically progressive. Furthermore there is no guarantee that progressive movements will persist indefinitely, especially given the differential mobilities of capital and labor. This differential mobility of capital and labor (whilst recognizing that there are also important intra-class differentials, in both cases) is especially important and alerts us to the fact that not all actors are "condemned" to stay in one place or another.

What this points to is that a material basis for shared interests *may* emerge in some places, at some times; but equally it may quickly dissolve. This process often accompanied campaigns to fight plant closures in the north of England in the 1980s. In the early stages the whole of

the workforce (white collar and blue collar) might cooperate; this alliance tended to break up as the time of the closure approached and people reacted to the different options that were open to them. Whilst the processes of capital expansion inevitably generate spatially uneven development, whether or not this becomes the basis for the emergence of "locality" in the sense that Cox and Mair use the term must remain a contingent matter, and therefore an issue for empirical investigation rather than theoretical prognostication.

What this makes clear is that the whole process of capitalist development (and not just the notion of "locality") is irreducibly political. In the course of history, spatially uneven development – arguably one key element in the expansion of capitalism – has become a central political problem. This process, and the forms it takes (e.g., inner-city problems, regional problems) is important in itself, and it has taken place at different times in different states. Nonetheless, it has produced a series of problems that modern states have been compelled to address. Within the EC, maintaining spatially uneven development within acceptable limits has undoubtedly become a political requirement. This has to be seen as one element in the broader processes of social change and in the range of activities undertaken by and in the form of the state itself. Such responses develop not in some mechanistically functional sense, but as part of the *politics* of retaining legitimacy for their own activities. There are a multitude of sources of pressure that may push for such policies. For example, pressures may emerge within national states themselves, with parts of the state apparatus pushing for more balanced regional growth as a route to faster national growth, and with it more state revenues from taxation, or more room for maneuver in relation to macro-economic policies. Such pressures *may* also arise from the activities of territorially-defined local or regional coalitions. Such groups may seek to defend or promote their places through a defense of local commerce or industry, or through constructing new material bases, associated with "new" private capital linked with "inward investment." Alternatively, they may seek to provide, through state welfare policies, the material continuity for places that are no longer of interest to capitals as spaces for profitable production.

Within this variety of factors it *may* be that place-based political movements emerge that are socially progressive and seek to transcend the divisiveness of socio-spatial inequality; place-based does not necessarily imply place-bound. But such movements *may* also become part of a regressive politics that pits place against place in a divisive, competitive struggle for investment and jobs. However, it seems clear to us that there is no *inevitability* about any of this, either in relation to the emergence (or not) of such political movements or in the political character

of their campaigns and proposals. Such issues are resolved through a political practice which is itself historically contingent and a relative rather than an absolute issue.

The Production of Places, People's Attachment to them and Place-based Political Strategies: Some Issues of Practice

Not all capitals are equally mobile, and not all working people are equally immobile, but in general capital is more mobile than labor. Locations that, for capital, are a (temporary) space for profitable production, are for workers, their families and friends places in which to live; places in which they have considerable individual and collective cultural investment; places to which they are often deeply attached, and which may hold powerful emotional ties and socially endowed symbolic meanings for them.² As such, it may be helpful, terminologically and theoretically, to understand *space* as the domain of capital – a domain across which capital is constantly searching in pursuit of greater profits – and *place* as the meaningful situations established by labor.

Within "places," people will have different orientations, commitments and understandings. In a previous period of dramatic economic and social changes sociologists used the terms "local" and "cosmopolitan" as a way of differentiating between the orientations of groups who were emotionally and economically attached to one place and those whose lives involved regular movement from one place to another (see Gouldner, 1957; Stacey, 1969). Similarly it can be seen that different groups of workers (those with different skills, of different gender or ethnic group) many perceive their attachment to places in very different ways. Nevertheless for people with a local identity their town or village is not *just* (or, for many, *even*) a space in which to work for a wage.³ It is a place where they have networks of friends, relatives and acquaintances, where they have learned about life and acquired a cultural frame of reference through which to interpret the social world around them; their place is where they are socialized as human beings rather than just reproduced as bearers of the commodity labor power. As a result, people have often become profoundly attached to particular places,⁴ which come to have socially endowed and shared meanings that touch on all aspects of their lives, helping shape *who* they are by virtue of *where* they are. Often they are places where people see themselves "belonging." This process of "belonging" itself requires analysis and empirical investigation, however. As with politics it, too, is historically contingent (see Cohen, 1982). For example, the nature of attachment is obviously variable and can itself be a source of conflict. The different ethnic groups in Bradford each express an attachment to the city but in

different ways. Similarly, men and women may have quite different sets of referents in establishing the nature of the place they call home.

If we move to the domain of space we find capitals largely involved in a one-dimensional assessment of localities, understood in terms of their capacity to yield profits. This is demonstrated in the countless questionnaires presented to local development corporations around the world. Driven by the competitive pressures that characterize capitalism, and the policies of national (and emergent supranational) states, investment and disinvestment decisions perpetually relate to a spatial dimension, and this can often pose a deep threat to the integrity of places. Such threats *may* well be contested but, as we have implied, attachment to a place is not automatically translated into its defense in a mechanistic manner. Indeed, one could argue that disagreement or passive acceptance of externally-generated changes is at least as typical as an active opposition to them.

Unlike space, the evaluation of places is more multi-dimensional. Certainly for many people these locations must yield a monetary income to pay for at least part of the costs of living there and this entails successfully selling their labor power to capitals or, perhaps, the state. Equally, senior plant or office management (however "cosmopolitan" in outlook) will have an interest in a particular place, in staying there for a length of time and establishing links with the place and people within it. As one of them put it in the 1960s, when he heard that he was to be moved on: "they should give you longer than two years in one place. If you've got a family they should give you longer than two years. I thought I'd settled for a bit here, it's not right." (Beynon, 1984, p. 106).

In this sense, workers and managers, their families, and capitals (those who employ them and those with whom they spend the resultant wage incomes) can share an interest in a particular location as a place to live and as a successful space for profitable production. This can provide the material basis for a shared commitment to a location which, in some circumstances, could underpin a sense of "locality" and lead to locationally-based political campaigns which transcend class, race and gender as people come together to defend "their locality" (cf. Cox and Mair, 1989). This instrumental attachment to a given location as a source of wage income can often link up with other attachments. Alone or in combinations such attachments *may* lead workers and their families, sometimes in alliance with management groups (maybe interested in a "buyout") or with small capitals that are tied to that location (such as those involved in retailing and the provision of personal services) to engage in competition with other places to keep existing jobs or gain new ones in an increasingly global place market. As a London taxi driver said to us in 1992: "I know its been bad up north up your way

and to be quite honest mate I don't give a shit. But its happening down here now. Redundancies, recession. There's *no* money about. And that does bother me."

Views like this one contribute to a process whereby the working class can be seen simultaneously to form itself, divide itself, and shape a changing spatial division of labor. That they have contributed to many place-based campaigns which have been entirely localized and regressive is not in question. In the various steel closures in the 1980s this local parochialism was reflected both in the campaigns at the threatened plants and by the responses of workers in the plants that were to stay open. In the car and textile industry, workers threatened with the closure of their place of work have often petitioned for the closure of another of the company's plants or for the restriction of imports from Japan or elsewhere. Management, aware of these tendencies, have often played an important part in orchestrating them. Equally, local campaigns can foster and represent a partial view of a locality and of the local interest. In the 1984-5 miners strike, for example, Scottish miners developed the demand of "jobs for the boys," but not the girls.

Attachment to place is grounded in a lot more than access to monetary wages, however, and hence political strategies to defend threatened places are not inevitably divisive or socially regressive: "place-based" does not necessarily mean "place-bound," as the strategies of local authorities such as the Greater London and Sheffield City Councils in the early 1980s showed. Equally, the 1984-5 miners' strike in the United Kingdom simultaneously produced a campaign to defend jobs and colliery villages, to arrest the long-established decline in the use of coal as an energy resource, and to challenge the political economy of Thatcherism. While it undeniably contained parochial elements, in its practice it placed miners in a position whereby they sought progressively to unite people in their different places (Beynon, 1985). In doing so it posed questions not just of Thatcherism but also of the working class mining culture that it sought to defend. This was most evident in relation to gender divisions and the role of women in civil society. The miners' support groups brought women out of the shadows in many pit villages and in their practice they challenged many of the assumptions involved in the "jobs for the boys" slogan.

The failure of such campaigns to realize their political objectives raises important questions about spatial cleavages within the working class (and, in the case of the miners, within particular occupational groups) and, more importantly, about asymmetries in power relations in society and the structural limits to such campaigns. Generally, relations between capital and labor are loaded in favor of capital; but this is only one aspect of power relations. National state strategies represent a force-field of their own and this, too, was made very clear during the British miners' dispute (see Beynon and McMylor, 1985).

The lesson is that "local pro-activity" cannot be equated with progressive politics. In fact, place-based campaigns more typically become place-bound and pitch places against one another in a competitive struggle for jobs, investment and resources, rather than serving as a basis from which to challenge the allocative mechanisms of capitalism. Equally, where place-based campaigns have been progressive in intent they have often been unsuccessful in practice. So where does this leave us? In post-modernity, perhaps, and with it the abandonment of the idea of "progressiveness" and with it the illusion of a unity that transcends space.

Postmodernism, Localities and the Difference that Place Makes: Is the Regressive Turn to Postmodernism as Approach Avoidable?

A postmodernist approach that celebrates the differences between places raises the uncomfortable spectre of going "back to the future" and to the traditional concern of regional geography: the "uniqueness" of regions and the grounding of regional analysis in specifically local processes. Nevertheless, it is clear that we need to acknowledge the specificities of places and to recognize spatial diversity and differentiation, (the joint authorship of this paper indicates that this view is not part of a disciplinary imperialism). New forms of such spatial differentiation have become apparent in recent years, and this needs to be recognized and with it the understanding that deconstruction goes beyond a simple registering of difference. However, spatially uneven development is hardly a new phenomenon and its latest manifestations are as much a product of the contradictions of capitalist social relations as were its earlier ones (see Jameson, 1991). Sensitive description of the changing uniqueness of places, of patterns of spatial differentiation, and peoples' experiences of these is important. Such descriptions, of themselves, raise critical questions relating to how we can explain and understand the causes and significance of such uniqueness and differentiation and how this might become the basis for, or a barrier to, progressive political practice and social change (see, for example, Davis, 1991, and Zukin, 1991). It seems to us that such questions cannot be constructively posed, let alone sensibly answered, without reference to some broader explanatory theoretical framework. Explaining the specific forms of spatial differentiation that help characterize postmodernism as a distinctive phase of capitalist development (assuming that this is what it is), can also be seen as an object of analysis and consistent with a modernist view of explanation and theory (see Giddens, 1991). In this sense, we would happily endorse Harvey's stated view in *The Condition of Postmodernity* and his insistence on the continued salience of a Marxist analysis. It is in his orthodox insistence on the importance of class

relations that problems appear, as this approach seems blind to the significance of other *differences* (notably of gender and ethnicity) as cleavage planes within capitalist society (see Massey, 1991), and to how these relate to the constitution of classes (see Beynon 1992).

On the other hand, Harvey's account borrows many of the more questionable assumptions of Lyotard and writers in the postmodern tradition. To begin with he is preoccupied with what is variously called the "First World," the "North," the "capitalist West" and takes a very blinkered view of spatial differentiation at the global level. Harvey's analysis provides scant recognition of the majority of the world's population who live in poverty, and whose conditions of life have deteriorated noticeably in the 1980s. For them (many millions of them) the principal concern is survival rather than niche marketing and conspicuous consumption; the mass consumption norms of Fordist modernism remain an alluring, but unattainable, goal. Whilst there are passing references to "the vast profusion of activities in newly industrialising countries" (p. 147), these are but a small part of the depressed South and East.

Equally, in his analysis of changes in advanced capitalist economies, Harvey is obsessed with the idea of flexibility. For example, he writes:

Flexible accumulation . . . rests on flexibility with respect to labour processes, labour markets, products and patterns of consumption . . . is characterised by the emergence of entirely new sectors of production, new ways of providing financial services, new markets. . . . (Harvey, 1989, p. 147).⁵

This amounts to little more than assertion, and in our view he is too dismissive of accounts based on detailed empirical inquiry which point to contrary interpretations of "flexibility" and change.

Clearly, in some places, times and industries, there is something that we can recognize as flexible production and flexible specialization. Equally there are, and always have been within capitalism, times and places in which sharply differentiated niche markets have been and are in evidence. Nevertheless, it is undoubtedly the case that, in recent years, state regulatory frameworks have taken on an increasingly market-oriented hue, and this is an important change. But it is important to acknowledge that within the parameters of capitalist societies there are quite definite material and social limits to the extent of both flexible production and niche markets. Certainly such changes as have occurred in the last decade or so in the advanced capitalist world relate to political strategies for regressive income redistribution, class recomposition and, in particular, the encouragement of new middle and entrepreneurial classes. But many industries remain *necessarily* characterized by forms

of mass production (albeit changing) whilst many others have never been organized on such lines. And, as we have indicated, the vast majority of the world's population do not approach the mass consumption norms of the Fordist regulatory era. This applies to places in the advanced capitalist states as well as to those beyond. In 1991, for example, the per capita income of Mid Glamorgan on the old South Wales coalfield fell below that of Singapore.

Thus, Harvey in powerfully arguing the case for a new historical-geographical materialism surprisingly neglects important questions to do with class differentiation, class recomposition and relations *between* different forms of organization of production, consumption and regulation in different locations. In adopting an overly simplistic view of the processes of production restructuring and of its relationship to consumption he fails to acknowledge the complex mosaic of variations between industries, classes and places, and the key theoretical questions that derive from this. As a consequence, important *political* questions (to do with the circumstances under which place-based, as opposed to place-bound, politics may take on a progressive role) fail to emerge centrally in the analysis. Paradoxically Harvey's critique of postmodernism is swallowed by it; ironically in paying attention to difference his focus becomes evenness.

Concluding Remarks

Do "localities" and "places" matter then? If by "locality" we denote cross-class territorially-defined coalitions of interests defending or promoting "their place" we would answer that they *may* do but it remains to be specified where, in what circumstances and in what ways. There can be no presumption that "attachment to place" or "locality" will emerge as a consequence of uneven development; or if it does, that it will pursue politically progressive politics; or that, whatever their hue, the politics of locality will be successfully prosecuted. Answering such questions requires careful empirical analysis of the relations between agents, structures and places: not empiricism, not voluntarism or structuralist determinism, but an openness to empirical research allied with a sense of definite limits to social action. Such research must be conducted in the spirit of a view which sees people as making their own history and geography but not in conditions of their choosing, as well as one which sees people as producing places in a variety of ways which relate to age, ethnic group and gender and which deeply affect the formation and composition of classes.

The history of the 1980s suggests that those seeking to defend Europe's vulnerable cities and regions in the 1990s may well experience

more local failures than successes. Indeed, if the basis of defense is for one area, or a coalition of areas, to seek a competitive edge over others such an outcome is inevitable. But it is not inevitable that the defense of place is conducted on these terms. Place-based campaigns could be constructed in ways that sought to forge alliances that would respect the cultural specificities of places whilst challenging the efficiency and legitimacy of the market as a resource allocation mechanism and of the place market as the arbiter of the fate of cities and regions. This would require a radical redefinition of relationships between capital, the EC, national states and the complex of interests represented in particular cities and regions. It would certainly require, if not the replacement of markets, decisive changes in the ways in which they are socially constructed and regulated.

We pose the issue in this way because we feel that there is a danger (within the discussion of pro-active localities and postmodern difference) that the contemporary period could be viewed as one in which everything is possible and whereby, within capital's space, people can creatively construct their own places with a growing sense of uniqueness. It helps make clear that fundamental questions remain to be faced. For example: is the future to be one of a Europe which competitively pits place against place in a divisive competitive struggle for private sector investment, employment and public resources? Or is it to be one informed by a spirit of cooperation, guided by notions of ecologically-sound economic planning and by a respect for the cultural specificities of places whose futures are to be worked out in more humane ways than as a brutal consequence of market forces? What sort of locally-based campaigns for what sort of Europe, a bigger and deeper Common Market or an evolving European community? Viewed in this way the political decisions now being taken about the EC and its future will have real effects upon locally-based social movements and their ability to generate and regenerate local economic activity.

Notes

1. The emphasis is ours, but we would argue that the appearance of the verb "to appear" is crucial to a proper understanding of the issues involved. The point is much more than just a semantic one.
2. The ties of place may be even more pronounced for the self-employed; or to put the point another way, and more generally, this distinction between place and space would require a more nuanced interpretation in the context of a more subtle theorization of social structure than that used here for expository purposes.
3. One of the attractions to capital of the great upsurge of temporary international labor migration from the late 1950s is – inter alia – that migrant workers whose place is elsewhere have a much more restricted basis of attachment to their workplace location as *only* a location in which to work for a wage (a

- situation typically reflected in their lack of citizenship rights). Moreover, an influx of migrant workers can often become the basis for ethnically-defined cleavages within the working class in such locations, which can produce labor market conditions that capitals can exploit.
4. It may well be that there are systematic gender differences, arising from women's relative immobility and confinement to the home, because of the ties of domestic labor. Equally, such differences may be at least in part narrowing because of changes in the division of waged labor between men and women.
 5. Whatever this means; accumulation has always been flexible, characterized by diverse forms of competition and cooperation between and within capital and labor.

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