state and locality primarily as manifestations of dynamics at a global level. Even if this were correct, the details of reactions must be explained by reference to the context at lower levels. To use his own example (p. 31), when a government decides to shut down specific shipyards in response to the world-wide recession in the shipbuilding sector, then Taylor’s world-system perspective will allow him to argue that shipyards will have to be closed but not to identify which ones or at which locations. In this regard it is clear why the author gives very little attention to cultural phenomena and aspects of decision-making that play a role at lower levels. Having taken a world-system approach, he is obviously not interested in these issues. Hence, geography is under pressure because, to paraphrase Johnston, Geography is about national and local variability within a general context of the world-system.

In retrospect, have the critical remarks presented in this review undermined the initial praise I expressed for this original study? Of course not! This study has laudably succeeded in integrating a fragmented political geography and an incohesive electoral geography. But the bias inherent in the study does raise some pertinent questions.

Notes:

Amsterdam P. A. Schat


Conversion of rental housing to owner-occupier dwellings has become a political issue in many countries, with a remarkable lack of consensus. The debate is all the more interesting because proponents and opponents take different views of the role of government in the provision of housing. The supporters of conversion accept at most a supplementary role for the government, while those opposing the process advocate a comprehensive housing policy and demand government intervention to stop the conversion process. The supporters of conversion frequently point out the growing opportunities for home ownership, "enabling those who are able to prosper". Opponents point out evidence gathered in empirical studies which demonstrates growing inequalities as a common result of conversion. As the debate is largely ideological it has so far produced more heat than light. Few studies have attempted to provide the broad evaluation that could sift out the presumed causes and the factual outcomes of the conversion. Lundqvist’s study does; he lists the important arguments for and against conversion and evaluates them by interpreting the available empirical evidence. In addition he attempts to distinguish between the general consequences and the ones that are typical of a specific country by using a comparative study design and a rather rigid model for his descriptions.

Lundqvist focuses on three countries where conversion of rental housing has become a political issue, albeit a different one in each. In Great Britain the sale of council housing has become the cornerstone of the government's housing policy. In West Germany the conversion of rental housing has a longer history and dealing with it has been the domain of policy for a long time. The conversion of rental housing to condominiums in the United States started quite recently as a market-induced development; and the (federal) government has been reluctant to react to it. Lundqvist’s choice to discuss the conversion in a specific sector in each of the countries may be justified as it allows him to join the public debate, but it does entail comparison of very different types of conversion and highly divergent outcomes. Only by ignoring many of the details is he able to draw some general conclusions. But it remains to be seen whether this will satisfy both the opponents and proponents of conversion and terminate their debate.

The structure of the book is straightforward. In Chapter 1 the arguments in the debate are discussed; these also provide the structure for the descriptive model employed to review the conversion process in the three countries. The next three chapters deal in turn with the United States, Great Britain, and West Germany. Lundqvist discusses the conversion process within the context of the national housing systems, which provides a better overview of the national housing situations than a direct comparison of the evidence on each of the issues would have allowed. The case studies deal with the quantity of converted dwellings and the effects that the size of this sector has on the availability of inexpensive rental housing in particular; the financial consequences for individual households and for various government agencies is also a major topic. As far as the data permits, Lundqvist also evaluates the effects on the occupant’s control over their housing situations. The last two chapters of the book present the author’s conclusions; he evaluates the arguments of the debate, and he discusses more general shifts in the goals and methods of housing policies.

The process Lundqvist describes for the United States is the conversion of private rental housing to condominiums. Much of the chapter reproduces data from the key study published in 1980 by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development. Some parts of this report, especially those dealing with displacement, have been exposed as unreliable, which is not sufficiently acknowledged by Lundqvist. But in his interpretation he is more careful, and on the basis of evidence from a variety of sources he rejects HUD’s optimistic appraisal of the processes. For Britain, Lundqvist describes the sale of council housing. As a national data set is not available, the evaluation is based on a large number of small-scale studies. Although the crucial period since 1984, when the effects of the ‘Right to Buy Act’ of 1980 became manifest, is not discussed, Lundqvist’s general conclusions are substantiated by recent analyses of the process by Murie & Forrest for England and by Sewell, Twine & Williams for Scotland. In the German case study the scope of the description is wider, and the conversion in various subsectors is described; significant differences in procedures and in effects are thereby highlighted. The outcomes of the case studies are summarized in Chapter 5. In the concluding chapter the outcomes are placed in a wider policy context. On the basis of his systematic description, the author concludes that the evidence supports the views of the opponents of the conversion process: conversion leads to a selective redistribution of wealth; it creates a liability for

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the public purse; and it narrows the housing opportuni-
ties for those who need housing assistance most. It
seems that the proponents put too much emphasis on the
opportunities created by the process and do not give
enough attention to the actual outcomes. Even though
the number and the proportion of the owner-occupiers
has increased as a result of the process, the group has not
become more diversified, and a broader distribution of
wealth cannot be demonstrated. On the other hand, the
German and British evidence demonstrates that the re-
maining group of tenants has become poorer, and conse-
quently social distance has increased. Rather than lead-
ing to a more equitable distribution of wealth and
opportunity, the conversion has increased the distance
between the groups.

Earlier, more narrowly focused analyses had also indi-
cated this effect, without being able to discourage the
proponents of conversion. Even though Lundqvist's
book has a wider scope than most other studies, it seems
unlikely that his conclusions will silence the debate for
several reasons. Primarily, the debate is ideological and
not easily influenced by empirical facts. Secondly,
Lundqvist's study is selective, highlighting the conver-
sion of a specific type of housing in each country and
virtually ignoring the process in other sectors, where the
effects may be different (as is hinted at in the German
case study, which is broader). It would not be surprising
if positive and negative effects were to emanate from the
process, though each effect would typify the outcome of
conversion in a specific subsector of the housing stock.
But even though the debate will continue, Lundqvist's
study certainly helps to clarify the issue. In addition, the
book is an important and welcome addition to the rapid-
growing body of literature on the increasingly impor-
tant topic of changes in the existing housing stock.

Utrecht
P.J. Boelhouwer & J. van Weesper

£18.50.

In this book an effort is made to construct a theoretical
concept of urban development which dynamically inte-
grates changes in several subsystems. Starting point is
then urban dynamics are precisely the result of the spa-
tial behaviour of urban actors. These latter are limited to
the population, companies and government. The spatial
behaviour itself is supposed to be determined by fun-
damental developments in society in the fields of tech-
nology, social values, demography and politics.

The first part of the book (Ch. 2, 3 and 4) discusses the
spatial behaviour of the urban actors. As far as the
population and companies are concerned models are
constructed which assume optimizing behaviour. In the
confrontation of welfare potentials of regions with aspi-
ration levels, optimal behaviour of the actors is formu-
lated. In Chapter 4 the dynamic behaviour of the urban
actors are integrated and a complex flow-diagram of the
system interrelations is presented. In turn the system is
considered to be influenced by the fundamental societal
developments described above. Before we go into this,
some general characteristics of this part of the book can
be noticed. In the first place the whole implicit assump-
tion is rather one-sided based on the neo-classical view
on society. Behaviour is seen as the result of individual
decisions. Secondly, and related to the first point, the
urban actors are perceived as rather homogeneous catego-
ries. Although at several occasions reference is made to
the differentiation of the categories, nowhere is this im-
portant point worked out. Of course, the suggestion of
just splitting up the general function in sub-functions for
each category is not enough in this respect.

The second part of the book (Ch. 5-8) discusses the
effects of the fundamental developments in society. The
relative influence of these may, however, vary in time.
Therefore four stages in urban development are dis-
cussed: respectively, the stage of industrialisation, the
rise of the service and transport sector, the living en-
vironment and the rise of the information sector. This
second part of the book gives a clear, concise view on the
development of urban regions in capitalist society. An
important finding is that, in due time, a proliferation of
functional urban regions ('funts') can be noticed. The
suburban ring is developing into small-scale urban cores,
finding itself increasingly competing with the original
large urban core. Although Van den Berg doesn't men-
tion the word, the concept of an evolving urban field can
be noticed in this.

This part of the book has, however, also some weak-
nesses. Firstly it is a pity that the theory developed
stands too much on its own. The innovative character
and authority could have been improved if the discus-
sion had been related to the existing literature. Nowhere
in these chapters are references made to publications
other than the author's own publications or to that of its
very near scientific kin. Particularly Lambe's 1975 study
on the metropolis impact on rural America would have
been very useful here. Secondly, and in line with this,
this part too noticeably lacks a critical reflection. On
the basis of the suppositions made, the author moves
in too straight a line to his conclusions.

In part three of the book (Ch. 9 and 10) a description
is given of the urban development in the United States
and Europe. Moreover, some of the theoretical relation-
ships mentioned before are empirically filled in. Appar-
etly these chapters summarize much of the previous
published empirical work on Europe by the author.
Some updating is achieved by recent work of others.
Although in this way some very useful data are present-
ed, it apparently has two important flaws. Firstly, the
selection of the data added is rather eclectic. Beginning
with a comprehensive European view, the scale of analy-
sis is exchanged for some specific data on, e.g., France
or NAC. By this, and that is the second point, one might
wonder whether the national differences are quite non-exist-
tent. This regional homogenization is highly questionable.
As far as the verification of the the-
eoretical relationships is concerned one is left with a feel-
ing of disappointment. Although some parallel develop-
ments in the population- and industrial deconcentration
are presented, the precise relationship between them is
not revealed. And where is the relationship with the oth-
er urban actor, the government?

The remarks made above, however, should be placed
within the major contribution this book makes towards
the understanding of urban systems. Particularly the in-
tegrative approach, which is mostly absent in economic
publications, is truly innovative in this respect. There-
fore the study will have much to tell to urban and regional
authorities as well as to potential investors. Also the dy-
namic approach in stressing the dependence of urban
changes on societal changes is lucidly presented. In
short, a thought-provoking book for all in management
concerned with future changes and those generally
interested in the changing urban world.

Rotterdam
Lambert van der Loon

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