Introduction

Cities are living systems, made, transformed and experienced by people. Urban forms and functions are produced and managed by the interaction between space and society, that is by the historical relationship between human consciousness, matter, energy and information.

While the structure of all urban dynamics can ultimately be described in such terms, the decisive input of purposive social action in the shaping of space and material conditions of everyday life has been highlighted by recent historical experience at two different levels.

On the one hand, the new international and inter-regional spatial division of labour, the growing importance of collective consumption through urban services, and the fact that public goods are most necessary while still being unprofitable for private capital, have led to systematic intervention by the state in the urban realm. Urban issues are thus at the forefront of contemporary political conflicts, and politics have become the core of the urban process.

On the other hand, the search for spatial meaningfulness and cultural identity, the demands for social goods and services, and the drift toward local autonomy, have triggered in the last decade a series of urban protest movements that, in very different contexts, called for urban reform and envisioned an alternative city. The squatter communities in Germany, Holland, and Denmark; the youth movement in Zurich; the neighbourhood associations in Spain; the massive uprisings over public services in Italy; the tenants struggles in Frances; the revolt of inner cities in England; the growing urban mobilization in the metropolises of newly industrialized countries, such as Caracas, Rio de Janeiro, Sao Paulo, and Mexico; the self-reliant squatter settlements of the Third World, from Lima to Manila; the widespread new neighbourhood movement arising in American cities from the ashes of urban revolts of the 1960s, across a much broader social spectrum; the environmentalist movement throughout the world. In spite of their obvious diversity, all these movements have proposed a new relationship between space and society. And they all have challenged prevailing cultural values and political institutions, by refusing some spatial forms, by asking for public services, and by exploring new social meanings for cities. While the historical significance of these urban movements is still unclear, they have already had a major impact on public policies and spatial structures. Yet, we know very little about the direction and the extent of such an impact, and we are equally ignorant about the intertwined network of relationships between the state, space, and society.

In fact, there is an increasing gap between urban research and urban problems. In the last 30 years, we have achieved substantial progress in the fields of spatial economy, land use planning, quantitative geography, regional development, environmental symbolism, and urban design. Such an impressive record has greatly contributed to our capacity to understand the built environment. Yet, we are still helpless when we wish to act on cities and regions, because we ignore the sources of their social change and fail to identify with sufficient accuracy the political processes underlying urban management.

Nevertheless, under the pressing demands of current events and government commissions, urban experts have done their homework in recent years. We now have a number of thorough studies of the urban crisis, as well as a series of monographs on urban protest. Yet, most existing research on community organization and social movements (including those of this

author) combine romantic descriptions with populist ideology, leaving us with no reliable explanation of the hows and whys of these movements.

Furthermore, the interpretations of the urban crisis tend to be couched strictly in economistic terms, identifying the source of our problems in a single factor that varies (according to the author's ideological taste) from the inherent logic of monopoly capital to the inevitable incompetence of public bureaucracy. Thus, despite serious efforts at gathering data and elaborating theory in the aftermath of urban crises and protests, we still have a long way to go before we understand the fundamental processes at work in the production of the material basis of most of our experience: the city.

The reasons for such an intellectual failure lie deep in the theoretical foundations of most social research. We believe that the difficulty arises precisely from the separation between the analysis of the crisis and the analysis of social change. Or in other words, the distinction between the urban system on the one hand, and social movements on the other. Collective action is usually seen as a reaction to a crisis created by an economically determined structural logic. Alternatively, random individual decisions are supposed to affect public policies according to some abstract rationality aimed at optimizing profit or power. Either way, people and the state, economy and society, cities and citizens, are considered as separate entities: one may dominate the other, or both may behave independently, but the logic of the analysis never allows them to interact in a meaningful structure. As a result, we are left with urban systems separated from personal experiences; with structures without actors, and actors without structures; with cities without citizens, and citizens without cities.

This book, on the contrary, assumes that only by analysing the relationship between people and urbanization will we be able to understand cities and citizens at the same time. Such a relationship is most evident when people mobilize to change the city in order to change society. For methodological reasons, thus, we will focus on the study of urban social movements: collective actions consciously aimed at the transformation of the social interests and values embedded in the forms and functions of a historically given city. Yet, if the process of production of cities by societies is most evident in the case of social revolt and spatial innovation, it is not limited to such exceptional events. Every day in every context, people acting individually or collectively, produce or reproduce the rules of their society, and translate them into their spatial expression and their institutional management. Because society is structured around conflicting positions which define alternative values and interests, so the production of space and cities will be, too. Urban structures will always be the expression of some institutionalized domination, and urban crises will be the result of a challenge coming from new actors in history and society.

Accordingly, if urban research is to respond to the questions of our time – the urban crisis, the role of the state, the challenge of urban protest – we need to integrate our analyses of structure and processes, of crisis and change. Our purpose is to cautiously construct a new theory of urban change that can light the path to a new city.

This book intends to contribute to the development of such a theory by focusing on the study of urban social movements as the heart of a broader theory of urban social change. Relying on a series of case studies in different socio-cultural contexts we will try to understand how urban movements interact with urban forms and functions; how the movements develop; why they have different social and spatial effects; and what elements account for their internal structure and historical evolution. But while we will present several detailed empirical studies, we are not simply gathering evidence. Rather, we want to work out a theory of urban social movements – even if such a theory must necessarily be limited by our current state of knowledge. Nevertheless, this theoretical purpose is informed by a methodological perspec-

tive that is distrustful of former experiences involving the useless construction of abstract grand theories. Therefore, we are determined to ground this attempt at theory-building on reliable research, and to avoid any hasty formalization of the proposed conceptual framework.

By this cautious strategy, we seek to rectify the excesses of theoretical formalism that have flawed social sciences in general and some of our earlier work in particular. In recent years, theorists in social science – as a healthy reaction against the short-sighted empiricism that forbade thinking about any phenomenon that could not be measured by very rudimentary statistical tools – have tried to construct systems of categories and propositions that would enable us to recode observations in a meaningful, cumulative form. Yet, their theoretical models (from functionalism to structuralism, or from symbolic interactionism to Marxism) have turned out to be as useless as they are sophisticated. In the practice of research, these conceptual frameworks required an arduous recoding of experience without adding any new knowledge. On contemplating these failures (the result, we believe, of unnecessary and ill-considered attempts to ape the natural sciences) it seemed to us that our best hope of understanding society (and therefore cities) lay in a much more patient approach to gathering information and building theories. We have followed the lead of the most fruitful studies in the social sciences, whatever their theoretical assumptions and technical tools, and we have moved freely back and forth among historical experience, our own research on contemporary urban movements, and a variety of methodologies and intellectual traditions, in a deliberate attempt to find new kinds of questions to ask about urban social change, and new, satisfying ways to answer them. Consequently, the methodological problem – how to construct a theory – has been as much a part of our research endeavour as studying the phenomenon of urban social movements itself. As we expected from the start, the particular circumstances of each case study modified the profile of our tentative theory and led us to tighten the argument.

Thus, our strategy of theory-building has relied on an articulated sequence of research operations. We started by asking some fundamental research questions, themselves generated by the social issues arising from historical experience. How do structurally defined actors produce and reproduce cities through their conflicts, domination, alliances, and compromises? How do spatial forms, economic functions, political institutions, and cultural meaning combine themselves in a process of urbanization that we view as the outcome of social struggles and social bargaining? How do class, sex, race, ethnic origins, cultural tradition, and geographical location, contribute to the formation of the social actors that intervene in the urban scene? How does such a pattern of relationships vary in different historical contexts? What is the role of urban movements within urban social change? How far are the fates of cities and societies linked in the process of historical development? How and why contemporary urban crises express some of our deepest social contradictions? How do contemporary urban movements contribute to the formation of new historical actors, and, therefore, to the general process of social change?

We asked the questions at a very general, tentative level, borrowing concepts and approaches from different intellectual traditions. (In Part 6 we explicitly describe the variety of sources to which we have gone.) Yet, because no existing body of theory addresses these questions, we had to elaborate a provisional, theoretical framework that, without being a general theory of society, would be comprehensive enough to stimulate our thinking, suggest specific cases of urban movements to study, and provide the ground for interpreting our observations.

We have preferred to present such a tentative theoretical framework in the last Part of the book, after modifying its profile and tightening the argument on the basis of the historical and empirical research carried on under its inspiration. The reasons for this method of presenta-

tion is that our theory is produced and not simply tested by the interpretation of our case studies. Therefore, the analysis of each urban movement under observation will provide the occasion for the in-depth elaboration of particular elements of our theory, with the result that the bringing together of all the elements in the final Part will be better understood on the basis of the preceeding discussions. So the reader will be asked to have the patience of watching our theoretical framework grow, with different emphases corresponding to the successive social processes under observation. We hope that the result will be to increase the clarity of our analysis and to link it more explicitly to our empirical research.

Nevertheless, since the selection of the cases of urban mobilization was itself largely determined by our research approach, it is important to make explicit the major hypotheses underlying our entire investigation. In a very schematic way, our argument can be summarized as follows:

1 The city is a social product resulting from conflicting social interests and values.
2 Because socially dominant interests have been institutionalized and resist change, major innovations in the city's role, meaning, and structure tend to be the outcome of grassroots mobilization and demands; when these mobilizations result in the transformation of the urban structure, we call them urban social movements.
3 Yet the process of urban social change cannot be reduced to the effects produced on the city by successful social movements. Thus a theory of urban change must account for the transformation resulting both from the action of the dominant interests and from the grassroots resistance and challenge to such a domination.
4 Finally, although class relationships and class struggle are fundamental in understanding the process of urban conflict, they are by no means the only or even the primary source of urban social change. Our theory must recognize other sources of urban social change: the autonomous role of the state, gender relationships, ethnic and national movements, and movements that specifically define themselves as citizen movements.

We have linked these general hypotheses with major themes currently posed by contemporary urban crises and urban protests in a variety of social contexts. Our study will derive its force from the interaction between these general theoretical concerns and the historical trends we have observed.

Urban protest movements, in our societies and in our epoch, seem to develop around three major themes:

1 Demands focused on *collective consumption*, that is, goods and services directly or indirectly provided by the state.
2 Defense of *cultural identity* associated with and organized around a specific *territory*.
3 *Political mobilization* in relationship to the state, particularly emphasizing the role of *local government*.

Finally, we must keep in mind throughout a crucial fact: a movement develops not only in relationship to its own society, but also in relationship to a world-wide social system. In this book we have had to exclude analyses of the 'state-planned societies' because of the absence of reliable data on urban movements in such a context. But we can and must study the differential process of urban mobilization in *dominant* and *dependent* societies within the capitalist system.

Thus, we aim first at understanding the interaction between cities and social change, but this research is designed to be a part of a broader investigation that will consider:

1 The new relationship between production and consumption through the growing role of the state in both processes.

2 The role of territoriality in the definition of cultural identity and symbolic meaning.
3 The forces at work in the re-definition of the relationship between the state and civil society by people's demands for self-management and local autonomy.

We have organized our process of theory-building around four empirical studies which maximize the chance to observe the social logic underlying the three major themes of our research – collective consumption, cultural identity, and political power – in relation to spatial forms and urban movements.

In particular we will study:

— The relationship between urban movements and *collective comsumption* as revealed by the emergence of urban trade-unionism in suburban public housing in the *Paris Metropolitan Area*.
— The development of urban movements around the issue of *cultural identity*, as expressed in two different versions, by the Latino community and the gay community in *San Francisco*.
— The subordination of urban movements to the *political system* according to the experience of urban populism in the *squatter settlements of Latin America*, with particular emphasis on the *pobladores movement in Santiago de Chile*. This study will also introduce the characteristics of the *dependent city*.
— The *interaction of collective consumption, culture, and politics through the urban movements*, as observed by the analysis of the movement that, during the 1970s, most clearly attempted to articulate these three dimensions in its struggle: the *Citizen Movement in Madrid*.

In addition to the analysis of contemporary urban protest movements, we tried to incorporate in the book another element that is crucial for our theory. Although urban social movements have been among the sources of urban forms and structures throughout history (as will be argued in the final Part of this book), the historical conditions peculiar to our societies make their impact much more evident than ever before. Therefore we will open our analysis by a historical overview that, while limited to recent modes of production of Western societies, will try to uncover the variation of urban meaning throughout different historical contexts. We have selected five historical cases to follow a very tight sequence of social evolution: the transition from feudalism to the absolutist state is examined through the revolution of the *Comunidades de Castilla* in the sixteenth century; the transition from the *Ancien Regime* to capitalism is exemplified by the *Commune de Paris* in 1871; the coming of the industrial capitalist city underlies our analysis of the Glasgow Rent Strike of 1915; the peculiar conditions of the capitalist-dependent city are shown by the study of the *Inquilinarios* of Veracruz, Mexico, in 1922; and the new urban issues of the post-industrial capitalist city are revealed by the revolt of American inner cities in the 1960s. It should be emphasized that, while analyses of contemporary urban movements rely on original fieldwork carried out by the author, the historical accounts presented in the first part of the book are dependent upon the work of other investigators. They should be merely considered as a fruitful way to introduce the subject matter of our theses on the relationship between cities and social movements.

Yet how accurate can be a demonstration based upon a limited number of case studies? In fact it is because our purpose is to further the process of theory-building that the case-study approach appears to be the best. Case studies have always been praised because they permit in-depth analysis, but blamed because of their singularity, disallowing any extrapolation of the findings. Nevertheless, we should remember that, from a historical point of view, *all* social situations are unique, and so are the findings of empirical research. A representative sample of the residents of Madison, Wisconsin, in 1977, or even of the manual workers of the United States of America in 1980, is as singular a universe as the neighbourhood organizations of the

Mission District in San Francisco in 1971. The general value of *any* observation depends on the purpose of its use. If we want to predict the outcome of a political election, an opinion poll of potential voters, on the basis of a representative sample, is an adequate research instrument (at least, sometimes). If we want to understand the new cultural patterns introduced by immigrants, we need to establish a typology of ethnic communities and weigh their differential evolution in relationship to mainstream society, on the basis of an anthropological observation. And if we want to elaborate a theory of urban social movements on the basis of historical experience, we must observe unique situations in which a particular phenomenon, considered by our theory to be crucial, is amplified. This has been the rationale that has informed our research design. It is only when and if we obtain a grounded theory of urban social movements and an understanding of how fully they relate to the evolution of cities, that we can compare mobilized and passive neighbourhoods *vis-à-vis* their differential effect on urban functions and forms. Thus, while case studies cannot provide a systematic verification of established propositions, they are invaluable in the pathbreaking efforts of generating new theories.

The complexity of the methodological operations involved in this research, as well as the diversity of the empirical sources, could submerge the main lines of the argument under a flood of data, description of techniques, and epistemological reasoning. We have therefore placed all epistemological and technical elements that are not necessary for the understanding of the social contexts and of substantive theory in a detailed Methodological Appendix. Interested readers are referred to it for a discussion of the logic of the demonstration and specific information about the empirical research underlying each case study.

But it is important to point out here that, from the outset, we have rejected the construction of a formal theory of urban social change. By a formal theory we understand a theory whose main concerns are trans-historical comprehensiveness and logical consistency. For the social sciences – whose historical and experimental character is quite unlike formal sciences, such as mathematics – the crucial test of a theory is its *adequacy*, rather than its coherence. By adequacy we mean the capacity of a series of intellectual tools to generate new knowledge about a given phenomenon. Following the teaching of Gaston Bachelard, we believe that the most useful concepts are those flexible enough to be deformed and rectified in the process of using them as instruments of knowledge. It is this capacity of enabling us to understand social processes and situations, and not the endless exercise of re-coding experience in a comprehensive paradigm, that is the actual test of the fruitfulness of a theory.

What we need now are not trans-historical theories of society but rather theorized histories of social phenomena.

This is not, and should not be, a general epistemological position. Someday perhaps we will reach a cumulative and comprehensive theoretical paradigm of history and societies, but not now and not soon. In the meantime, we need humble but effective strategies of theory-building that can lead us away from short-sighted empiricism without becoming lost in the artificial paradises of the grand theory. This book is an attempt to walk cautiously, yet relentlessly, that path.

Thus, the book opens with an investigation of the historical evolution of the process through which social actors produce cities and urban meaning. It continues with the analysis of urban demands as elements of collective consumption in suburban Paris. It poses the question of the relationship between culture and space on the basis of the San Francisco experience. It examines the effects of the subordination of urban movements to the political system by summarizing evidence, including ours, on squatter communities in Latin America. And it studies the relationship between consumption, culture, and politics by focusing on the Citizen

Movement in Madrid. On the basis of a series of *ad hoc* analytical models, supported by our empirical observations for each case study, all findings are integrated in a final Part that proposes a cross-cultural theory of urban social change.

The purpose of this research effort goes beyond our scholarly endeavour. For, only if we are able to understand how people create cities might we be able to create cities for people.