



A Review on A Book Entitled, “*The New Urban Sociology, 4th ed.*” By Mark Gottdiener and Ray Hutchinson

Abraham Achenef Zewdu¹

1. Introduction

In this paper an attempt is made to give a critical appraisal on the book, written by Mark Gottdiener and Ray Hutchinson, entitled ‘The New Urban Sociology’ published in 2011 by Westview Press in Boulder, USA. Gottdiener, a Professor of Sociology at the University of Sunny-Buffalo, and Hutchinson, the late Professor of Sociology at the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay, published three editions of the same book, ‘The New Urban Sociology’. The intention of this paper is to put forward critical review of the book entitled, “The New Urban Sociology, Fourth Edition” based on its content and contribution to the knowledge stock of urban sociology, in particular, and social science in general.

2. Brief Sketch of the book, *The New Urban Sociology, 4th ed* by Gottdiener and Hutchison

Gottdiener and Hutchinson published the fourth edition of the book “*The New Urban Sociology*” in 2011 with some changes in the third edition of the same book published in 2006. Among the changes was a shift in the orientation of the noteworthy approach of urban ecology from a neo-classical/neo-liberal economics to mixed economy. In this regard, Gottdiener and Hutchinson (2011) wrote the following:

Our original formulation of the new paradigm directly attacked the previous dominant approach of urban ecology that was grounded in neo-Classical economics with the market of many buyers and sellers as supreme along with its neo-Liberal political and planning prescriptions that weighted market solutions heavily despite government subsidies. The

¹ Lecturer of Sociology at Bahir Dar University, Bahir Dar, Ethiopia

new urban sociology replaced this view with the more realistic one of an economy and political system hegemonically controlled by large, powerful interests that moved to make their concerns the most important in our universally acknowledged “mixed” economy, where government intervention usually favored those powerful interests and not level-playing-field markets. (P. xiii).

Although the fourth edition of the book *‘The New Urban Sociology’* consisted of many other changes from the previous edition(s), at least to the words of the authors, the aforementioned shift was noteworthy as it proved the application of mixed-economy oriented structuration to explicate urban growth both in the developed world, as they argued, and the developing world, to which Ethiopia could be an example, as this paper has tried to buttress in the following sections.

Gottdiener and Hutchison published the fourth edition of the book *‘The New Urban Sociology’* supporting fourteen chapters in the bringing of *‘the urban issue’* to the attention of readers in the most meaningful and multifaceted way possible as urbanization involves variegated hues as the authors argued in the entirety of the book. The rise and subsequent development of urban sociology, among the pinnacles of the book, were entertained thoroughly in the book. Hinging on the works of such social thinkers as Ferdinand Tonnies, Emile Durkheim, and Georg Simmel, Gottdiener and Hutchison showed urban sociology could be conceived of as the earliest sub-discipline of, if not contemporary to, the parent discipline of sociology. Gottdiener and Hutchison dwelled on the union of Tonnies, Durkheim, and Simmel through their respective works of the *‘Gemeinschaft-Gesellschaft divide’*, *‘The Division of Labor in Society’*, and *‘The Metropolis and Mental Life’* (Ritzer, 2011) in the revelation of social change that was unfolding across Europe entailing heterogeneous social interactions, impersonal exchanges, and instrumental relationships.

Gottdiener and Hutchison also commented on Louis Wirth’s theory of *‘Urbanism as a Way of Life’* as a breakthrough in the understanding of urbanism, giving the issue of urbanization a sociological flavor that oriented subsequent literature in the field to date. They revisited how Wirth focused on urbanism-urban lifestyle-more than on structure adding the concept of city was defined as it was a relatively large, dense, and permanent settlement and socially and culturally heterogeneous people, and so urbanism was a function of population density, size and heterogeneity.

3. What good is the book *The New Urban Sociology* by Gottdiener and Hutchison?

In the beginning of this paper, review of changes in the fourth edition of the book revisited the shift in the theoretical orientation to explicate urban issues from neo-classical economics to mixed economy. This shift testified the determination and clarity of Gottdiener and Hutchison to throw an approach that could be applied at global level. In the quest of developing an objective theoretical framework to better understand social phenomena in social science, this orientation to explain urbanization can be considered a milestone. This is to say that, although subjective understanding of the social phenomena has been focused on in the social science literatures, a perspective that could enable readers to connect variables and phenomena at the most integrated essence at global level, but also explanatory of the same issue at the most local level we could think of, is worthy of trying to develop. In this regard, the authors deserve recognition for the favor they had done discourses in the social sciences. Science in general and social sciences in particular have been, and are still taking the risk of being criticized for their Euro-centric orientation in the understanding of social phenomena that could arise far from the occidental world. We all have read the criticisms of, say modernization theory of development developed by Smelser and Rostow, for example (Harrison, 2005) revolving around the difficulty of applying the rationales of the theory to account for similarly placed issues in other areas of the world, in Africa and Asia to mention but a few. The importance given to the centrality of mixed economy in the understanding of urban growth globally is then what this book could be good for such a perspective clearly captures the involvement of governments in urban expansion virtually in all countries of the world.

Gottdiener and Hutchison argued global urban expansion could now best be understood in terms of the nexus between global economy and small-family businesses connected to local communities. As much as the influence of global economy was important to induce urban expansion especially in metropolis structure in the eyes of writers in the social science, so do small-local businesses. To support this claim with a practical example, we can turn our attention into the importance that social capital has had in the livelihood diversification of people in urban areas in the developing nations. This has come to the focus of urban sociologists to scrutinize the interplay between social capital and migration to affect livelihood diversification in urban areas whose combined effect is a pronounced urban expansion. Gottdiener and Hutchison acknowledged the ever increasing global pattern urbanization has been taking and the importance of internal sources of changes in the trend of urban growth within boundaries of nations and

cities across the globe. Political unrests in Ethiopia since 2016, for example, have been greatly impacting the concentration of people in certain cities of the country thereby bringing about urban expansion in the process implicating concomitant changes in the lifestyle of people who made it into the host communities.

Gottdiener and Hutchison were of the claim that literatures in the issue of urbanization focused more on the demand-side factors in urban development in the past. Down the time, they argued, supply-side factors in urban development needed attention. Government and real estate have been shaping the pattern of urban growth in a multifaceted way. The increase in Gated-Communities, massive investments on urban infrastructure and amenities, restructuring of spatial segments of cities and metropolis, and the reclassification of villages into urban areas can all be mentioned here for they altogether bring about urban expansion both in spatial and demographic terms. This trend can also give us an insight to look into the nexus between global and local businesses to influence the pattern of urban growth as local business developers have been greatly learning from and adopting the strategies of global entities to further urban expansion in their respective boundaries. The Real Estate business, suffocating almost all media outlets through their advertisements, can now be seen putting their impact on the spatial structuration of urban areas in Ethiopia, to be specific, and in other countries in general. Government led projects in housing development and provision of infrastructure is also a major variable in urban expansion. This could even take a heightened version in the case of state-controlled economies where land and other important resources are controlled by and put into use by agencies of governments, as in the case of Ethiopia.

Urban semiotics, “*a special subfield that studies the built environment in the urban setting*” (Gottdiener and Hutchison, 2011: 17), is another perspective Gottdiener and Hutchison came up with. Urban sociology is of the view that built-up structures in the walls of cities have always been manifestations of the underlying socio-cultural fabrics of a given social organization. In this regard we can think of how temples, walls, fortresses, industrial erects, and skyscrapers bear the developments in human civilization and urbanization. As such arrangements could seem a mere agglomeration of construction materials and function-based establishments in the eyes of laymen, their essence, designs, and centrality in every-day lives of people is nothing short of an epitome of the cultural foundation in the civilization of the human race; an orientation the discipline of sociology has been installed on since its inception.

Gottdiener and Hutchison furthered this claim to include a perspective on how the study of origins of urbanization could actually shed light on the development of social structure of a society in general. It needs no mention that sociology as a discipline is obsessed with the understanding of the origin, development, and impact of social structure as it could give the perfect entry into the understanding of how society works. In this regard, Gottdiener and Hutchison attempted to look into the inception of urban living that could have impacted on the rise of social structure of societies since antiquity.

Gottdiener and Hutchison also did a great job developing *the Sociospatial Approach*. This approach “focuses our attention on how everyday life in the multinucleated metropolitan region is affected by the political economy of urban life—the interplay of cultural, political, economic, and social forces both within and outside of urban communities” (Gottdiener and Hutchison, 2011: 20). Being an embodiment of geography, urban planning, political economy, and sociology, the sociospatial approach provided an all-encompassing perspective to analyze urban phenomena with regard to economic, political, geographic-spatial, and socio-cultural variables. Only in this integrated and multifaceted context is such a complex issue as urbanization could be understood. It also represents a theoretical framework that could help urban studies embark on endeavors in further attempts to better understand urbanization and the many more variables associated with it.

4. What could Gottdiener and Hutchison cover more?

Commenting so far on the elements of the book written by Gottdiener and Hutchison which intrigued the attention of the reviewer, this critical review argues the book could have covered more instances of urbanization to further the bringing into attention of the dynamics of urbanization by taking the context of Ethiopia, an African nation, whose experience could provide a different pattern in the history of urban growth.

Gottdiener and Hutchison discussed patterns of urban growth across different regions of the world in the entirety of their book. That attempt covered the cases of the United States of America, Europe, Japan, and developing nations, including China, Mexico, Argentina, Brazil, Indonesia and the likes. This was an important move by the authors that could help readers grasp the variegated contexts of urban growth across different regions and economic ladders of countries. This could, however, cover the history and pattern of urbanization in Ethiopia, a

country whose case could present a different experience with regard to the forces that shaped urbanization. Ethiopia is known to be among the oldest civilizations in the world with an experience of state formation that prevailed for over three millennia. Some authorities, including Antonsich (2000) and Munro-Hay (1991), argued the beginning of urbanization in Ethiopia was as old as its state formation dating back to the first millennium B.C. This millennia old experience of statehood has been accompanied by a pattern of urban growth different to the developed nations, developing nations or even to primate cities.

Literatures in the social science resonate the history of independence of Ethiopia from colonial conquest of European forces as it signals the typical identity of the country. That identity also involves a history of urbanization associated with the importance of such cities as Axum, Lalibela, Gondar, Harar, Addis Ababa and the likes. An inclusion of the history of urbanization in Ethiopia in the book *The New Urban Sociology* could render readers a perspective that could not be explained by the instances of those mentioned earlier, i.e. developed nations, developing nations, and the legacy of primate cities.

5. Conclusion

Gottdiener and Hutchison managed to publish a book that represents a full-fledged stand against any quest in the issue of urbanization. They developed the sociospatial approach that could equip an urban reader with lenses to look at urban phenomena at the most global, but also local level. Their desire to ensure objectivity and subjectivity in the theoretical orientations of the perspectives is also a good reason to simply read the book.

6. References

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