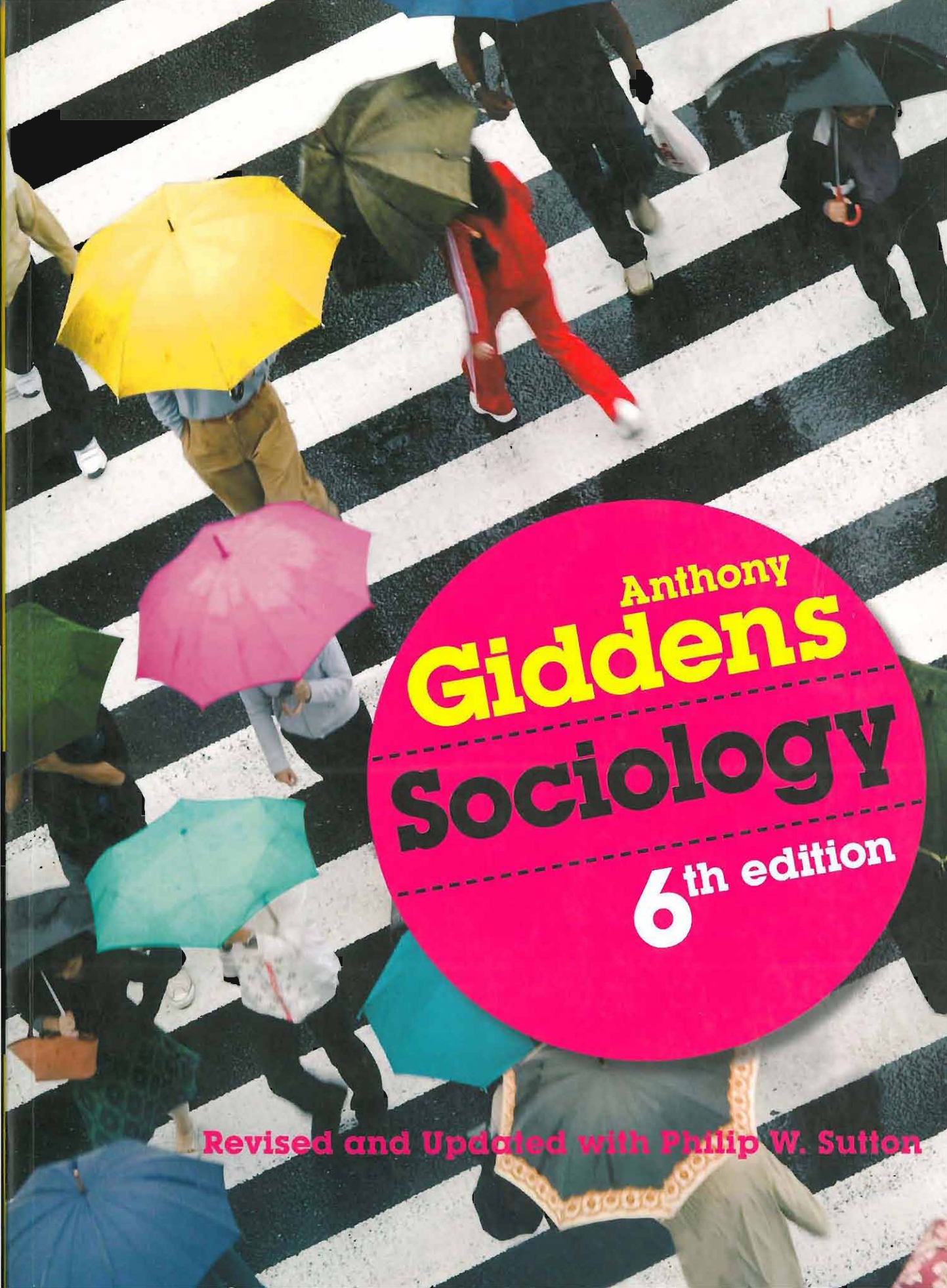

Anthony

Giddens

Sociology

6th edition

Revised and Updated with Philip W. Sutton

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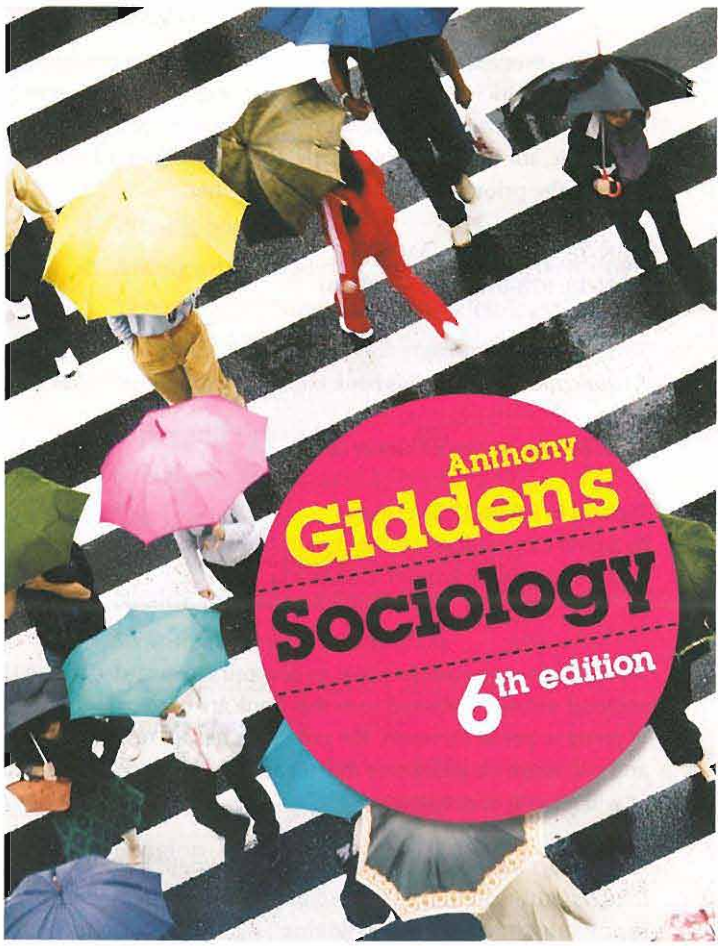

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Philip W. Sutton

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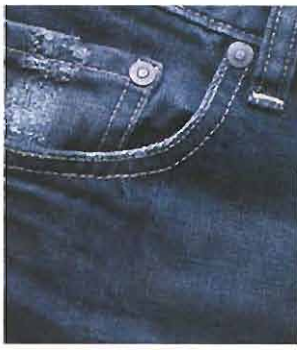

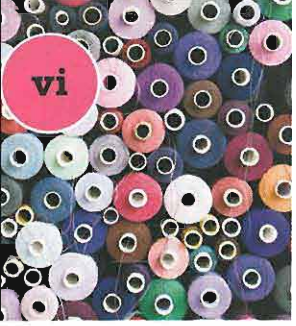

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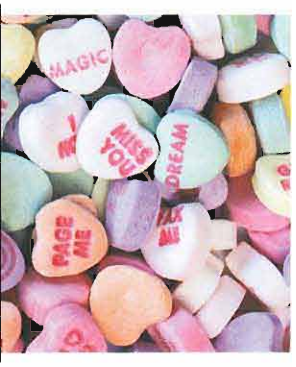
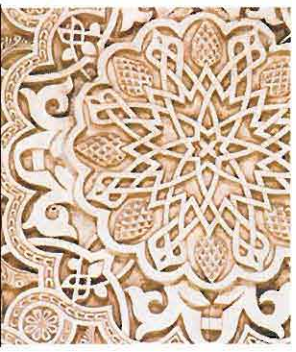




Preface to the sixth edition

It is now 20 years since the first edition of *Sociology* was published. In 1989, when the book first came out, some readers of the current edition weren't even born. That year was a time of dramatic social change, with the end of the Cold War and the opening up of former Soviet bloc countries. Events such as the Tiananmen Square massacre in China made headlines worldwide. Throughout the 1980s, more and more people in the developed world had acquired luxury goods such as microwaves and video recorders. Yet at that time the current pervasiveness of the Internet, email and other digital media in everyday life was unimaginable. I dictated much of the first edition onto tape, and it was then typed up on a word processor, a kind of electronic typewriter.

Over the years, consecutive editions have mapped out the myriad changes we have experienced in the social world, as well as sociologists' attempts to understand them. This sixth edition has been carefully revised to make sure it takes account of recent global developments and new ideas in sociology. You'll see that there is now a chapter dedicated to war and terrorism, as well as substantive new material in the chapters on the media, education, theoretical thinking, politics and government. Other revisions have been made throughout.

I have all the previous editions of *Sociology* on my shelves at home, as well as copies in the multiple languages into which the book has been translated. What all previous editions of this book have in common is their attempt to help readers see the value of thinking sociologically. I hope this sixth edition will again serve that purpose.

Students sometimes find sociological ideas and evidence difficult to understand. In part, I think that's because sociology demands a concerted attempt to set aside personal beliefs and opinions when analysing research findings and theories. In this sense, thinking sociologically involves a profound intellectual challenge. Most people who study sociology are changed by the experience. The reason is that sociology offers a different perspective on the world from that which most people have when they start out in the subject. Sociology helps us look beyond the immediate contexts of our lives and so helps us understand the causes of our own actions better. Sociology can also help us change the world for the better. I hope you enjoy the book.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank everyone who has helped in the preparation of this book in all six of its editions. This sixth edition has benefited enormously from the involvement of Philip W. Sutton, a sociologist with 17 years' experience of teaching at university level. Philip's contribution to this edition has helped to ensure that the book is fully up to date with the ways in which sociology is currently being taught. His longstanding experience of designing and delivering introductory sociology courses has given this edition a fresh, interactive dimension. This revision also owes much to the research skills of Ann P. Love, who worked tirelessly to collect contemporary materials across the varied sociological subjects. I am greatly indebted to her. I should like to thank all those who read draft chapters and made constructive suggestions for improvement. Thanks are also owed to the worldwide readers of the fifth edition who wrote to tell me about their experiences of using the book.

At Polity, I thank the following in particular: John Thompson, David Held, Gill Motley, Neil de Cort and Breffni O'Connor. Emma Longstaff and Jonathan Skerrett have managed the project from start to finish and have been marvellous to work with. The book owes much to Emma's clear vision and constructive advice, even – perhaps especially – in occasional periods of adversity. Finally, as always, I should like to thank Alena Ledeneva for her constant help and encouragement.

AG

About this book

One of the things that's so exciting about sociology is its constant engagement with the ever-changing social world. Events we find hard to make sense of, or that frighten us – such as climate change or terrorism – are all of interest to sociologists. My aim in this sixth edition, as in the previous five, has been to capture the sense of excitement that pervades the very best of sociology, and to inspire a new generation of sociologists. The book was written in the firm belief that sociology has a key role to play in modern intellectual culture and a central place in the social sciences. It does not try to introduce overly sophisticated notions nor does it make a virtue of sociological jargon. Nevertheless, findings drawn from the cutting edge of the discipline are incorporated throughout, along with contemporary issues and data. My own work is, of course, included across the book and I have referred to it in the first person so that readers are clear when I am writing about my own contributions to the field. I have also included the views of my critics where necessary. I hope it is not a partisan treatment; as usual I endeavoured to cover the major perspectives in sociology and the major findings of contemporary research in an even-handed, though not indiscriminate, way.

Major themes

The book is constructed around a number of basic themes, each of which helps to give the work a distinctive character. One central theme is that of *social change*. Sociology was born of the transformations that wrenched the industrializing social order of the West away from the ways of life characteristic of preceding societies. The world created by these changes is the primary concern of sociological analysis. The pace of social change has continued to accelerate, and it is possible that we stand on the threshold of transitions as significant as those that occurred in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Sociology has prime responsibility for charting the transformations that have taken place in the past and for grasping the major lines of development taking place today.

A second, connected, theme of the book is the *globalizing of social life*. For too long, sociology has been dominated by the view that societies can be studied as independent entities. But even in the past, societies never really existed in isolation. In the contemporary world, we can see a clear acceleration in processes of global integration. The emphasis on globalization also connects closely with the weight given to the *interdependence* of the industrialized and developing worlds today. The book's first edition, published in 1989, broke new ground in discussing the impact of globalization, an examination of which was only just beginning, even in the more technical areas of the discipline. Since then the

debate about globalization has intensified, while globalization itself has advanced much further, as have some of the changes in information technology associated with it.

Third, the book adopts a strongly *comparative* stance. Sociology cannot be taught solely by understanding the institutions of one particular society and the discussions contain a rich variety of materials drawn from across the world. The book continues to cover developing countries as well as the industrialized ones and in this way, it contributes to the globalization of sociology. Given the close connections that now mesh societies across the world with one another, and the virtual disappearance of traditional social systems, sociology and anthropology are becoming increasingly indistinguishable.

A fourth theme is the necessity of taking an *historical approach* to sociology. This involves more than just filling in the historical context within which events occur. One of the most important developments in sociology over the past few years has been an increasing emphasis on historical analysis. This should be understood not solely as applying a sociological outlook to the past, but as a way of contributing to our understanding of institutions in the present. Recent work in historical sociology is discussed throughout and provides a framework for the interpretations offered within most of the chapters.

Fifth, particular attention is given throughout the text to *issues of gender*. The study of gender is ordinarily regarded as a specific field within sociology as a whole – and this volume contains one chapter that specifically explores thinking and research on the subject. However, questions about gender relations are so fundamental to sociological analysis today that they cannot simply be considered a subdivision. Thus, many chapters contain sections concerned with issues of gender.

A sixth theme is the *micro and macro link*. In many places in the book, I show that interaction in micro-level contexts affects larger social processes and that such macro-level processes influence our day-to-day lives. Social situations can be better understood by analysing them at both the micro and macro levels.

A final theme is the relation between the *social* and the *personal*. Sociological thinking is a vital help to self-understanding, which in turn can be focused back on an improved understanding of the social world. Studying sociology should be a liberating experience that enlarges our sympathies and imagination, opens up new perspectives on the sources of our own behaviour and creates an awareness of cultural settings different from our own. In so far as sociological ideas challenge dogma, teach the appreciation of cultural variety and provide insights into the working of social institutions, the *practice* of sociology enhances the possibilities of human freedom.

New features

The sixth edition incorporates a range of new features, all designed to help make the book more engaging, support students' learning, and to stretch their sociological imaginations. First, throughout the book you'll now find *Classic Studies* boxes. These are intended to introduce students to some of sociology's most influential research. I have tried to pick examples which have had a big impact in the field, and which will engage or provoke readers. The selections are not

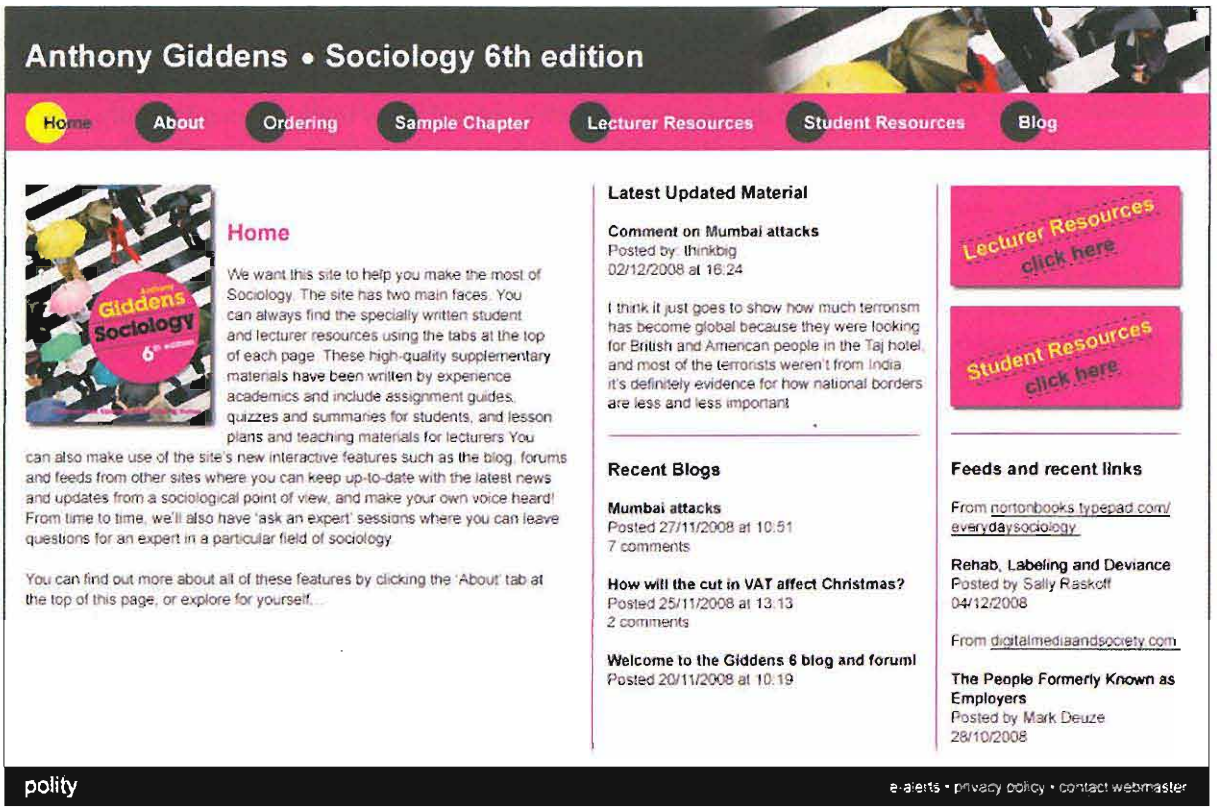
definitive, exhaustive or comprehensive, but are illustrative of key problems or concerns. The Classic Studies may date from the early days of sociology or be relatively recent, as sheer age does not define them. Instead, the studies are chosen for the deep-seated influence they've had on subsequent research, be it methodologically, theoretically, empirically, or a mixture of these. Above all, I have tried to choose examples that will inspire students, and help them to appreciate the many possibilities opened up by thinking sociologically.

Second, the interactivity of the text has been increased to reflect the growing focus in education on student-centred learning. In all the chapters you'll find a series of new boxes labeled *Thinking Critically*. These can be seen as 'stopping off' points where the reader is encouraged to reflect on what they've been reading, before coming back to pick up the thread. The notion of 'critical' thinking may seem irrelevant to those who see sociology as an inherently critical discipline. However, the questions posed often require the reader to be critical not only of political dogma or social practices, but also of sociology and sociological debates themselves. In this sense, 'thinking critically' serves as a useful reminder that a *constantly* critical approach extends to all ideas – including my own and the so-called 'classics' I discussed earlier! I strongly recommend that readers work through these boxes as part and parcel of getting the most from the book.

Third, many more boxed sections have been included. Numerous lecturers and students have found these very helpful in previous editions and have requested more. To this end, in addition to the *Classic Studies* already mentioned, the book now features two more styles of box. *Global Society* boxes reflect the increasingly global frame of reference within which sociologists work, and will hopefully encourage students to orientate themselves globally when thinking of even the most apparently local or domestic issues. Boxes labelled *Using your Sociological Imagination* often contain quirky or arresting material, designed to illustrate or expand themes found in the main body of the text. They finish with a series of questions on the material featured, providing another opportunity to stimulate students' critical thinking.

In addition, the number of terms in the *glossary* has been expanded. Terms included in the glossary are highlighted in a different colour in the text. *Further readings* are annotated for the first time in this edition, so readers can make a more informed choice about what they choose to read. At the end of each chapter *Summary points* bring readers back to the main points of each chapter – a way of checking understanding, and to reinforce the key messages of each chapter. *Internet links* have been included again, but this time with explicit guidance on why each site is being recommended.

In addition to the *Internet links*, the book is also designed to be used in conjunction with the extensive material on its own website: www.polity.co.uk/giddens. Both lecturers and students will find a wealth of resources to aid further research into the themes explored throughout the book, and to support students' learning.



Visit the interactive website that accompanies this book at

www.politybooks.com/giddens6

where you'll find specially written materials for students and lecturers, including assignment guides, quizzes and useful links, lesson plans and teaching resources.

The site also features regularly updated content and blogs, so don't miss out on the opportunity to put across your questions in the 'ask an expert' sessions and to make your voice heard.

Organization of the book

There is not much abstract discussion of sociological concepts in the book. Instead, I have sought to illustrate ideas, concepts and theories by means of concrete examples. While these are usually taken from sociological research, I have quite often used material from other sources (such as newspaper reports) for illustrative purposes. I have tried to keep the writing style as simple and direct as possible, whilst also endeavouring to make the book a good read. The overall aim is to create a fairly seamless narrative throughout each chapter and indeed the book as a whole.

The chapters follow a sequence designed to help achieve a progressive mastery of the different fields of sociology, but I have taken care to ensure that the book can be used flexibly and is easy to adapt to the needs of teachers, which are necessarily diverse. Chapters can be ignored or studied in a different order without much loss as each one has been written as a fairly autonomous unit, with substantial cross-referencing to relevant chapters.

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USING YOUR SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION

CHAPTER 1

What is Sociology?

We live today – in the first decade of the twenty-first century – in a world that is intensely worrying, yet full of the most extraordinary promise for the future. It is a world marked by rapid changes, deep conflicts, tensions and social divisions, as well as by increasing concerns about the destructive impact of human societies on the natural environment. Yet we also have new opportunities for controlling our destiny and shaping our lives for the better that would have been unimaginable to earlier generations.

How did this world come about? Why are our conditions of life so different from those of our parents and grandparents? What directions will societies take in the future? If you have ever asked yourself such questions, then consider

yourself a novice sociologist. These questions are the prime concern of sociology, a field of study that consequently has a fundamental role to play in modern intellectual life.

Sociology is the scientific study of human life, social groups, whole societies and the human world as such. It is a dazzling and compelling enterprise, as its subject-matter is our own behaviour as social beings. The scope of sociology is extremely wide, ranging from the analysis of passing encounters between individuals on the street to the investigation of international relations and global forms of terrorism.

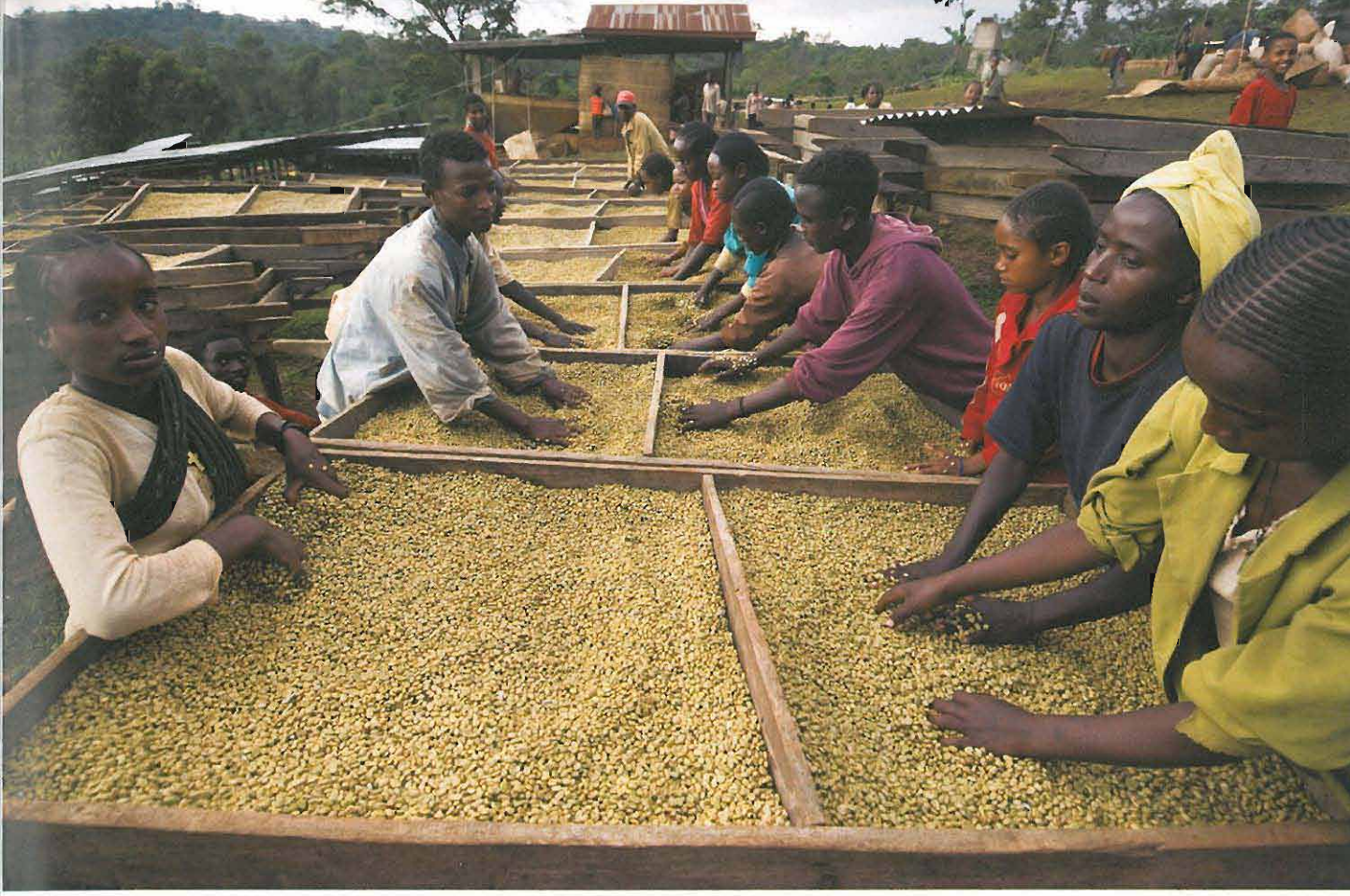
Most of us see the world in terms of the familiar features of our own lives – family, friendships and work. But sociology demonstrates the need to take a much broader view of our own lives in order to explain why we act as we do. It teaches us that what we regard as natural, inevitable, good or true may not be so, and that things we take for granted are strongly influenced by historical events and social processes. Understanding the subtle yet complex and profound ways in which our individual lives reflect the contexts of our social experience is basic to the sociological outlook.

The sociological imagination

Learning to think sociologically – looking, in other words, at the broader view – means cultivating our imagination. Studying sociology is not just a routine process of acquiring knowledge. A sociologist is someone who is able to break free from the immediacy of personal circumstances and put things into a wider context. Doing sociological work depends on what the American author C. Wright Mills, in a famous phrase, called the sociological imagination (Mills 1970).

The sociological imagination requires us, above all, to 'think ourselves away' from the familiar routines of our daily lives in order to look at them anew. Consider the simple act of drinking a cup of coffee. What could we find to say, from a sociological point of view, about such an apparently

Getting together with friends for coffee is part of a social ritual.



Coffee is more than a pleasant drink for these workers, whose livelihoods depend on the coffee plant.

uninteresting piece of behaviour? An enormous amount.

We could point out, first of all, that coffee is not just a refreshment. It has symbolic value as part of our day-to-day social activities. Often the ritual associated with coffee-drinking is much more important than the simple act of consuming the drink. For many Westerners, the morning cup of coffee stands at the centre of a personal routine. It is an essential first step to starting the day. Morning coffee is often followed later in the day by coffee with others – the basis of a social, not just individual, ritual. Two people who arrange to meet for coffee are probably more interested in getting together and chatting than in what they actually drink. In all societies, drinking and eating provide occasions for social interaction and the enactment of rituals – and these offer a rich subject matter for sociological study.

Second, coffee is a drug that contains caffeine, which has a stimulating effect on the brain. Many people drink coffee for the 'extra lift' it provides. Long days at the office or late nights studying are made more tolerable by regular coffee breaks. Coffee is a habit-forming substance, but coffee addicts are not normally regarded by most people in Western cultures as 'drug-users'. Like alcohol, coffee is a socially acceptable drug, whereas marijuana, for instance, is not. Yet there are societies that tolerate the consumption of marijuana or even cocaine, but frown on both coffee and alcohol. Sociologists are interested in why these differences exist and how they came about.

Third, an individual who drinks a cup of coffee is caught up in a complicated set of social and economic relationships stretching right across the world. Coffee is a product that links people in some of the wealthiest and most impoverished parts of the planet: it is consumed in great quantities in wealthy countries, but is grown primarily in poor ones. Next to oil, coffee is the most valuable commodity in international trade; it provides many

Eighteenth-century coffee houses were centres of gossip and political intrigue for British social elites.

countries with their largest source of foreign exchange. The production, transportation and distribution of coffee require continuous transactions between people thousands of miles away from the coffee drinker. Studying such global transactions is an important task of sociology, since many aspects of our lives are now affected by worldwide social influences and communications.

Fourth, the act of sipping a coffee presumes a long process of social and economic development. Along with other familiar items of Western diets – like tea, bananas, potatoes and white sugar – coffee became widely consumed only from the late 1800s, though it was fashionable amongst the elite before then. Although the drink originated in the Middle East, its mass consumption dates from the period of Western expansion some two centuries ago. Virtually all the coffee we drink today comes from areas such as South America and Africa that were colonized by Europeans; it is in no sense a 'natural' part of the Western diet. The colonial legacy has had an enormous impact on the development of the global coffee trade.

Fifth, coffee is a product that lies at the heart of contemporary debates about globalization, international fair trade, human rights and environmental destruction. As coffee has grown in popularity, it has become 'branded' and politicized; the decisions that consumers make about what kind of coffee to drink and where to purchase it have become lifestyle choices. People may choose to drink only organic coffee, decaffeinated coffee or coffee that has been 'fairly traded' through schemes that pay the full market price to small producers in developing countries. They may opt to patronize 'independent' coffee houses, rather than 'corporate' coffee chains such as Starbucks. Coffee-drinkers might decide to boycott coffee from countries with poor human rights and environmental records. Sociologists are interested to understand how globalization heightens people's awareness of issues occurring in distant corners of the planet and prompts them to act on new knowledge in their own lives. For sociologists, the apparently trivial act of drinking coffee could hardly be more interesting.

Studying people and society

Adopting a sociological imagination allows us to see that many events which appear to concern only the individual actually reflect

larger issues. Divorce, for instance, may be a very difficult process for someone who goes through it – what Mills calls a 'personal trouble'. But divorce is also a significant 'public issue' in many societies across the world. In Britain, over a third of all marriages end in divorce within ten years. Unemployment, to take another example, may be a personal tragedy for anyone who loses their job and is unable to find another. Yet it goes far beyond a matter of private despair when millions of people in a society are in the same situation: it is a public issue expressing large social trends.

Try to apply a sociological imagination to your own life. It is not necessary to think only of troubling events. Consider, for instance, why you are turning the pages of this book at all – why did you decide to study sociology? You could be a reluctant sociology student, taking the course only to fulfil the degree requirement for a future career. Or you might just be enthusiastic to find out more about your society and the subject of sociology. Whatever your motivation, you are likely to have a good deal in common, without necessarily knowing it, with others who also study sociology. Your private decision reflects your position within the wider society.

Do the following characteristics apply to you? Are you young? White? From a professional or white-collar background? Have you done, or do you still do, some part-time work to boost your income? Do you want to find a good job when you finish your education, but are not especially dedicated to studying? Do you not really know what sociology is, but think it has something to do with how people behave in groups? More than three-quarters of you will answer 'yes' to all these questions. University students are not typical of the population as a whole, but tend to be drawn from more privileged social backgrounds. And their attitudes usually reflect those held by friends and acquaintances. The social backgrounds from which we come have a great deal to do with what kinds of decision we think appropriate.

Did some or none of the characteristics above apply to you? You might come from a minority-group background or from one of poverty. You may be someone in mid-life or older. All the same, further conclusions probably follow. You are likely to have had to struggle to get where you are; you might have had to overcome hostile reactions from friends and others when you told them you were intending to go to college; or you might be combining higher education with full-time parenthood.

Although we are all influenced by the social contexts in which we find ourselves, none of us is completely determined in our behaviour by those contexts. We possess, and create, our own individuality. It is the business of sociology to investigate the connections between what society makes of us and what we make of ourselves and society. Our activities both structure – give shape to – the social world around us and, at the same time, are structured by that social world. The concept of social structure is an important one in sociology. It refers to the fact that the social contexts of our lives do not consist of random assortments of events or actions; they are structured, or patterned, in distinct ways. There are regularities in the ways we behave and in the relationships we have with one another.

But social structure is not like a physical structure, such as a building, which exists independently of human actions. Human societies are always in the process of structuration. They are reconstructed at every moment by the very 'building blocks' that compose it – human beings like you and me. Consider again the case of coffee. A cup of coffee does not automatically arrive in your hands. You choose to go to a particular coffee shop and you choose whether to drink a latte or an espresso. As you make these decisions, along with millions of other people, you shape the market for coffee and affect the lives of coffee producers living perhaps thousands of miles away on the other side of the world.

The development of sociological thinking

When they first start studying sociology, many students are puzzled by the diversity of approaches they encounter. Sociology has never been a discipline in which there is a body of ideas that everyone accepts as valid, though there have been times when some theories have been more widely accepted than others. Sociologists often quarrel amongst themselves about how to study human behaviour and how research results should best be interpreted. Why should this be so? Why can sociologists not agree with one another more consistently, as natural scientists seem able to do? The answer is bound up with the very nature of our subject-matter. Sociology is about our own lives and our own behaviour and studying ourselves is the most complex and difficult endeavour we can undertake.

Theories and theoretical perspectives

Trying to understand something as complex as the impact of industrialization on societies, for example, raises the importance of theory to sociology. Factual research shows how things occur; but sociology does not just consist of collecting facts, however important and interesting they may be. For example, it is a fact that I bought a cup of coffee this morning, that it cost a certain amount of money and that the coffee beans used to make it were grown in Central America. But in sociology we also want to know

In this painting by Brueghel, there are a large number of people engaged in a range of often bizarre activities. The painting at first seems to make little sense. However, its title, Netherlandish Proverbs, helps explain its meaning: this picture shows more than 100 proverbs that were common when it was painted in the sixteenth century. In the same way, sociologists need theory as a context to help make sense of their observations.

why things happen, and in order to do so we have to learn to construct explanatory theories. For instance, we know that industrialization has had a major influence on the emergence of modern societies, but what are the origins of and preconditions for industrialization? Why do we find differences between societies in their industrialization processes? Why is industrialization associated with changes in forms of criminal punishment or in family structures and marriage systems? To answer such questions, we have to develop theoretical thinking.

Theories involve constructing abstract interpretations that can be used to explain a wide variety of empirical or 'factual' situations. A theory about industrialization, for example, would be concerned with identifying the main features that processes of industrial development share in common and would try to show which of these are of importance in explaining industrial development. Of course, factual research and theories can never be completely separated. We can only develop valid theoretical explanations if we are able to test them by means of factual research.

We need theories to help us make sense of the many facts that we find. Contrary to popular assertion, facts do *not* speak for themselves. Many sociologists do work primarily on factual research, but unless they are guided by some knowledge of theory, their work is unlikely to be able to *explain* the complexity of societies. This is true even of research carried out with strictly practical objectives in mind.

Many 'practical people' tend to be suspicious of theorists and may like to see themselves as too 'down to earth' to have to pay any attention to more abstract ideas. Yet all practical decisions have some theoretical assumptions lying behind them. The manager of a business, for example, might have scant regard for 'theory'. Nonetheless, every approach to business activity involves theoretical assumptions, even if these remain unstated. Thus, the manager might assume that employees are motivated to work hard mainly by money – the level of wages they receive. This is an underlying theoretical interpretation of human behaviour, though it is also a mistaken one, as research in industrial sociology tends to demonstrate.

Without a theoretical approach, we would not know what to look for when beginning a study or when interpreting our results at the end of the research. However, the illumination of factual evidence is not the only reason for the prime position of theory in sociology. Theoretical thinking must respond to general problems posed by the study of human social life, including issues that are philosophical in nature. Deciding the extent to which sociology should be modelled on the natural sciences and how we should best conceptualize human consciousness, action and institutions are problems that do not have easy solutions. They have been handled in different ways in the various theoretical approaches that have developed within the discipline. This chapter will introduce sociology's founders and describe the way they theorized about modern societies; chapter 3, 'Theories and Perspectives in Sociology', provides a more up-to-date overview of the development of sociological theorizing over the course of the twentieth and into the twenty-first century.

Founders of sociology

We human beings have always been curious about the sources of our own behaviour, but for thousands of years our attempts to understand ourselves relied on ways of thinking passed down from generation to generation, often expressed in religious terms. For example, before the rise of modern science, many people believed that gods or spirits were the cause of natural events such as earthquakes and other natural disasters. Although writers from earlier periods provided insights into human behaviour, the systematic study of society is

Auguste Comte (1798–1857).

a relatively recent development, whose beginnings date back to the late 1700s and early 1800s. The background to the origins of sociology lies in the series of sweeping changes ushered in by the French Revolution and the mid-eighteenth-century Industrial Revolution in Europe. The shattering of traditional ways of life wrought by these changes resulted in the attempts of thinkers to understand and explain how they had come about and what their consequences were likely to be. To do this, scholars were led to develop new understandings of both the social and the natural worlds.

One key development was the use of science instead of religion to understand the world. The type of questions that nineteenth-century thinkers sought to answer – What is human nature? Why is society structured the way it is? How and why do societies change? – are much the same as those that sociologists try to answer today. However, our modern world is radically different from that of the past and it is sociology's task to help us understand this world and what the future is likely to hold.

Auguste Comte

No single individual can found a whole field of study and there were many contributors to early sociological thinking. However, particular prominence is usually given to the French author Auguste Comte (1798–1857), if only because he actually invented the word 'sociology'. Comte had originally used the term 'social physics' to describe the new field, but some of his intellectual rivals at the time were also using that term. Comte wanted to distinguish his own ideas from theirs, so he coined the term 'sociology' to describe the subject he wished to establish.

Comte's thinking reflected the turbulent events of his age. The French Revolution of 1789 had significantly changed French society, while the spread of industrialization was altering the traditional lives of the population. Comte sought to create a science of society that could explain the laws of the social world just as natural science explained the functioning of the physical world. Although Comte recognized that each scientific discipline has its own subject-matter, he argued that studying the latter could be done using the same common logic and scientific method aimed at revealing universal laws. Just as the discovery of laws in the natural world allows us to control and predict events around us, so uncovering the laws that govern human society could help us shape our destiny and improve the welfare of humanity. Comte argued that society conforms to invariable laws in much the same way that the physical world does.

Comte's vision for sociology was for it to become a 'positive science'. He wanted sociology to apply the same rigorous scientific

methods to the study of society that physicists and chemists use to study the physical world. Positivism holds that science should be concerned only with observable entities that are known directly to experience. On the basis of careful observations, one can infer laws that explain the relationship between the observed phenomena. By understanding the causal relationships between events, scientists can then predict how future events will occur. A positivist approach to sociology aims for the production of knowledge about society based on empirical evidence drawn from observation, comparison and experimentation.

Comte's *law of three stages* claims that human efforts to understand the world have passed through theological, metaphysical and positive stages. In the theological stage, thinking was guided by religious ideas and the belief that society was an expression of God's will. In the metaphysical stage, which came to the forefront around the time of the Renaissance, society came to be seen in natural, not supernatural, terms. The positive stage, ushered in by the discoveries and achievements of Copernicus, Galileo and Newton, encouraged the application of scientific techniques to the social world. In keeping with this view, Comte regarded sociology as the last science to develop – following on from physics, chemistry and biology – but also as the most significant and complex of all the sciences.

In the latter part of his career, Comte drew up ambitious plans for the reconstruction of French society in particular and for human societies in general, based on his sociological viewpoint. He urged the establishment of a 'religion of humanity' that would abandon faith and dogma in favour of a scientific grounding. Sociology would be at the heart of the new religion. Comte was keenly aware of the state of the society in which he lived; he was concerned with the inequalities being produced by industrialization and the threat they posed to social cohesion. The long-term solution, in his view, was the production of a new moral consensus that would help to regulate, or hold together, society, despite the new patterns of inequality. Although Comte's vision for the reconstruction of society was never realized, his contribution to systematizing and unifying the science of society was important to the later professionalization of sociology as an academic discipline.

Emile Durkheim

The writings of another French sociologist, Emile Durkheim (1858–1917), have had a more lasting impact on modern sociology than those of Comte. Although Durkheim drew on aspects of Comte's work, he thought that many of his predecessor's ideas were too speculative and vague and that Comte had not successfully carried out his programme – to establish sociology on a

Emile Durkheim (1858–1917).

scientific basis. Durkheim saw sociology as a new science that could be used to elucidate traditional philosophical questions by examining them in an empirical manner. Like Comte before him, Durkheim argued that we must study social life with the same objectivity as scientists study the natural world. His famous first principle of sociology was 'Study social facts as things!' By this, he meant that social life could be analysed as rigorously as objects or events in nature.

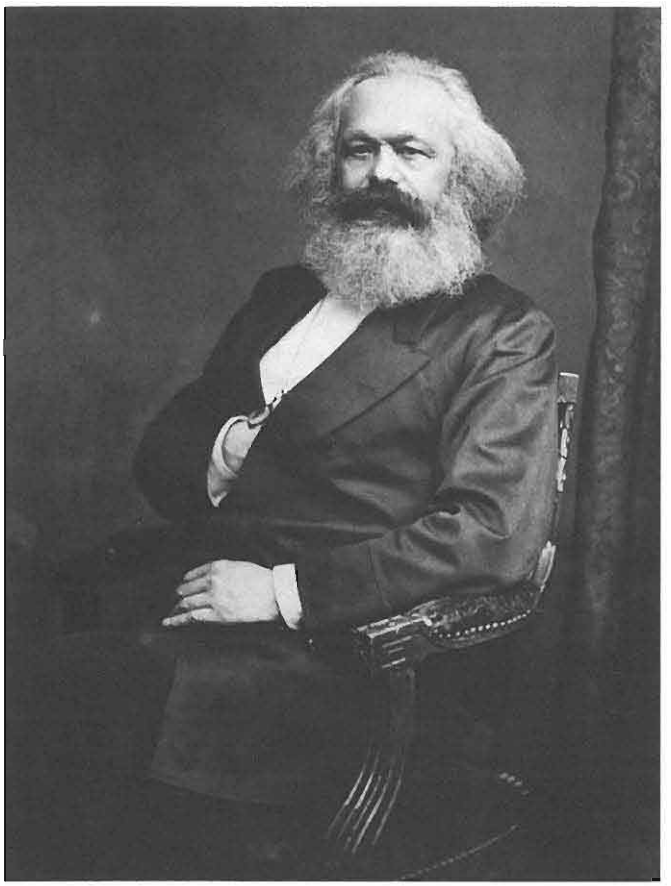
Durkheim's writings spanned a broad spectrum of topics. Three of the main themes he addressed were the importance of sociology as an empirical science, the rise of the individual and the formation of a new social order, and the sources and character of moral authority in society. We will encounter Durkheim's ideas again in our discussions of sociological theories, religion, deviance and crime, and work and economic life.

For Durkheim, the main intellectual concern of sociology is the study of social facts. Rather than applying sociological methods to the study of individuals, sociologists should instead examine social facts – aspects of social life that shape our actions as individuals, such as the state of the economy or the influence of religion. Durkheim argued that societies have a reality of their own – that there is more to society than simply the actions and interests of its individual members. According to Durkheim, social facts are ways of acting, thinking or feeling that are external to individuals and have their own reality outside the lives and perceptions of individual people. Another attribute of social facts is that they exercise a coercive power over individuals. The constraining nature of social facts is often not recognized by people as coercive. This is because people generally comply with social facts freely, believing they are acting out of choice. In fact, Durkheim argues, people often simply follow patterns that are general to their society. Social facts can constrain human action in a variety of ways, ranging from outright punishment (in the case of a crime, for example) to social rejection (in the case of unacceptable behaviour) to simple misunderstanding (in the case of the misuse of language).

Durkheim conceded that social facts are difficult to study. Because they are invisible and intangible, social facts cannot be observed directly. Instead, their properties must be revealed indirectly by analysing their effects or by considering attempts that have been made at their expression, such as laws, religious texts or written rules of conduct. In studying social facts, Durkheim stressed the importance of abandoning prejudices and ideology. A scientific attitude demands a mind which is open to the evidence of the senses and free of preconceived ideas which come from outside. Durkheim held that scientific concepts could only be generated through scientific practice. He challenged sociologists to study things as they really are and to construct new concepts that reflect the true nature of social things.

Like the other founders of sociology, Durkheim was preoccupied with the changes transforming society in his own lifetime. He was particularly interested in social and moral solidarity – in other words, what holds society together and keeps it from descending into chaos. Solidarity is maintained when individuals are successfully integrated into social groups and are regulated by a set of shared values and customs. In his first major work, *The Division of Labour in Society*, Durkheim presented an analysis of social change that argued that the advent of the industrial era meant the emergence of a new type of solidarity (Durkheim 1984 [1893]). In making this argument, Durkheim contrasted two types of solidarity, mechanical and organic, and related them to the division of labour – the growth of distinctions between different occupations.

According to Durkheim, traditional cultures with a low division of labour are characterized by mechanical solidarity. Because most members of the society are



Karl Marx (1818–83).

involved in similar occupations, they are bound together by common experience and shared beliefs. The strength of these shared beliefs is repressive – the community swiftly punishes anyone who challenges conventional ways of life. In this way, there is little room for individual dissent. Mechanical solidarity, therefore, is grounded in consensus and similarity of belief. The forces of industrialization and urbanization, however, led to a growing division of labour that contributed to the breakdown of this form of solidarity. Durkheim argued that the specialization of tasks and the increasing social differentiation in advanced societies would lead to a new order featuring organic solidarity. Societies characterized by organic solidarity are held together by people's economic interdependence and their recognition of the importance of others' contributions. As the division of labour expands, people become increasingly dependent upon one another, because each person needs goods and services that those in other occupations supply. Relationships of economic reciprocity and mutual dependency come to replace shared beliefs in creating social consensus.

Yet, processes of change in the modern world are so rapid and intense that they give rise to major social difficulties. They can have disruptive effects on traditional lifestyles, morals, religious beliefs and everyday patterns without providing clear new values. Durkheim linked these unsettling conditions to anomie: feelings of aimlessness, dread and despair provoked by modern social life. Traditional moral controls and standards, which used to be supplied by religion, are largely broken down by modern social development, and this leaves many individuals in modern societies feeling that their daily lives lack meaning.

One of Durkheim's most famous studies was concerned with the analysis of suicide (see Classic Studies 1.1 below). Suicide seems to be a purely personal act, the outcome of extreme personal unhappiness. Durkheim showed, however, that social factors exert a fundamental influence on suicidal behaviour, anomie being one of these influences. Suicide rates show regular patterns from year to year and these patterns must be explained sociologically.

Karl Marx

The ideas of Karl Marx (1818–83) contrast sharply with those of both Comte and Durkheim, but, like them, he sought to explain the changes that were taking place in society during the time of the Industrial Revolution. As a young man, Marx's political activities brought him into conflict with the German authorities; after a brief stay in France, he settled permanently in exile in Britain. Marx witnessed the growth of factories and industrial production, as well as the

Classic Studies 1.1 Durkheim's study of suicide rates

The research problem

One of the most unsettling aspects of our lives is the phenomenon of suicide, which often leaves those left behind with more questions than answers. Why do some people decide to take their own lives? Where do the pressures they experience actually come from? One of the early sociological classics which explores the relationship between the individual and society is Emile Durkheim's analysis of suicide rates, *Suicide: A Study in Sociology* (Durkheim 1952 [1897]). Even though people see themselves as individuals exercising free will and choice, their behaviours are often socially patterned and shaped and Durkheim's study showed that even a highly personal act like suicide is influenced by what happens in the social world.

Research had been conducted on suicide prior to Durkheim's study, but he was the first to insist on a sociological explanation. Previous writers had acknowledged the influence of some social factors on suicide, but generally resorted to race, climate or mental disorder to explain an individual's likelihood of committing suicide.

According to Durkheim, though, suicide was a social fact that could only be explained by other social facts. The suicide rate was more than simply the aggregate of individual suicides – it was a phenomenon with patterned properties. Suicide rates, for example, vary widely across the world's societies (see figure 1.1).

In examining official suicide statistics in France, Durkheim found that certain categories of people were more likely to commit suicide than others. He discovered, for example, that there were more suicides amongst men than amongst women, more Protestants than Catholics, more wealthy than poor, and more single people than married people. Durkheim also noted that suicide rates tended to be lower during times of war and higher during times of economic change or instability. Why should this be so?

Durkheim's explanation

These findings led Durkheim to conclude that there are social forces *external to the individual*

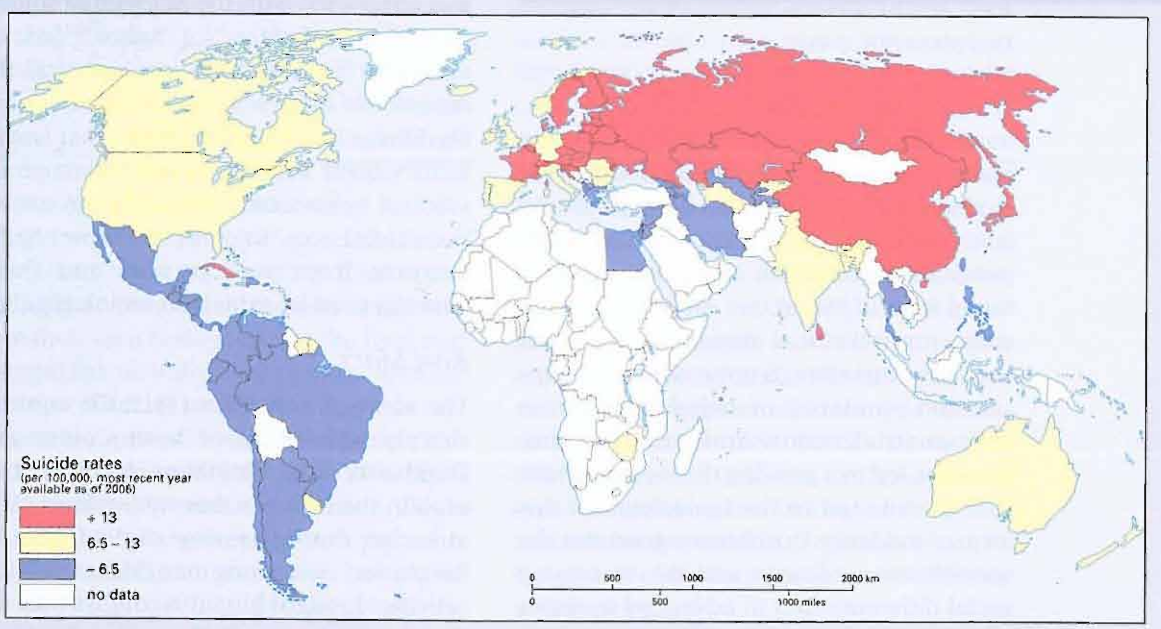


Figure 1.1 Global suicide rates, 2002

Source: World Health Organization 2002

which affect suicide rates. He related his explanation to the idea of social solidarity and to two types of bonds within society – social integration and social regulation. Durkheim argued that people who were strongly integrated into social groups, and whose desires and aspirations were regulated by social norms, were less likely to commit suicide. He identified four types of suicide, in accordance with the relative presence or absence of integration and regulation.

1. *Egoistic suicides* are marked by low integration in society and occur when an individual is isolated, or when his or her ties to a group are weakened or broken. For example, the low rates of suicide amongst Catholics could be explained by their strong social community, while the personal and moral freedom of Protestants mean that they 'stand alone' before God. Marriage protects against suicide by integrating the individual into a stable social relationship, while single people remain more isolated within society. The lower suicide rate during wartime, according to Durkheim, can be seen as a sign of heightened social integration in the face of an external enemy.
2. *Anomic suicide* is caused by a lack of social regulation. By this, Durkheim was referring to the social conditions of anomie when people are rendered 'normless' as a result of rapid change or instability in society. The loss of a fixed point of reference for norms and desires – such as in times of economic upheaval or in personal struggles like divorce – can upset the balance between people's circumstances and their desires.
3. *Altruistic suicide* occurs when an individual is 'over-integrated' – social bonds are too strong – and values society more than him- or herself. In such a case, suicide becomes a sacrifice for the 'greater good'. Japanese kamikaze pilots or Islamic 'suicide bombers' are examples of altruistic suicides. Durkheim saw these as characteristic of traditional societies where mechanical solidarity prevails.
4. The final type of suicide is *fatalistic suicide*. Although Durkheim saw this as of little contemporary relevance, he believed that it results when an individual is over-regulated by society. The oppression of the individual results in a feeling of powerlessness before fate or society.

Suicide rates vary between societies but show regular patterns *within* societies over time. Durkheim took this as evidence that there are consistent social forces that influence suicide rates. An examination of suicide rates reveals how general social patterns can be detected within individual actions.

Critical points

Since the publication of *Suicide*, many objections have been raised to Durkheim's study, particularly in relation to his uncritical use of official statistics, his dismissal of non-social influences on suicide and his insistence in classifying all types of suicide together. Some critics have also shown that it is vitally important to understand the social process involved in collecting data on suicides, as coroners' definitions and criteria influence the number of deaths actually recorded as 'suicides'. Because of this, suicide statistics may be highly variable across societies, not necessarily because of differences in suicidal behaviour, but because of different practices used by coroners in recording unexplained deaths.

Contemporary significance

Nonetheless, despite such legitimate criticisms, Durkheim's study remains a classic. It helped to establish sociology as a discipline with its own subject – the study of social facts – and his fundamental argument in his book on suicide retains its force: that to grasp fully even the apparently most personal act of suicide demands a sociological explanation rather than simply one rooted in the exploration of personal motivation.

resulting inequalities. His interest in the European labour movement and socialist ideas were reflected in his writings, which covered a diversity of topics. Most of his work concentrated on economic issues, but since he was always concerned to connect economic problems to social institutions, his work was, and remains, rich in sociological insights. Even his sternest critics regard his work as important in the development of sociology.

Capitalism and class struggle

Though he wrote about various phases of history, Marx concentrated primarily on change in modern times. For him, the most important changes were bound up with the development of capitalism. Capitalism is a system of production that contrasts radically with all previous economic systems, involving as it does the production of goods and services sold to a wide range of consumers. Marx identified two main elements within capitalist enterprises. The first is capital – any asset, including money, machines or even factories, that can be used or invested to make future assets. The accumulation of capital goes hand in hand with the second element, wage-labour. Wage-labour refers to the pool of workers who do not own the means of their livelihood but who must find employment provided by the owners of capital. Marx argued that those who own capital – capitalists – form a ruling class, while the mass of the population make up a class of waged workers – a working class. As industrialization spread, large numbers of peasants who used to support themselves by working the land moved to the expanding cities and helped to form an urban-based industrial working class. This working class is also referred to as the proletariat.

According to Marx, capitalism is inherently a class system in which class relations are characterized by conflict. Although owners of capital and workers are each dependent on the other – the capitalists need labour and the workers need wages – the dependency is highly unbalanced. The relationship between classes is an exploitative one, since workers have little or no control over their labour and employers are able to generate profit by appropriating the product of workers' labour. Marx saw that class conflict over economic resources would become more acute with the passing of time.

Social change: the materialist conception of history

Marx's viewpoint was grounded in what he called the materialist conception of history. According to this view, it is not the ideas or values which human beings hold that are the main sources of social change; rather, social change is prompted primarily by economic influences. Conflicts between classes provide the motivation for historical development – they are the 'motor of history'. As Marx wrote at the beginning of *The Communist Manifesto,* 'The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles' (Marx and Engels 2001 [1848]). Although Marx focused most of his attention on capitalism and modern society, he also examined how societies had developed over the course of history. According to him, social systems make a transition from one mode of production to another – sometimes gradually, sometimes through revolution – as a result of contradictions in their economies. He outlined a progression of historical stages that began with primitive communist societies of hunters and gatherers and passed through ancient slave-owning systems and feudal systems based on the division between landowners and serfs. The emergence of merchants and craftspeople marked the beginning of a commercial or capitalist class that came to displace the landed nobility. In accordance with this view of history, Marx argued that, just as the capitalists had united to overthrow the feudal order, so too would the capitalists be supplanted and a new order installed: communism.

Marx theorized the inevitability of a workers' revolution which would overthrow the capitalist system and usher in a new society in which there would be no classes – no large-scale divisions between rich and poor. He did not mean that all inequalities between individuals would disappear. Rather, society would no longer be split into a small class that monopolizes economic and political power and the large mass of people who benefit little from the wealth their work creates. The economic system would come under communal ownership, and a more humane society than we know at present would be established. Marx argued that, in the society of the future, production would be more advanced and efficient than production under capitalism.

Marx's work had a far-reaching effect on the twentieth-century world. Until only a generation ago, more than a third of the earth's population lived in societies, such as the Soviet Union and the countries of Eastern Europe, whose governments claimed to derive their inspiration from Marx's ideas.

Max Weber

Like Marx, Max Weber (pronounced 'veybur') (1864–1920) cannot simply be labelled a sociologist; his interests and concerns ranged across many areas. Born in Germany, where he spent most of his academic career, Weber was an individual of wide learning. His writings covered the fields of economics, law, philosophy and comparative history, as well as sociology. Much of his work was also concerned with the development of modern capitalism and the ways in which modern society was different from earlier forms of social organization. Through a series of empirical studies, Weber set forth some of the basic characteristics of modern industrial societies and identified key sociological debates that remain central for sociologists today.

In common with other thinkers of his time, Weber sought to understand the nature and causes of social change. He was influenced by Marx but was also strongly critical of some of Marx's major views. He rejected the materialist conception of history and saw class conflict as less significant than did Marx. In Weber's view, economic factors are important, but ideas and values have just as much impact on social change. Weber's celebrated and much discussed work, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1992 [1904–5]), proposes that religious values – especially those associated with Puritanism – were of fundamental importance in creating a capitalistic outlook. Unlike other early sociological thinkers, Weber argued that sociology should focus on social action, not social structures. He argued that human

Max Weber (1864–1920).

motivation and ideas were the forces behind change – ideas, values and beliefs had the power to bring about transformations. According to Weber, individuals have the ability to act freely and to shape the future. He did not see, as did Durkheim and Marx, that structures existed external to or independent of individuals. Rather, structures in society were formed by a complex interplay of actions. It was the job of sociology to understand the meanings behind those actions.

Some of Weber's most influential writings reflected this concern with social action in analysing the distinctiveness of Western society as compared with other major civilizations. He studied the religions of China, India and the Near East, and in the course of these researches made major contributions to the sociology of religion. Comparing the leading religious systems in China and India with those of the West, Weber concluded that certain aspects of Christian beliefs strongly influenced the rise of capitalism. He argued that the capitalist outlook of Western societies did not emerge, as Marx supposed, only from economic changes. In Weber's view, cultural ideas and values help shape society and our individual actions.

An important element in Weber's sociological perspective was the idea of the ideal type. Ideal types are conceptual or analytical models that can be used to understand the world. In the real world, ideal types rarely, if ever, exist – often only some of their attributes will be present. These hypothetical constructions can be very useful, however, as any situation in the real world can be understood by comparing it to an ideal type. In this way, ideal types serve as a fixed point of reference. It is important to point out that by 'ideal' type Weber did not mean that the conception was a perfect or desirable goal. Instead, he meant that it was a 'pure' form of a certain phenomenon. Weber utilized ideal types in his writings on forms of bureaucracy and economic markets.

Rationalization

In Weber's view, the emergence of modern society was accompanied by important shifts in patterns of social action. He saw that people were moving away from traditional beliefs grounded in superstition, religion, custom and long-standing habit. Instead, individuals were increasingly engaging in rational, instrumental calculations that took into account efficiency and the future consequences of their actions. In industrial society, there was little room for sentiment and for doing things simply because they had been done that way for generations. The development of science, modern technology and bureaucracy was described by Weber collectively as rationalization – the organization of social and economic life according to the principles of efficiency and on the basis of technical knowledge. If, in traditional societies, religion and long-standing customs largely defined people's attitudes and values, modern society was marked by the rationalization of more and more areas of life, from politics to religion to economic activity.

In Weber's view, the Industrial Revolution and the rise of capitalism were evidence of the larger trend towards rationalization. Capitalism is not dominated by class conflict, as Marx argued, but by the rise of science and bureaucracy: large-scale organizations. Weber saw the scientific character of the West as one of its most distinctive features. Bureaucracy, the only way of organizing large numbers of people effectively, expands with economic and political growth. Weber used the term 'disenchantment' to describe the way in which scientific thinking in the modern world had swept away the forces of sentimentality from the past.

Weber was not entirely optimistic about the outcome of rationalization, however. He was fearful that the spread of modern bureaucracy to all areas of life would imprison us in a 'steel-hard cage' from which there would be little chance of

USING YOUR SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION

1.1 Neglected founders of sociology?

Although Comte, Durkheim, Marx and Weber are, without doubt, foundational figures in sociology, there were some in the same period and others from earlier times whose contributions should also be taken into account. Sociology, like many academic fields, has not always lived up to its ideal of acknowledging the importance of every thinker whose work has intrinsic merit. Very few women or members of racial minorities were given the opportunity to become professional sociologists during the 'classical' period of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In addition, the few who were given the opportunity to do sociological research of lasting importance have frequently been neglected. Important scholars like Harriet Martineau and the Muslim scholar Ibn Khaldun have attracted the attention of sociologists in recent years.

Harriet Martineau (1802–76)

Harriet Martineau (1802–76).

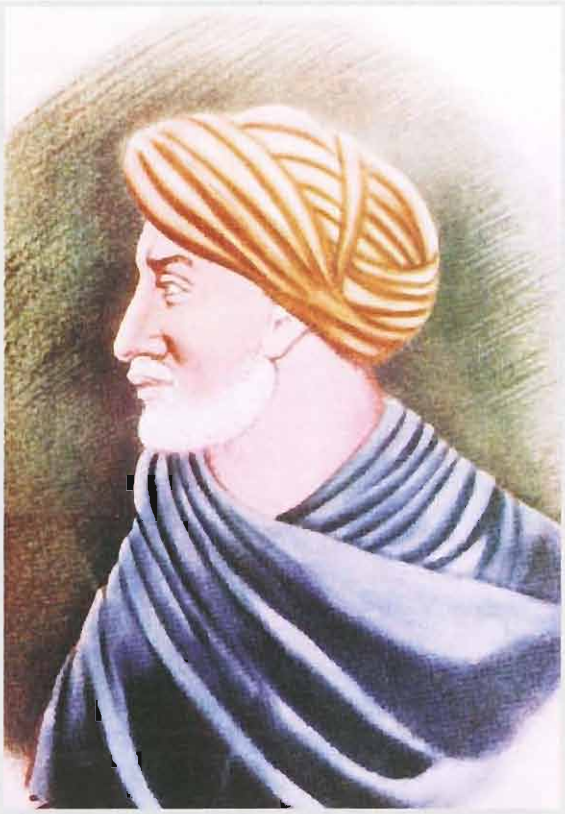
Harriet Martineau has been called the 'first woman sociologist', but, like Marx and Weber, cannot be thought of simply as a sociologist. She was born and educated in England and was the author of more than 50 books, as well as numerous essays. Martineau is now credited with introducing sociology to Britain through her translation of Comte's founding treatise of the field, *Positive Philosophy* (see Rossi 1973). In addition, Martineau conducted a first-hand, systematic study of American society during her extensive travels throughout the United States in the 1830s, which is the subject of her book *Society in America* (Martineau 1962 [1837]). Martineau is significant to sociologists today for several reasons.

First, she argued that when one studies a society, one must focus on all its aspects, including key political, religious and social institutions. Second, she insisted that an analysis of a society must include an understanding of women's lives. Third, she was the first to turn a sociological eye on previously ignored issues, including marriage, children, domestic and religious life, and race relations. As she once wrote: 'The nursery, the boudoir, and the kitchen are all excellent schools in which to learn the morals and manners of a people' (1962 [1837]). Finally, she argued that sociologists should do more than just observe; they should also act in ways to benefit a society. As a result, Martineau was an active proponent of both women's rights and the emancipation of slaves.

Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406)

The Muslim scholar Ibn Khaldun was born in what is today Tunisia and is famous for his historical, sociological and political economic studies. Ibn Khaldun wrote many books, the most widely known of which is a six-volume work, the *Muqaddimah* ('Introduction'), completed in 1378. This is viewed by some scholars today as essentially an early foundational work of sociology (see Alatas 2006). The *Muqaddimah* criticized existing historical approaches and methods as dealing only with description, claiming instead the discovery of a new 'science of social organization' or 'science of society', capable of getting at the underlying meaning of events.

Ibn Khaldun devised a theory of social conflict based on understanding the central characteristics of the 'nomadic' and 'sedentary' societies of his time. Central to this theory was the concept of 'group feeling' or solidarity (*asabiyyah*). Groups and societies with a strong group feeling were able to dominate and control those with weaker forms of internal solidarity. Ibn Khaldun developed these ideas in an attempt to explain the rise and decline of Maghribian and Arab states, and in this sense he may be seen as studying the process of state-formation – itself a main concern of modern, Western historical sociology. Nomadic Bedouin tribes tended towards a very strong group feeling, which enabled them to overrun and dominate the weaker sedentary town-dwellers and establish new dynasties. However, the Bedouin then became settled into more urbanized lifestyles and their previously strong group feeling and military force diminished, thus leaving them open to attack from external enemies once again. This completed a long cycle in the rise and decline of states. Although Western historians and sociologists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries referred to Ibn Khaldun's work, only in very recent years have they again come to be seen as potentially significant.



Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406).

escape. Bureaucratic domination, although based on rational principles, could crush the human spirit by attempting to regulate all spheres of social life. He was particularly troubled by the potentially suffocating and dehumanizing effects of bureaucracy and its implications for the fate of democracy. The seemingly progressive agenda of the eighteenth-century Age of Enlightenment, of scientific progress, increasing wealth and happiness produced by rejecting traditional customs and superstitions, also had a dark side with new dangers.

THINKING CRITICALLY

What factors might account for the neglect of Harriet Martineau's sociological work on marriage, children and the domestic life of women in the nineteenth century? Why do you think Ibn Khaldun's fourteenth-century ideas are finding a new audience at the start of the twenty-first century?

Modern theoretical approaches

The early sociologists were united in their desire to make sense of the changing societies in which they lived. They wanted to do more than simply depict and interpret the momentous events of their time, however. They all looked to develop ways of studying the social world that could explain how societies functioned and what were the

causes of social change. Yet, as we have seen, Durkheim, Marx and Weber employed very different approaches in their studies. For example, where Durkheim and Marx focused on the strength of forces external to the individual, Weber took as his point of departure the ability of individuals to act creatively on the outside world. Where Marx pointed to the predominance of economic issues, Weber considered a much wider range of factors to be significant. Such differences in approach have persisted throughout the history of sociology. Even when sociologists agree on the subject of analysis, they often undertake that analysis from different theoretical positions.

The three recent theoretical approaches examined below – functionalism, the conflict approach and symbolic interactionism – have connections with Durkheim, Marx and Weber respectively. Throughout this book, you will encounter arguments and ideas that draw upon and illustrate these theoretical approaches.

» In chapter 3, 'Theories and Perspectives in Sociology', we return to the major theoretical approaches in more detail and examine the development of sociological theory during the twentieth century.

Functionalism

Functionalism holds that society is a complex system whose various parts work together to produce stability and solidarity. According to this approach, the discipline of sociology should investigate the relationship of parts of society to each other and to society as a whole. We can analyse the religious beliefs and customs of a society, for example, by showing how they relate to other institutions within it, for the different parts of a society develop in close relation to one another.

To study the function of a social practice or institution is to analyse the contribution which that practice, or institution, makes to the continuation of society. Functionalists, including Comte and Durkheim, have often used an organic analogy to compare the operation of society to that of a living organism. They argue that the parts of society work together, just as the various parts of the human body do, for the benefit of society as a whole. To study a bodily organ like the heart, we need to show how it relates to other parts of the body. By pumping blood around the body, the heart plays a vital role in the continuation of the life of the organism. Similarly, analysing the function of a social item means showing the part it plays in the continued existence and health of a society.

Functionalism emphasizes the importance of moral consensus, in maintaining order and stability in society. Moral consensus exists when most people in a society share the same values. Functionalists regard order and balance as the normal state of society – this social equilibrium is grounded in the existence of a moral consensus among the members of society. For instance, Durkheim argued that religion reaffirms people's adherence to core social values, thereby contributing to the maintenance of social cohesion.

Until the 1960s, functionalist thought was probably the leading theoretical tradition in sociology, particularly in the United States. Talcott Parsons (1902–79) and Robert K. Merton (1910–2003), who each drew extensively on Durkheim, were two of its most prominent adherents. Merton's version of functionalism has been particularly influential. Merton distinguished between manifest and latent functions. Manifest functions are those known to, and intended by, the participants in a specific type of social activity. Latent functions are consequences of that activity of which participants are unaware. To illustrate this distinction, Merton used the example of a rain dance performed by the Hopi Tribe of Arizona and New Mexico. The Hopi believe that the ceremony will bring the rain they need for their crops (manifest function). This is why they organize and participate in it. But the rain dance,

Merton argued, using Durkheim's theory of religion, also has the effect of promoting the cohesion of the Hopi society (latent function). A major part of sociological explanation, according to Merton, consists in uncovering the latent functions of social activities and institutions.

Merton also distinguished between functions and dysfunctions. To look for the dysfunctional aspects of social behaviour means focusing on features of social life that challenge the existing order of things. For example, it is mistaken to suppose that religion is always functional – that it contributes only to social cohesion. When two groups support different religions or even different versions of the same religion, the result can be major social conflicts, causing widespread social disruption. Thus, wars have often been fought between religious communities – as can be seen in the struggles between Protestants and Catholics in European history.

In recent years, the popularity of functionalism has begun to wane, as its limitations have become apparent. While this was not true of Merton, many functionalist thinkers (Talcott Parsons is an example) unduly stressed factors leading to social cohesion at the expense of those producing division and conflict. The focus on stability and order means that divisions or inequalities in society – based on factors such as class, race and gender – are minimized. There is also less emphasis on the role of creative social action within society. Many critics have argued that functional analysis attributes to societies social qualities that they do not have. Functionalists often wrote as though societies have 'needs' and 'purposes', even though these concepts make sense only when applied to individual human beings.

Conflict perspectives

Like functionalists, sociologists employing conflict theories emphasize the importance of structures within society. They also advance a comprehensive 'model' to explain how society works. However, conflict theorists reject functionalism's emphasis on consensus. Instead, they highlight the importance of divisions in society. In doing so, they concentrate on issues of power, inequality and struggle. They tend to see society as composed of distinct groups pursuing their own interests. The existence of separate interests means that the potential for conflict is always present and that certain groups will benefit more than others. Conflict theorists examine the tensions between dominant and disadvantaged groups within society and seek to understand how relationships of control are established and perpetuated.

An influential approach within conflict theory is Marxism, named after Karl Marx, whose work emphasized class conflict. Numerous interpretations of Marx's major ideas are possible, and there are today schools of Marxist thought that take very different theoretical positions. In all of its versions, Marxism differs from most other traditions of sociology in that its authors see it as a combination of sociological analysis and political reform. Marxism is supposed to generate a programme of radical political change.

However, not all conflict theories take a Marxist approach. Some conflict theorists have also been influenced by Weber. A good example is the contemporary German sociologist Ralf Dahrendorf (1929–). In his now classic work, *Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society* (1959), Dahrendorf argues that functionalist thinkers only consider one side of society – those aspects of social life where there is harmony and agreement. Just as important, or more so, are areas marked by conflict and division. Conflict, Dahrendorf says, comes mainly from different interests that individuals and groups have. Marx saw differences of interest mainly in terms of classes, but Dahrendorf relates them more broadly to authority and power. In all societies there is a division between those who hold authority and

those who are largely excluded from it – between rulers and ruled.

Symbolic interactionism

The work of the American social philosopher G. H. Mead (1863–1931) had an important influence on sociological thought, in particular through a perspective called symbolic interactionism. Symbolic interactionism springs from a concern with language and meaning. Mead claims that language allows us to become self-conscious beings – aware of our own individuality and able to see ourselves from the outside as others see us. The key element in this process is the symbol. A symbol is something that stands for something else. For example, words that we use to refer to certain objects are in fact symbols which represent what we mean. The word 'spoon' is the symbol we use to describe the utensil that we use to eat soup. Non-verbal gestures or forms of communication are also symbols. Waving at someone or making a rude gesture has symbolic value. Mead argued that humans rely on shared symbols and understandings in their interactions with one another. Because human beings live in a richly symbolic universe, virtually all interactions between human individuals involve an exchange of symbols.

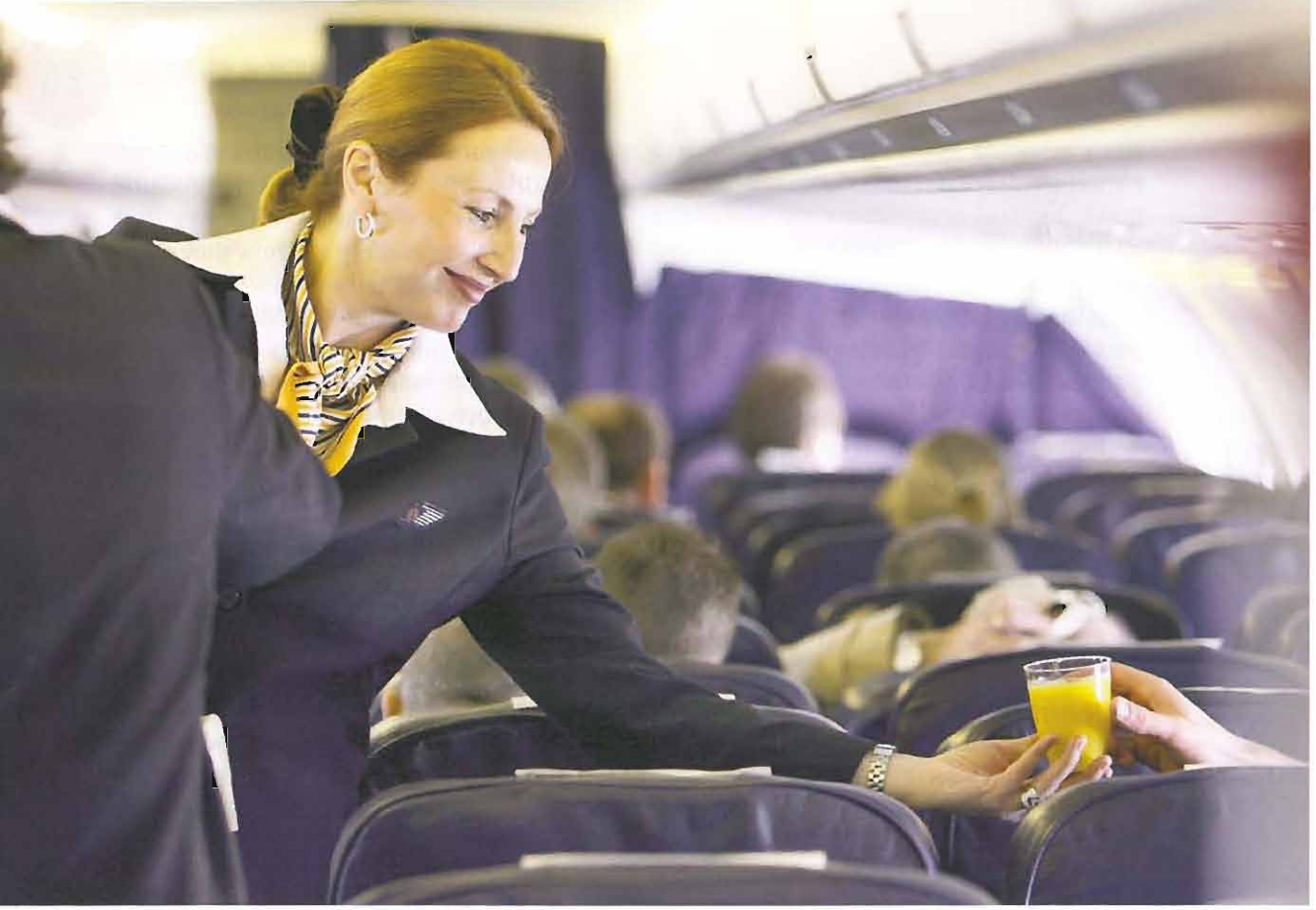
Symbolic interactionism directs our attention to the detail of interpersonal interaction and how that detail is used to make sense of what others say and do. Sociologists influenced by symbolic interactionism often focus on face-to-face interaction in the contexts of everyday life. They stress the role of such interaction in creating society and its institutions. Max Weber was an important indirect influence on this theoretical approach because, although he acknowledged the existence of social structures – such as classes, parties, status groups and others – he held that these structures were created through the social actions of individuals.

While the symbolic interactionist perspective can yield many insights into the nature of our actions in the course of day-to-day social life, it has been criticized for ignoring the larger issues of power and structure within society and how they serve to constrain individual action.

One classic example of symbolic interactionism that does take into account the issues of power and structure in our society is Arlie Hochschild's *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling* (1983). Hochschild, a sociology professor at the University of California, observed training sessions and carried out interviews at Delta Airlines' Stewardess Training Center in Atlanta in the USA. She watched flight attendants being trained to manage their feelings as well as learning other skills. Hochschild recalled the comments of one instructor, a pilot, at the training sessions: 'Now girls, I want you to go out there and really smile', the pilot instructed. 'Your smile is your biggest asset. I want you to go out there and use it. Smile. Really smile. Really lay it on.'

Through her observations and interviews, Hochschild found that as Western economies have become increasingly based on the delivery of services, the emotional style of the work we do needs to be understood. Her study of 'customer service' training amongst flight attendants might feel familiar to anyone who has worked in the service industry before, perhaps in a shop, restaurant or bar. Hochschild calls this training in 'emotional labour' – labour that requires that one manages one's feelings in order to create a publicly observable (and acceptable) facial and body display. According to Hochschild, the companies you work for lay claim not only to your physical movements, but also to your emotions. They own your smile when you are working.

Hochschild's research opened a window on an aspect of life that most people think they understand, but which needed to be understood at a deeper level. She found that service workers – like physical labourers – often feel a sense of distance from the particular aspect of themselves that is given up in work. The physical labourer's arm, for



In many service industries, people's management of the public display of their emotions has become a key part of their skills training.

example, might come to feel like a piece of machinery, and only incidentally a part of the person moving it. Likewise, service workers often told Hochschild that their smiles were *on* them but not *of* them. In other words, these workers felt a sense of distance from their own emotions. This is interesting when we consider the fact that emotions are usually thought of as a deep and personal part of ourselves.

Hochschild's book is an influential application of symbolic interactionism and many other scholars have built on her ideas. Although she conducted her research within one of the world's most developed 'service economies' – the United States – Hochschild's findings are applicable to many societies in the present age. Service jobs are expanding rapidly in countries around the world, demanding that more and more people engage in 'emotional labour' at the workplace. In some cultures, such as amongst the Inuit of Greenland, where there is not the same tradition of public smiling as there is in Western Europe and North America, training in emotional labour has proved to be a somewhat difficult task. In these countries, employees in service jobs are sometimes required to take part in special 'smiling training sessions' not so different from the ones attended by Delta Airlines stewardesses.

Theoretical thinking in sociology

So far in this chapter we have been concerned with theoretical *approaches*, which refer to broad, overall orientations to the subject-matter of sociology. However, we can draw a distinction between the theoretical approaches discussed above and actual theories. Theories are more narrowly

focused and represent attempts to explain particular social conditions or types of event. They are usually formed as part of the process of research and in turn suggest problems to which research investigations should be devoted. An example would be Durkheim's theory of suicide, referred to earlier in this chapter.

Many theories have been developed in the many different areas of research in which sociologists work. Sometimes theories are very precisely set out and are even occasionally expressed in mathematical form – although this is more common in other social sciences (especially economics) than in sociology.

Some theories are also much more encompassing than others. Opinions vary about whether it is desirable or useful for sociologists to concern themselves with very wide-ranging theoretical endeavours. Robert K. Merton (1957), for example, argued forcefully that sociologists should concentrate their attention on what he calls 'theories of the middle range'. Rather than attempting to create grand theoretical schemes (in the manner of Marx, for instance), we should be concerned with developing theories that are more modest.

Middle-range theories are specific enough to be directly tested by empirical research, yet sufficiently general to cover a range of different phenomena. A case in point is the theory of relative deprivation. This theory holds that the way people evaluate their circumstances depends on whom they compare themselves to. Thus, feelings of deprivation do not conform directly to the level of material poverty that people experience. A family living in a small home in a poor area, where everyone is in more or less similar circumstances, is likely to feel less deprived than a family living in a similar house in a neighbourhood where the majority of the other homes are much larger and the other people more affluent.

It is indeed true that the more wide-ranging and ambitious a theory is, the more difficult it is to test empirically. Yet there seems no obvious reason why theoretical thinking in sociology should be confined to the 'middle range'.

Assessing theories, and especially theoretical approaches, in sociology is a challenging and formidable task. Theoretical debates are, by definition, more abstract than controversies of a more empirical kind. The fact that sociology is not dominated by a single theoretical approach might seem to be a sign of weakness in the subject, but this is not the case. The jostling of rival theoretical approaches and theories is an expression of the vitality of the sociological enterprise. In studying human beings – ourselves – theoretical variety rescues us from dogma and stagnation. Human behaviour is complicated and many-sided, and it is very unlikely that a single theoretical perspective could cover all of its aspects. Diversity in theoretical thinking provides a rich source of ideas that can be drawn on in research and which stimulate the imaginative capacities so essential to progress in sociological work.

Levels of analysis: microsociology and macrosociology

One important distinction between the different theoretical perspectives we have discussed in this chapter involves the level of analysis at which each is directed. The study of everyday behaviour in situations of face-to-face interaction is usually called microsociology. Macrosociology is the analysis of large-scale social systems, like the political system or the economic order. It also includes the analysis of long-term processes of change, such as the development of industrialism. At first glance, it might seem that microanalysis and macroanalysis are distinct from one another. In fact, the two are closely connected (Knorr-Cetina and Cicourel 1981; Giddens 1984).

Macroanalysis is essential if we are to understand the institutional background of daily life. The ways in which people live their

everyday lives are greatly affected by the broader institutional framework, as is obvious when the daily cycle of activities of a culture like that of the medieval period is compared with life in an industrialized urban environment. In modern societies, we are constantly in contact with strangers. This contact may be indirect and impersonal. However, no matter how many indirect or electronic relations we enter into today, even in the most complex societies, the presence of other people remains crucial. While we may choose just to send an acquaintance an email message, we can also choose to fly thousands of miles to spend the weekend with a friend.

Micro-studies are in turn necessary for illuminating broad institutional patterns. Face-to-face interaction is clearly the main basis of all forms of social organization, no matter how large scale. Suppose we are studying a business corporation. We could understand much about its activities simply by looking at face-to-face behaviour. We could analyse, for example, the interaction of directors in the boardroom, people working in the various offices, or the workers on the factory floor. We would not build up a picture of the whole corporation in this way, since some of its business is transacted through printed materials, letters, the telephone and computers. Yet we could certainly contribute significantly to understanding how the organization works.

Of course, people do not live their lives as isolated individuals, nor are their lives completely determined by national states. Sociology tells us that our everyday life is lived in families, social groups, communities and neighbourhoods. At this level – the meso (or 'middle') level of society – it is possible to see the influences and effects of both micro- and macro-level phenomena. Many sociological studies of specific local communities deal with the macrosociological impact of huge social changes, such as industrialization and economic globalization. But they also explore the way that individuals, groups and social movements cope with such changes and attempt to turn them to their advantage. For example, when the UK government decided to reduce the role of coal in its energy policy in the 1980s, the impact was disastrous for many traditional mining communities, as people's livelihoods were threatened by large-scale unemployment (Waddington et al. 2001). Mining communities initially organized to protest against the policy, but, when this eventually failed, many individual miners retrained to find work in other industries. Such studies of the community-level of social life can provide a window through which to observe and understand the interaction of micro- and macro-levels of society and much applied work in sociology takes place at this *meso* level of social reality.

In later chapters, we will see further examples of how interaction in micro-contexts affects larger social processes, and how macro-systems in turn influence more confined settings of social life.

Why study sociology?

Sociology has several practical implications for our lives, as C. Wright Mills emphasized when developing his idea of the sociological imagination. First, sociology gives us an awareness of cultural differences that allows us to see the social world from many perspectives. Quite often, if we properly understand how others live, we also acquire a better understanding of what their problems are. Practical policies that are not based on an informed awareness of the ways of life of people they affect have little chance of success. For example, a white social worker operating in a predominantly Latin American community in South London will not gain the confidence of its members without developing a sensitivity to the differences in social experience between members of different groups in the UK.

Second, sociological research provides practical help in assessing the results of policy initiatives. A programme of practical

reform may simply fail to achieve what its designers sought or may produce unintended consequences of an unfortunate kind. For instance, in the years following the Second World War, large public housing blocks were built in city centres in many countries. These were planned to provide high standards of accommodation for low-income groups from slum areas and offered shopping amenities and other civic services nearby. However, research later showed that many people who had moved from their previous dwellings to large apartment blocks felt isolated and unhappy. High-rise apartment blocks and shopping centres in poorer areas often became dilapidated and provided breeding grounds for muggings and other violent crimes.

Third, and in some ways this is the most important, sociology can provide us with self-enlightenment – increased self-understanding. The more we know about why we act as we do and about the overall workings of our society, the more likely we are to be able to influence our own futures. We should not see sociology as assisting only policy-makers – that is, powerful groups – in making informed decisions. Those in power cannot be assumed always to consider the interests of the less powerful or underprivileged in the policies they pursue. Self-enlightened groups can often benefit from sociological research by using the information gleaned to respond in an effective way to government policies or form policy initiatives of their own. Self-help groups like Alcoholics Anonymous and social movements like the environmental movement are examples of social groups that have directly sought to bring about practical reforms, with some degree of success.

Finally, it should be mentioned that many sociologists concern themselves directly with practical matters as professionals. People trained in sociology are to be found as industrial consultants, researchers, urban planners, social workers and personnel managers, as well as in many other jobs. An understanding of society can also help for future careers in law, journalism, business and health professions.

There is often a connection between studying sociology and the prompting of social conscience. Should sociologists themselves actively advocate and agitate for programmes of reform or social change? Some argue that sociology can preserve its intellectual independence only if sociologists are studiously neutral in moral and political controversies. Yet are those scholars who remain aloof from current debates necessarily more impartial in their assessment of sociological issues than others? No sociologically sophisticated person can be unaware of the inequalities that exist in the world today. It would be strange if sociologists did not take sides on political issues, and it would be illogical to try to ban them from drawing on their expertise in so doing.

In this chapter, we have seen that sociology is a discipline in which we often set aside our personal view of the world in order to look more carefully at the influences that shape our lives and those of others. Sociology emerged as a distinct intellectual endeavour with the development of modern societies, and the study of such societies remains a central concern. However, in an increasingly interconnected global world, sociologists must increasingly take a similarly global view of their subject-matter if they are properly to understand and explain it. Of course, sociologists remain preoccupied with a broad range of issues about the nature of social interaction and human societies in general.

As we will see in chapter 3, *Theories and Perspectives in Sociology*, the central problems that exercise sociologists change along with the societies they aim to explore and understand. During the period of the discipline's classical founders, the central problems included social class conflict, wealth distribution, the alleviation of absolute as well as relative poverty, the secularization of religious belief and the question of where the process of modernization was headed. In the contemporary period, though most of

these issues remain, it can forcefully be argued that sociology's central problems are shifting. Today, societies are grappling with the problems created by rapid globalization, environmental degradation and its impact on human health and well-being, the awareness of risks with potentially high consequences, how to create successful models of multiculturalism and the achievement of a genuine gender equality: to name just a few. This means that sociologists will need to question whether the theories designed to grasp the different problems of an earlier period have any purchase on the problems facing today's societies. If not, then they will need to design new theories that *can* grasp what Karl Mannheim once called 'the secret of these new times'. Readers can expect the ongoing debate about the status and continuing relevance of the classical sociological theories and attempts to construct new theories to occur throughout this book.

Sociology is not just an abstract intellectual field, but has major practical implications for people's lives. Learning to become a sociologist should not be a dull or tedious endeavour. The best way to make sure it does not become so is to approach the subject in an imaginative way and to relate sociological ideas and findings to situations in your own life. In that way, you should learn important things about yourself, about your society and about the wider human world.

Summary points

1. Sociology is the systematic study of human societies, giving special, but not exclusive emphasis, to modern industrialized societies.
2. The practice of sociology involves the ability to think imaginatively and to detach oneself from preconceived ideas about social life.
3. Sociology came into being as an attempt to understand the far-reaching changes that have occurred in human societies over the past two or three centuries. The changes involved are not just large-scale ones; they also involve shifts in the most intimate and personal aspects of people's lives.
4. Among the classical founders of sociology, four figures are particularly important: Auguste Comte, Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim and Max Weber. Comte and Marx, working in the mid-nineteenth century, established some of the basic issues of sociology, later elaborated on by Durkheim and Weber. These issues concern the nature of sociology and the impact of modernization on the social world.
5. A diversity of theoretical approaches is found in sociology. Theoretical disputes are difficult to resolve even in the natural sciences, but in sociology we face special difficulties because of the complex problems involved in subjecting our own behaviour to study.
6. The main theoretical approaches in sociology are functionalism, conflict perspectives and symbolic interactionism. There are some basic differences between each of these approaches, which have strongly influenced the development of the subject in the post-war period.
7. One way of thinking about sociology's approaches is in terms of their level of analysis. Microsociology is the study of everyday behaviour in face-to-face encounters. Macrosociology analyses large-scale social systems and whole societies. Micro- and macro-levels are closely connected, however, and this can be seen in research studies of communities and neighbourhoods – the meso (or middle) level of social life.
8. Sociology is a subject with important practical implications. It can contribute to social criticism and practical social reform in several ways. The improved understanding of social circumstances gives us all a better chance of controlling them. At the same time, sociology provides the means of increasing

our cultural sensitivities, allowing policies to be based on an awareness of divergent cultural values. In practical terms, we can investigate the consequences of the adoption of particular policy programmes. Finally, and perhaps most important, sociology provides self-enlightenment, offering groups and individuals an increased opportunity to understand and alter the conditions of their own lives.

Further reading

For anyone new to sociology, Steve Bruce's *Sociology: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) is a good place to start your reading. This is a brief but stimulating guide. Following this, Zygmunt Bauman and Tim May's *Thinking Sociologically* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001) is a more involved introduction to developing and using your sociological imagination and the book contains many everyday examples. If these motivate you to take on something a little more advanced, then Richard Jenkins's *Foundations of Sociology: Towards a Better Understanding of the Human World* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002) contains a central argument about the role of sociology and sociologists in an age of globalization. This is not an easy read but it is worthwhile.

One other useful resource for all newcomers to the discipline is a good sociology dictionary and there are several possibilities. Among them, both John Scott and Gordon Marshall's *Oxford Dictionary of Sociology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) and Nicholas Abercrombie, Stephen Hill and Bryan Turner's *The Penguin Dictionary of Sociology* (London: Penguin Books, 2006) are reliable and comprehensive.

Internet links

Additional information and support for this book at Polity:
www.polity.co.uk/giddens

The International Sociological Association:
www.isa-sociology.org/

The European Sociological Association:
www.valt.helsinki.fi/esa/

The British Sociological Association:
www.britsoc.co.uk/

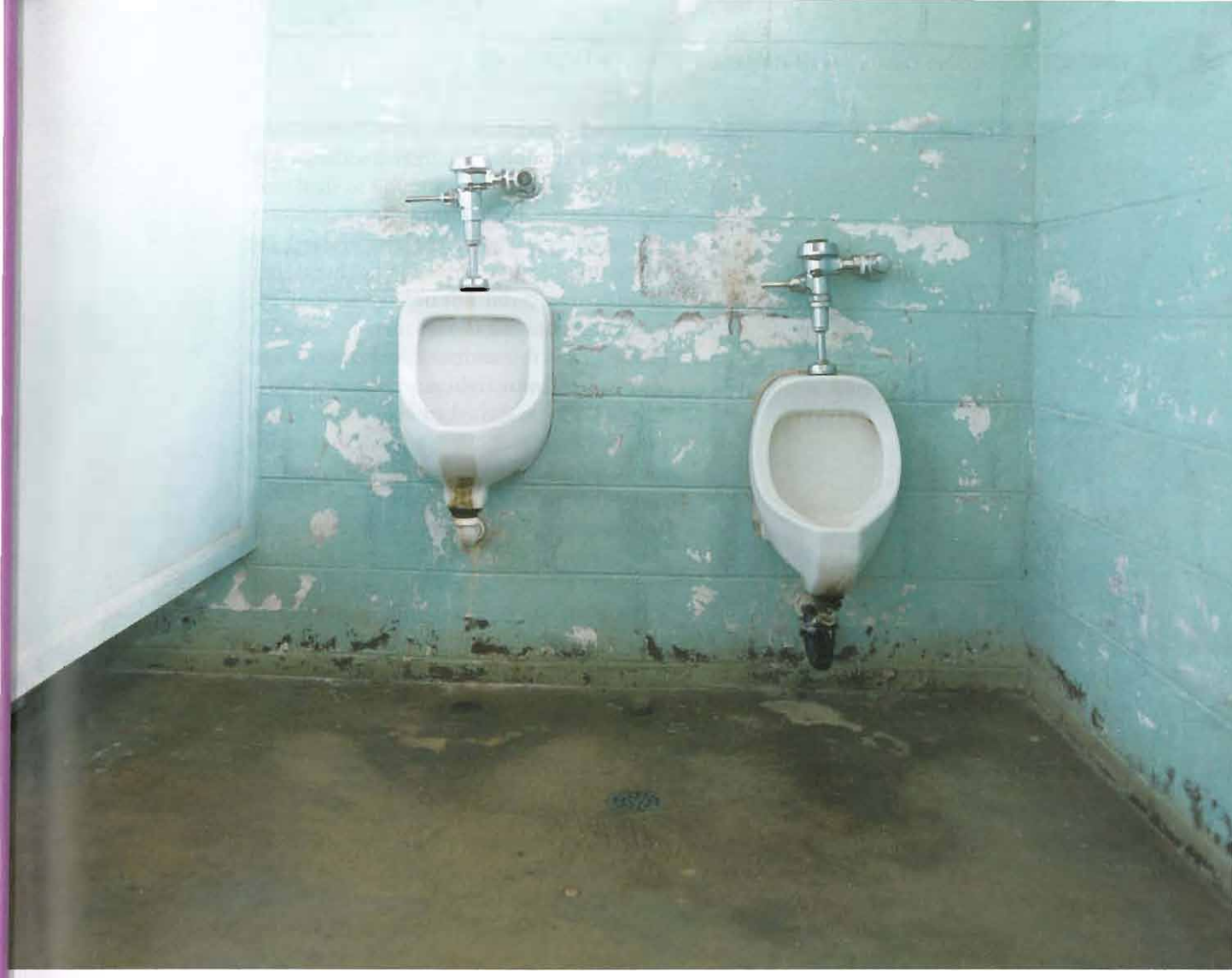
Intute – a social science information gateway with lots of sociology resources:
www.intute.ac.uk/socialsciences/sociology/

SocioSite – the Social Science Information System, based at the University of Amsterdam:
www.sociosite.net/index.php

CHAPTER 2

Asking and Answering Sociological Questions

(opposite) Why hang out in public toilets?



Towards the end of a working day, the public toilets of a particular park in St Louis, Missouri, in the United States, are suddenly busier than one might expect. One man walks in dressed in a grey suit; another has on a baseball cap, trainers, shorts and a T-shirt; a third is wearing the mechanic's uniform from the garage where he has repaired cars all day. What are these men doing here? Surely other toilets are more conveniently located. Is there some common interest besides the toilets themselves that brings them to this place?

None of these men is visiting the toilets to use them for the purposes for which they were officially built: they are there for 'instant sex'. Many

In contrast to Humphrey's covert research, increasingly the subjects of research are themselves involved in the research process and may help to formulate questions or comment on the researcher's interpretation of their views.

men – married and unmarried, those with straight identities and those who see themselves as gay – seek sex with people they do not know. They are hoping to experience sexual excitement, but they want to avoid involvement. They do not want any commitments that extend beyond the particular encounters they will have in this public convenience.

This kind of search for anonymous, instant sex between men happens all over the world, yet until the late 1960s the phenomenon persisted as a widespread but rarely studied form of human interaction. In the USA, the gay community called the toilets where these activities occur 'tearooms' (in the UK the activity is known as 'cottaging'). Laud Humphreys, a sociologist, visited these public lavatories to conduct research on the participants. He wrote about them in his book *Tearoom Trade* (Humphreys 1970). Unsurprisingly, the book caused widespread controversy when it was published, and for some people the issue is still a difficult one to deal with today. For example, Humphreys' research methodology was heavily criticized for being unethical because his fieldwork had to be covert; it did not involve seeking the informed consent of the men he studied. However, his research in the 'tearooms' was able to cast new light on the struggles of men who were forced to keep their sexual proclivities secret. He showed that many men who otherwise live 'normal' lives – the people next door – find ways to engage in embarrassing behaviours that will not harm their careers or family lives. Humphreys' research was conducted at a time when there was much more stigma associated with gay and lesbian identities and when police were vigilant in enforcing laws against such behaviour. Many lives were ruined in the process of harsh law enforcement.

Humphreys spent an extended period of time researching public toilets because one excellent way to understand social processes is to participate in and observe them. He also conducted survey interviews that enabled him to gather more information than he would have obtained by simply observing the toilets. Humphreys' research opened a window on an aspect of life that many people were shocked to know existed at all and that certainly needed to be understood at a deeper level. His work was based on systematic research, but it also carried a note of passion; it was conducted with a certain scientific detachment, but at the same time Humphreys was involved in the search for solutions to social problems.

Humphreys argued that persecution of gay lifestyles leads men to live anguished existences in which they must resort to extreme secrecy and often dangerous activities. His study was conducted before the onset of AIDS; such activity would be much more dangerous today. He argued that tolerance for a gay subculture would put gays in a position where they could provide one

another with self-esteem, mutual support and relief from torment.

Human subjects and ethical problems

All research concerned with human beings can pose ethical dilemmas. A key question that sociologists agree must be asked is whether the research 'poses risks to the subjects that are greater than the risks they face in their everyday lives'. Ethical issues have become much more prominent today than in the past. In particular, researchers are no longer seen as *the* knowledgeable experts or participants as mere *subjects* of research. Increasingly, the subjects of research are themselves involved in the research process and may help to formulate questions, comment on the researcher's interpretation of their views and in some cases expect to receive a copy of the final research report.

Clearly, as is the case in other areas of social life (such as doctors and their patients or university professors and their students), 'lay people' no longer automatically defer to 'experts' in the way they might have done a few decades ago. This broad social change is also transforming research practice. Indeed, all research funding bodies now routinely ask research teams what ethical issues they expect to confront and how they will deal with these, whether deception will be used, what measures will be put in place to protect their participants from risk and how their findings will be fed back to participants at the end of the study.

In writing *Tearoom Trade*, Humphreys said he was less than truthful to those whose behaviour he was studying. He said he did not reveal his identity as a sociologist when observing the tearoom. People who came into the tearoom assumed he was there for the same reasons they were and that his presence could be accepted at face value. Although he did not tell any direct lies during his observations, neither did he reveal the real reason for his presence in the tearoom. Was this particular aspect of his behaviour ethical? The answer is that, on balance, this particular aspect of his study did not put any of his subjects at risk. On the basis of what he observed in the tearoom, Humphreys did not collect information about the participants that would have identified them. What he knew about them was similar to what all the other people in the tearoom knew. In this way, his presence did not subject them to any more risk than they already encountered in their everyday lives. At the same time, had Humphreys been completely frank at every stage, the research might not have progressed as far as it did. Indeed, some of the most valuable data that have been collected by sociologists could never have been gathered if the researcher had first explained the project to each person encountered in the research process.

If this were the only dilemma posed by Humphreys' research project, it would not stand out as a notable problem in the ethics of social research. What raised more eyebrows was that Humphreys wrote down the car number-plates of the people who came into the 'tearooms', obtained their home addresses from a friend who worked at the Department of Motor Vehicles and then visited their homes in the guise of conducting a neutral survey. Even though Humphreys did not reveal to the men's families anything about their activities in the tearooms, and even though he took great pains to keep the data confidential, the knowledge he gained could have been damaging. Since the activity he was documenting was illegal, police officers might have demanded that he release information about the identities of the subjects. It is also possible that a less skilled investigator could have slipped up when interviewing the subjects' families, or that Humphreys could have lost his notes, which might then have been found by someone else.

Considering the number of things that could go wrong in the research process,

researchers today do not consider projects of this kind to be legitimate. Around the world, government funding bodies for sociological research, such as the European Science Foundation or the UK's Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), as well as the professional organizations to which sociologists belong, such as the International Sociological Association (ISA), now have much stricter ethical guidelines for researchers engaging in sociological research of whatever kind.

Humphreys was one of the first sociologists to study the lives of gay men. His account was a humane treatment that went well beyond the existing stock of knowledge on sexual communities. Although none of his research subjects actually suffered as a result of his book, Humphreys himself later agreed with his critics on the key ethical controversy. He said that were he to do the study again, he would not trace number-plates or go to people's homes. Instead, after gathering his data in the public 'tearooms', he might try to get to know a subset of the people well enough to inform them of his goals for the study and then ask them to talk about the significance of these activities in their lives.

Sociological questions

The toilets under study in *Tearoom Trade* are a perfect example of a phenomenon that is the subject of many of the kinds of question that sociologists ask. For example, in looking at the surprising activities that occur in public toilets, Humphreys was asking how society works in ways that are different from the official versions of how it should work. He also found that what we take to be natural – a public toilet – is actually *socially constructed*, depending on how it is used. Social constructionism is a perspective which begins from the premise that social reality is – to varying degrees – the product of interactions between individuals and groups, not something that is obvious to all (see chapter 7, 'Social Interaction and Everyday Life' and chapter 5, 'The Environment'). In this case, what most people believed to be simply a public building with an immediately obvious function was, for a particular social group, *primarily* a venue for the pursuit of sexual satisfaction.

It is also interesting to note that elements of modern theoretical approaches can help us understand the issues addressed by Humphreys' study. An *interactionist* might ask: how does this behaviour take place through processes of interaction? What *kinds* of interaction take place? Humphreys found that people who went into the tearooms learnt from others to be silent. This was a response to the demand for privacy without involvement. Another finding was that men who went into the toilet and who did not respond to initial sexual advances were not approached any further. Each party must collaborate to make a sexual situation occur. A *functionalist* approach might ask: what contribution does the tearoom make to the continuation of society as a whole? The answer is that it provides an outlet for sexual activity that, when carried out in secret, enables the participants and other members of society to carry on as 'normal' people in their everyday lives without challenging the accepted order of things. A *Marxist* approach might ask: is thinking about economic class relations apparent in the tearooms? Humphreys found that the impersonal sex of the tearooms had a democratic quality. Men of all social classes and races would come together in these places for sexual contact. Finally, a *feminist* approach might ask: how can women's lives be considered in this study of an all-male group? This approach was not dominant at the time Humphreys conducted his study, but a feminist today might ask how women's lives – perhaps wives and partners who know nothing about the activity of their male partners – are affected and put at risk by the secret behaviour in the

Law enforcement exists in all countries, but comparative empirical studies of police forces are needed to reveal their similarities and differences.

tearooms. We explore some of these theoretical approaches in chapter 3.

It is almost 40 years since *Tearoom Trade* was first published and in the interim society has become more tolerant of gay identities and gay sex. After the publication of his book, Humphreys became part of the political movement – the gay rights movement – that made this change possible. He used his findings to convince courts and police to ease up on prosecuting men for engaging in gay sex so as to alleviate the damaging side effects of covert sexual activity.

It is the business of sociological research in general to go beyond surface-level understandings of ordinary life, as Humphreys clearly did. Good research should help us understand our social lives better, sometimes in a new way. It could take us by surprise, both in the questions that it asks and in the findings it comes up with. The issues that concern sociologists, in both their theorizing and their research, are often similar to those that worry other people. But the results of such research frequently run counter to our common-sense beliefs.

What are the circumstances in which racial or sexual minorities live? How can mass starvation exist in a world that is far wealthier than it has ever been before? What effects will the increasing use of the Internet have on our lives? Is the family beginning to disintegrate as an institution? Sociologists try to provide answers to these and many other questions. Their findings are by no means conclusive. Nevertheless, it is always the aim of sociological theorizing and research to break away from the speculative manner in which the ordinary person usually considers such questions. Good

sociological work tries to make the questions as precise as possible and seeks to gather factual evidence before coming to conclusions. To achieve these aims, we must know the most useful research methods to apply in a given study and how best to analyse the results.

In their research studies, sociologists will often ask empirical or factual questions. For example, many aspects of sexual behaviour, such as those Humphreys studied, need direct and systematic sociological investigation. Thus, we might ask: what kinds of occupation and domestic arrangement are most common among people who go to the tearooms? What proportion of tearoom participants do the police catch? Factual questions of this kind are often difficult to answer. Official statistics on tearooms do not exist. Even official statistics on crime are of dubious value in revealing the real level of criminal activity. Researchers who have studied crime levels have found that only about half of all serious crimes are reported to the police.

Factual information about one society, of course, will not always tell us whether we are dealing with an unusual case or a general set of influences. Sociologists often want to ask comparative questions, relating one social context within a society to another or contrasting examples drawn from different societies. There are significant differences, for example, between the social and legal systems of the USA, Italy and South Africa. A typical comparative question might be: how much do patterns of criminal behaviour and law enforcement vary between the two countries?

In sociology, we need not only to look at existing societies in relation to one another but also to compare their present and past. The questions sociologists ask in this case are historical or developmental questions. How did we get from there to here? To understand the nature of the modern world, we have to look at previous forms of society and also study the main direction that processes of change have taken. Thus we can investigate, for example, how the first prisons originated and what they are like today.

Factual investigations – or, as sociologists usually prefer to call them, empirical investigations – concern *how* things occur. Yet sociology does not consist of just collecting facts, however important and interesting they may be. We always need to interpret what facts mean, and to do so we must learn to pose theoretical questions – concerned with *why* things occur. Many sociologists work primarily on empirical questions, but unless they are guided in research by some knowledge of theory, their work is unlikely to be illuminating (see table 2.1).

Table 2.1 The sociologist's line of questioning

Factual question	What happened?	Since the 1980s, girls have been attaining better educational results in school than boys.
Comparative question	Did this happen everywhere?	Was this a global phenomenon, or did it occur just in Britain, or only in a certain region of Britain?
Developmental question	Has this happened over time?	What have been the patterns of girls' educational attainment over time?
Theoretical question	What underlies this phenomenon?	Why are girls now performing better in school? What factors would we look at to explain this change?

At the same time, sociologists strive not to attain theoretical knowledge for its own sake. A standard view is that while the sociologist's values should not be permitted to bias their conclusions, social research should be relevant to real-world concerns. In this chapter, we look further into such issues by asking whether it is possible to produce 'objective' knowledge. We begin by stressing the scientific nature of sociology, before examining the stages involved in sociological research. Some of the most widely used research methods are then compared, as we consider some actual investigations. As we shall see, there are often significant differences between the way research should ideally be carried out and real-world studies. Sociological research, like other scientific research, is the art of the possible.

"I'm a social scientist, Michael. That means I can't explain electricity or anything like that, but if you ever want to know about people I'm the man."

Is sociology scientific?

As discussed in chapter 1, Auguste Comte saw sociology as an emerging science, which should adopt the successful (positivist) methods of the natural sciences such as physics and chemistry. Durkheim, Marx and the other founders of sociology also thought of sociology as a scientific subject; but can we really study human social life in a scientific way? Are Laud Humphreys' observations on the tearooms really scientific? Before we can answer, we must first understand what this word means; what exactly is science?

Science is the use of *systematic methods* of empirical investigation, the *analysis of data, theoretical thinking* and the *logical assessment* of arguments to develop a *body of knowledge* about a particular subject-matter. Sociology *is* a scientific endeavour, according to this definition, because it involves systematic methods of empirical investigation, the analysis of data and the assessment of theories in the light of evidence and logical argument.

Studying human beings, however, is different from observing events in the physical world, so sociology and the natural sciences cannot be identical. Unlike objects in nature, humans are self-aware beings who confer meaning and purpose on what they do. We cannot even describe social life accurately unless we first grasp the concepts that people apply in their own behaviour. For instance, to describe a death as a 'suicide' means knowing what the person in question was intending when he died. Suicide can only occur when an individual actively has self-destruction in mind. If he accidentally steps in front of a car and is killed, he cannot be said to have committed suicide.

The fact that we cannot study human beings in exactly the same way as objects in nature is in some ways an advantage to sociology. Sociological researchers profit from being able to ask questions directly of those they study – other human beings – and get responses that they understand. This opportunity to converse with the participants of research studies and confirm the researcher's

interpretations means that sociological findings are, at least potentially, even more *reliable* (different researchers would arrive at the same results) and *valid* (the research actually measures what it is supposed to) than those from the natural sciences. However, in other respects, sociology creates difficulties that are not encountered by natural scientists. People who are aware that their activities are being scrutinized may not behave in the same way that they normally do. They may consciously or unconsciously portray themselves in a way that differs from their usual attitudes. They may even try to 'assist' the researcher by giving the responses they believe he or she wants. Researchers studying the behaviour of, say, chemicals or frogs do not have this problem.

THINKING CRITICALLY

Reflecting on the discussion so far, in what ways does sociology differ from the natural sciences, such as physics and chemistry? Were Laud Humphreys' *research methods* 'scientific', for example? If we were allowed to use the same methods to carry out a similar study today, would we be likely to get the same or different results? Thinking more generally and sociologically now, how might recent social changes affect such a study and its potential findings?

The research process

Let us first look at the stages normally involved in research work. The research process takes in a number of distinct steps, leading from when the investigation is begun to the time its findings are published or made available in written form (see figure 2.1).

Defining the research problem

All research starts from a research problem. This is sometimes an area of factual ignorance: we may simply wish to improve our knowledge about certain institutions, social processes or cultures. A researcher might set out to answer questions like 'What proportion of the population holds strong religious beliefs?' 'Are people today really disaffected with "big government"?' 'How far does the

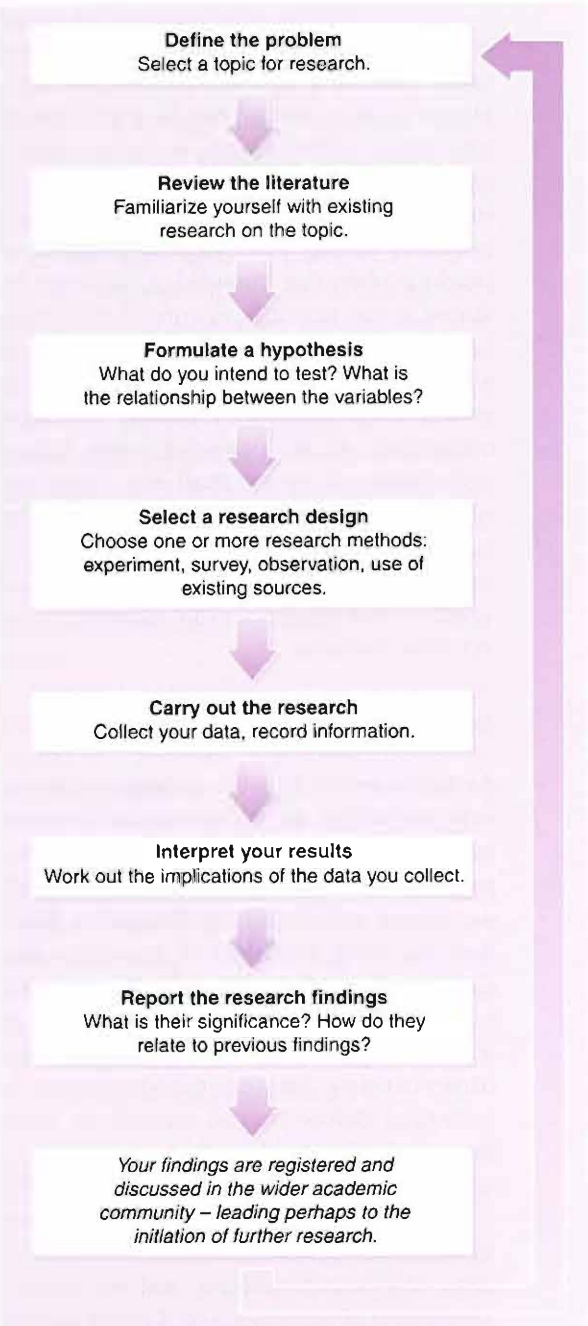


Figure 2.1 Steps in the research process

economic position of women lag behind that of men?'.

The best sociological research, however, begins with problems that are also puzzles. A puzzle is not just a lack of information, but a *gap in our understanding*. Much of the skill in producing worthwhile sociological research consists in correctly identifying puzzles. Rather than simply answering the question 'What is going on here?', puzzle-solving research tries to contribute to our understanding of why events happen as they do. Thus we might ask: why are patterns of religious belief changing? What accounts for the decline in the proportions of the population voting in elections in recent years? Why are women poorly represented in high-status jobs?

No piece of research stands alone. Research problems come up as part of ongoing work; one research project may easily lead to another because it raises issues the researcher had not previously considered. A sociologist may discover puzzles by reading the work of other researchers in books and professional journals or by being aware of specific trends in society. For example, over recent years, there have been an increasing number of programmes that seek to treat the mentally ill within the community, rather than confining them in asylums. Sociologists might be prompted to ask: what has given rise to this shift in attitude towards the mentally ill? What are the likely consequences both for the patients themselves and for the rest of the community?

Reviewing the evidence

Once the problem is identified, the next step taken in the research process is usually to review the available evidence in the field; it might be that previous research has already satisfactorily clarified the problem. If not, the sociologist will need to sift through whatever related research does exist, to see how useful it is for his or her purpose. Have previous researchers spotted the same puzzle? How have they tried to resolve it? What aspects of the problem has their research left unanalysed? Drawing upon others' ideas helps the sociologist to clarify the issues that might be raised and the methods that might be used in the research.

Making the problem precise

A third stage involves working out a clear formulation of the research problem. If relevant literature already exists, the researcher might return from the library with a good notion of how the problem should be approached. Hunches about the nature of the problem can sometimes be turned into a definite hypothesis. Although rooted in an educated guess about what is going on, a hypothesis clearly states this in exact language so that it can be tested. If the research is to be effective, hypotheses must be formulated in such a way that the factual material gathered will provide evidence that either supports or disproves them.

Working out a design

The researcher must then decide just how the research materials are to be collected. A range of different research methods exists, and which one is chosen depends on the overall objectives of the study, as well as the aspects of behaviour to be analysed. For some purposes, a survey (in which questionnaires are normally used) might be suitable. In other circumstances, interviews or an observational study, such as that carried out by Laud Humphreys, might be more appropriate. We shall learn more about various research methods later in this chapter.

Carrying out the research

At the point of actually proceeding with the research, unforeseen practical difficulties can easily crop up. It might prove impossible to contact some of those to whom questionnaires are to be sent or those people the researcher wishes to interview. A business firm or government agency may be unwilling to let the researcher carry out the work planned. Difficulties such as these could

Table 2.2 Number of motor vehicles per 1,000 inhabitants: selected countries

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Austria	462	463	503	515	528	543	495	509	529	544	555	565	537
Belgium	432	442	441	454	464	487	494	482	490	500	511	517	520
Canada	600	619	627	595	569	565	565	564	580	566	569	572	581
Germany	527	527	427	478	523	540	547	551	556	564	570	582	589
Greece	248	246	257	271	283	298	313	328	351	378	406	428	450
Portugal	310	370	407	439	438	501	533	569	610	654	698	711	756
Turkey	57	47	53	61	64	68	97	105	111	116	124	148	148
UK	443	433	453	441	439	428	448	458	474	486	493	516	533
United States	842	718	779	725	719	771	783	784	792	798	810	816	807

Source: OECD Factbook 2005

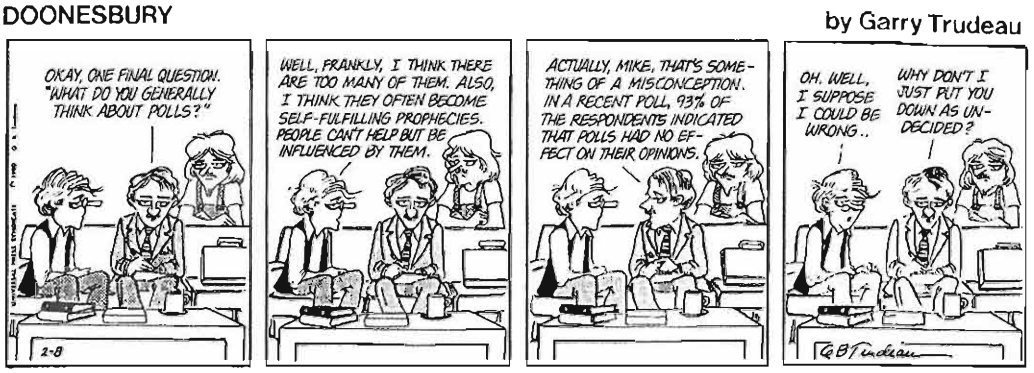
USING YOUR SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION

2.1 Reading and interpreting tables

You will often come across tables when reading sociological literature. They sometimes look complex, but are easy to decipher if you follow a few basic steps, listed below; with practice, these will become automatic. Do not succumb to the temptation to skip over tables; they contain information in concentrated form, which can be read more quickly than would be possible if the same material were expressed in words. By becoming skilled in the interpretation of tables, you will also be able to check how far the conclusions drawn by a writer actually seem justified.

1. Read the title in full. Tables frequently have longish titles, which represent an attempt by the researcher to state accurately the nature of the information conveyed. The title of table 2.2 gives first the subject of the data, second the fact that the table provides material for comparison, and third the fact that data are given only for a limited number of countries.
2. Look for explanatory comments, or notes, about the data. Notes may say how the material was collected, or why it is displayed in a particular way. Many of the tables used throughout this book contain explanatory notes. If the data have not been gathered by the researcher but are based on findings originally reported elsewhere, a *source* will be included. The source sometimes gives you some insight into how reliable the information is likely to be, as well as showing where to find the original data. In table 2.2, the source note makes clear that the data have been taken from a publication by the OECD.
3. Read the headings along the top and left-hand side of the table. (Sometimes tables are arranged with 'headings' at the foot rather than the top.) These tell you what type of information is contained in each row and column. In reading the table, keep in mind each set of headings as you scan the figures. In our example, the headings on the left give the countries involved, while those at the top refer to the levels of car ownership and the years for which they are given.
4. Identify the units used; the figures in the body of the table may represent cases, percentages, averages or other measures. Sometimes it may be helpful to convert the figures to a form more useful to you: if percentages are not provided, for example, it may be worth calculating them.
5. Consider the conclusions that might be reached from the information in the table. Most tables are discussed by the author, and what he or she has to say should of course be borne in mind. But you should also ask what further issues or questions could be suggested by the data.

Several interesting trends can be seen in the figures in our table. First, the level of car ownership varies considerably between different countries. The number of cars per 1,000 people was more than five times greater in the United States than in Turkey in 2002. Second, there is a clear connection between car ownership and the level of affluence of a country. In fact, we could probably use car ownership ratios as a rough indicator of differential prosperity. Third, in nearly all countries represented, the level of car ownership increased between 1990 and 2002, but in some the rate of increase has been higher than in others – probably indicating differences in the degree to which countries have successfully generated economic growth or are catching up.



potentially bias the result of the study and give a false interpretation. For example, if the researcher is studying how business corporations have complied with equal opportunities programmes for women, then companies that have not complied may not want to be studied. Clearly, this could result in a systematic bias in the results.

Bias can enter the research process in many ways. For example, if a piece of research is based on surveys of participants' views, it may be easy for the researcher to push the discussion in a particular way, such as asking leading questions that follow their own particular prejudices (as the Doonesbury cartoon shows). Alternatively, interviewees may evade a question that for various reasons they do not want to answer. The use of questionnaires with fixed wording can help to reduce interview bias, but it will not eliminate it. Another source of bias comes when *potential* participants in a survey, such as a voluntary questionnaire, decide that they do not want to take part. This is known as *non-response bias*, and as a general rule the higher the proportion of non-responses in the sample, the more likely it is that the survey of those who do take part will be biased. Even if every attempt is made to reduce bias in the survey, the observations that sociologists make in carrying out a piece of research are

THINKING CRITICALLY

Familiarize yourself again with table 2.2 and reflect on what questions might follow from this. For example, did you find anything surprising here? How could we find out *why* vehicle ownership in Canada and the USA has fallen from its highpoint in the early 1990s, while in the UK and other European countries ownership continues to rise? Next, track down the same data from 2003–9 yourself: what has happened to vehicle ownership since this table was produced? What place is there, if any, for qualitative methods in helping us to address such questions?

likely to reflect their own cultural assumptions. This *observer bias* can be difficult, or perhaps even impossible, to eliminate. Later in this chapter we look at some of the other pitfalls and difficulties of sociological research, and discuss how some of these can be avoided.

Interpreting the results

Once the material has been gathered together for analysis, the researcher's troubles are not over – they may be only just beginning! Working out the implications of the data collected and relating these back to the research problem are rarely easy. While it may be possible to reach a clear answer to the initial questions, many investigations are, in the end, less than fully conclusive.

Reporting the findings

The research report, usually published as a journal article or book, provides an account of the nature of the research and seeks to justify whatever conclusions are drawn. In Humphreys' case, this report was the book *Tearoom Trade*. This is a final stage only in terms of the individual research project. Most reports indicate questions that remain unanswered and suggest further research that might profitably be done in the future. All individual research investigations are part of the continuing process of research taking place within the sociological community. Other scholars have built on Humphreys' research findings.

Reality intrudes!

The preceding sequence of steps is a simplified version of what happens in actual research projects (see figure 2.1). In real sociological research, these stages rarely succeed each other so neatly, and there is almost always a certain amount of 'muddling through'. The difference is a bit like that between the recipes outlined in a cookbook and the actual process of preparing a meal. People who are experienced cooks often do not work from recipes at all, yet their food may be better than that cooked by those who do. Following fixed schemes can be unduly restricting and many outstanding pieces of sociological research have not fitted rigidly into this sequence, although most of the steps would be there somewhere.

Understanding cause and effect

One of the main problems to be tackled in research methodology is the analysis of cause and effect. A causal relationship between two events or situations is an association in which one event or situation produces another. If the handbrake is released in a car that is pointing downhill, the car will roll down the incline, gathering speed progressively as it does so. Taking the brake off caused this to happen; the reasons for this can readily be understood by reference to the physical principles involved. Like natural science, sociology depends on the assumption that all events have causes. Social life is *not* a random array of occurrences, happening without rhyme or reason. One of the main tasks of sociological research – in combination with theoretical thinking – is to identify causes and effects.

Causation and correlation

Causation cannot be directly inferred from correlation. Correlation means the existence of a regular relationship between two sets of occurrences or variables. A variable is any dimension along which individuals or groups vary. Age, differences in income, crime rates and social-class differences are among the many variables that sociologists study. It might seem as though, when two variables are found to be closely correlated, one must be the cause of the other. However, this is very often not the case. There are, in fact, many correlations without any causal relationship between variables. For example, over the period since the

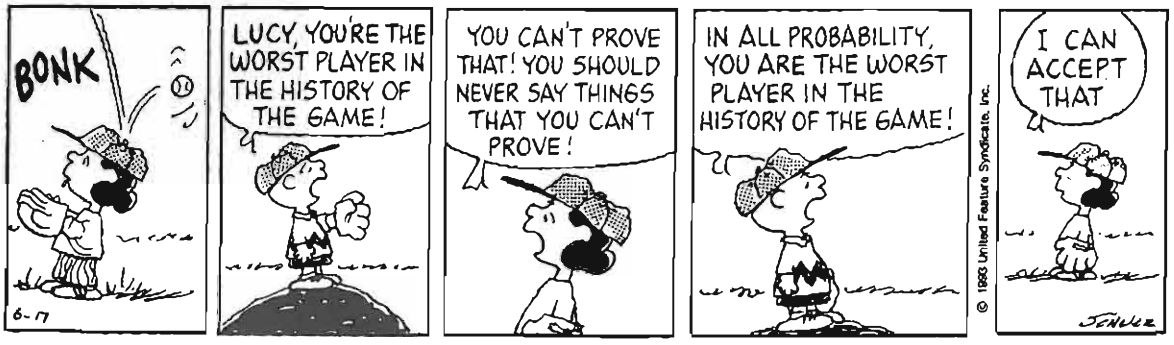
Second World War, a strong correlation can be found between the decline in pipe-smoking and the decrease in the number of people who regularly go to the cinema. Clearly one change does not cause the other, and we would find it difficult to discover even a remote causal connection between them.

There are many instances, however, in which it is not so obvious that an observed correlation does not imply a causal relationship. Such correlations are traps for the unwary and easily lead to questionable or false conclusions. In his classical work of 1897, *Suicide* (discussed in chapter 1), Emile Durkheim found a correlation between rates of suicide and the seasons of the year. In the societies that Durkheim studied, levels of suicide increased progressively from January to around June or July. From that time onward they declined over the remainder of the year. It might be supposed that this demonstrates that temperature or climatic change are *causally related* to the propensity of individuals to kill themselves. We might perhaps surmise that as temperatures increase, people become more impulsive and hot-headed, leading to higher suicide rates. However, the causal relationship here has nothing *directly* to do with temperature or climate at all. In spring and summer, most people engage in a more intensive social life than they do in the winter months. Individuals who are isolated or unhappy tend to experience an intensification of these feelings as the activity level of other people rises. Hence they are likely to experience acute suicidal tendencies more in spring and summer than they do in autumn and winter, when the pace of social activity slackens. We always have to be on our guard both in assessing whether correlation involves causation and deciding in which direction causal relations run.

Causal mechanisms

Working out the causal connections involved in correlations is often a difficult process. There is a strong correlation, for instance, between level of educational achievement and occupational success in modern societies. The better the grades an individual gets in school, the better-paid the job he is likely to get. What explains this correlation? Research tends to show that it is not mainly school experience itself; levels of school attainment are influenced much more by the type of home from which the person comes. Children from better-off homes, whose parents take a strong interest in their learning skills and where books are abundant, are more likely to do well than those coming from homes where these

Sociologists might be interested in the reasons why some young children, but not others, smoke. However, it can be difficult to establish a causal relationship between the different factors involved.



qualities are lacking. The causal mechanisms here are the attitudes of parents towards their children, together with the facilities for learning that a home provides.

Causal connections in sociology should not be understood in too mechanical a way. The attitudes people have and their subjective reasons for acting as they do are causal factors in relationships between variables in social life.

» A discussion of some recent 'critical realist' approaches to environmental sociology can be found in chapter 5, 'The Environment'.

Controls

In assessing the cause or causes that explain a correlation, we need to distinguish independent variables from dependent variables. An independent variable is one that produces an effect on another variable. The variable affected is the dependent one. In the example just mentioned above, academic achievement is the independent variable and occupational income the dependent variable. The distinction refers to the direction of the causal relation we are investigating. The same factor may be an independent variable in one study and a dependent variable in another. It all depends on what causal processes are being analysed. If we were looking at the effects of differences in occupational income on lifestyles, occupational income would then be the independent variable rather than the dependent one.

To find out whether a correlation between variables is a causal connection, we use controls, which means we hold some variables constant in order to look at the effects of others. By doing this, we are able to judge between explanations of observed correlations, separating causal from non-causal relationships. For example, researchers studying child development have claimed that there is a causal connection between maternal deprivation in infancy and serious personality problems in adulthood. ('Maternal deprivation' means that an infant is separated from its mother for a long period – several months or more – during the early years of its life.) How might we test whether there really is a causal relationship between maternal deprivation and later personality disorders? We would do so by trying to control, or 'screen out', other possible influences that might explain the correlation.

One source of maternal deprivation is the admission of a child to a hospital for a lengthy period, during which it is separated from its parents. Is it attachment to the mother, however, that really matters? Perhaps if a child receives love and attention from *other* people during infancy, she might subsequently be a stable person. To investigate these possible causal connections, we would have to compare cases where children were deprived of regular care from anyone with other instances in which children were separated from their mothers but received love and care from *someone* else. If the first group developed severe personality difficul-

ties but the second group did not, we would suspect that regular care from someone in infancy is what matters, regardless of whether or not it is the mother. In fact, children do seem to prosper normally as long as they have a loving, stable relationship with someone looking after them; this person does not have to be the mother herself.

Identifying causes

There are a large number of possible causes that could be invoked to explain any given correlation. How can we ever be sure that we have covered them all? The answer is that we cannot be sure. We would never be able to carry out and interpret the results of a piece of sociological research satisfactorily if we were compelled to test for the possible influence of every causal factor we could imagine as potentially relevant. Identifying causal relationships is normally guided by previous research into the area in question. If we do not have some reasonable idea beforehand of the causal mechanisms involved in a correlation, we would probably find it very difficult to discover what the real causal connections are. We would not know what to test *for*.

A good example of how difficult it is to be sure of the causal relations involved in a correlation is given by the long history of studies of smoking and lung cancer. Research has consistently demonstrated a strong correlation between the two. Smokers are more likely to contract lung cancer than non-smokers, and very heavy smokers are more likely to do so than light smokers. The correlation can also be expressed the other way around. A high proportion of those who have lung cancer are smokers or have smoked for long periods in their past. There have been so many studies confirming these correlations that it is generally accepted that a causal link is involved, but the exact causal mechanisms are thus far largely unknown.

However much correlational work is done on any issue, there always remains some doubt about possible causal relationships. Other interpretations of the correlation are possible. It has been proposed, for instance, that people who are predisposed to get lung cancer are also predisposed to smoke. In this view, it is not smoking that causes lung cancer, but rather some built-in biological disposition to smoking and cancer.

Research methods

A common distinction is often made in sociology between quantitative and qualitative research methods and traditions; the former is associated with functionalism and positivism, the latter with interactionism and the search for meanings and understanding. As the term suggests, quantitative methods try to *measure* social phenomena and will use mathematical models and, often, statistical analysis to explain them. Qualitative methods, on the other hand, attempt to gather detailed, rich data allowing for an in-depth understanding of individual action in the context of social life. As a rough-and-ready guide to a diverse range of sociological research methods, this distinction is a starting point and many sociologists will tend to specialize in, or even favour, one tradition rather than another. However, there is a danger that the two traditions will be seen as opposing 'camps' with entirely different approaches to research. This would not be very productive.

In fact, many research projects today make use of mixed methods – both quantitative and qualitative – in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding and explanation of the subject being studied. The findings from separate quantitative and qualitative studies can also be combined. For example, some feminist sociologists favour qualitative methods, which, they argue, allow the authentic voices of women to be heard in ways that quantitative studies do not. But without quantitative studies it would not have been possible to measure the extent of gender inequalities in society

Table 2.3 Four of the main methods used in sociological research

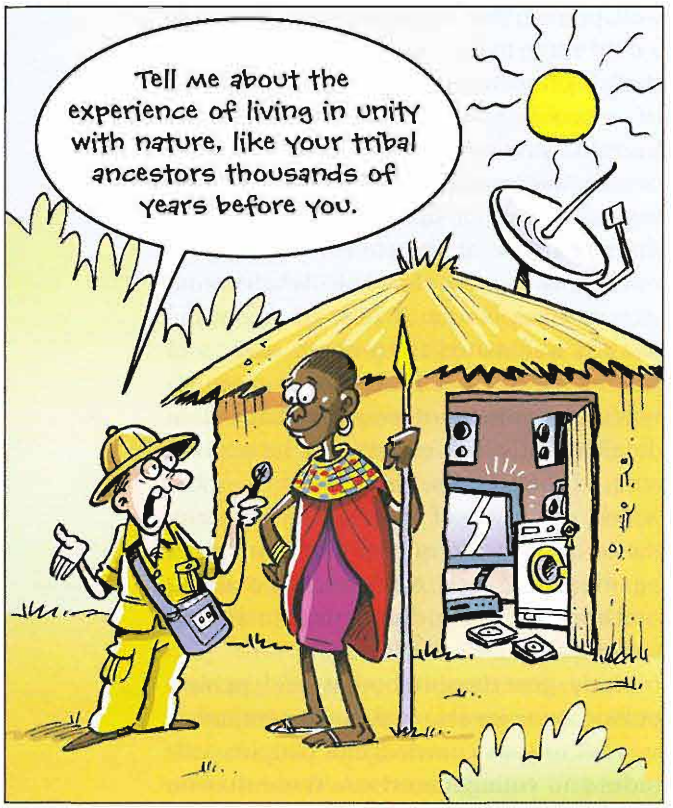
Research method	Strengths	Limitations
Fieldwork	Usually generates richer and more in-depth information than other methods.	Can only be used to study relatively small groups or or communities.
	Ethnography can provide a broader understanding of social processes.	Findings might only apply to the groups or communities studied; it is not easy to generalize on the basis of a single fieldwork study.
Surveys	Make possible the efficient collection of data on large numbers of individuals.	The material gathered may be superficial; where a questionnaire is highly standardized, important differences between respondents' viewpoints may be glossed over.
	Allow for precise comparisons to be made between the answers of respondents.	Responses may be what people profess to believe rather than what they actually believe.
Experiments	The influence of specific variables can be controlled by the investigator.	Many aspects of social life cannot be brought into the laboratory.
	Are usually easier for subsequent researchers to repeat.	The responses of those studied may be affected by their experimental situation.
Documentary research	Can provide source of in-depth materials as well as data on large numbers, depending on the type of documents studied.	The researcher is dependent on the sources that exist, which may be partial.
	Is often essential when a study is either wholly historical or has a defined historical dimension.	The sources may be difficult to interpret in terms of how far they represent real tendencies, as in the case of some official statistics.

or set those individual women's voices into their wider societal context. Sociologists have to be prepared to use the most appropriate methods for the questions they want to answer.

Next, we look at the various research methods sociologists commonly employ in their work (see table 2.3).

Ethnography

Laud Humphreys used ethnography, a type of fieldwork, or first-hand study of people, using participant observation and/or interviews as his main research methods. Here, the investigator hangs out, works or lives with a group, organization or community and perhaps takes a direct part in their activities. Where it is successful, ethnography provides information on the behaviour of people in groups, organizations and communities, and also on how those people understand their own behaviour. Once we see how things look from inside a given group, we are likely to develop a better understanding not only of that group, but of social processes that transcend the situation under study. Ethnography is one



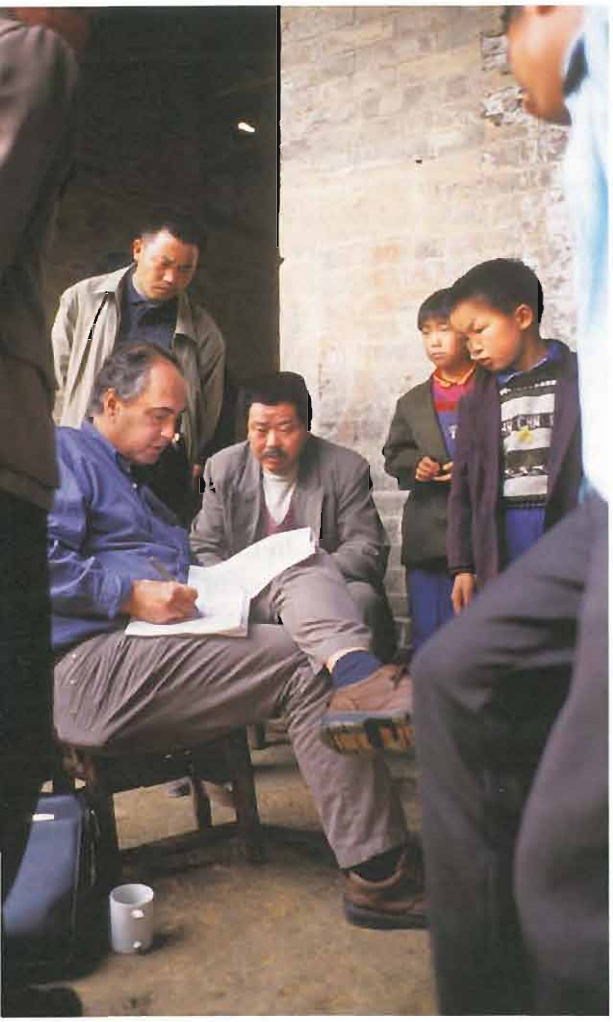
of a number of qualitative research methods used in sociology that aims to gain an in-depth knowledge and understanding of relatively small-scale social phenomena.

In recent years, sociologists have made use of focus groups, which have previously been widely used in marketing and surveys of political attitudes, as a qualitative research method. Focus groups are essentially 'group interviews' in which a particular group of people – usually between four and ten individuals – are gathered together to discuss a subject and exchange views. The researcher acts as a moderator but also asks specific questions relating to the research study, to direct the discussion. Focus groups can increase the size of a sample quite easily and because of their interactive nature, any possible misunderstandings can be clarified, thereby increasing the validity of a study's findings. However, critics point out that the researcher in a focus group is more participant than detached observer and may well influence the responses of the group. There is therefore a danger that participants will perform according to their perception of the researcher's expectations.

In the traditional works of ethnography, accounts were presented without very much information about the researchers themselves. This was because it was believed that an ethnographer could present objective pictures of the societies they studied. More recently, ethnographers have increasingly tended to talk about themselves and the nature of their connection to the people under study. Sometimes, for example, it might be a matter of trying to consider how one's race, class or gender affected the work, or how the power differences between observer and observed distorted the dialogue between them.

For a long while, it was usual for research based on participant observation to exclude any account of the hazards or problems that had to be overcome, but more recently the published reminiscences and diaries of fieldworkers have been more open about them. Frequently, feelings of loneliness must be coped with – it is not easy to fit into a social context or community where you do not really belong. The researcher may be constantly frustrated because the members of the group refuse to talk frankly about themselves; direct queries may be welcomed in some contexts but met with a chilly silence in others. Some types of fieldwork may even be physically dangerous; for instance, a researcher studying a delinquent gang might be seen as a police informer or might become unwittingly embroiled in conflicts with rival gangs.

Ethnographic studies also have other major limitations. Only fairly small groups or communities can be studied and much depends on the skill of the researcher in gaining the confidence of the individuals involved. Without this skill, the research is unlikely to get off the ground at all. The reverse is also possible. A researcher could



In fieldwork, sociologists have to become close to the communities they are studying, but not so close that they lose their outsider's eye.

begin to identify so closely with the group that he or she becomes too much of an 'insider' and loses the perspective of an outside observer.

Surveys

Interpreting field studies usually involves problems of generalization. Since only a small number of people are under study, we cannot be sure that what is found in one context will apply in other situations as well, or even that two different researchers would come to the same conclusions when studying the same group. This is usually less of a problem in survey research. In a survey, questionnaires are either sent out or administered directly in interviews to a selected group of people – sometimes as many as several thousand. Sociologists refer to this group of people, whatever its size, as a population. Whilst ethnographic work is well suited to in-depth studies of small slices of social life, survey research tends to produce information that is less detailed but which can usually be applied over a broader area. Surveys are the most widely used type of quantitative research method, allowing social phenomena to be measured and then analysed using mathematical models and statistical techniques.

Many government bodies and private polling agencies also make extensive use of surveys to gain knowledge of people's attitudes and voting intentions. These may be conducted through face-to-face interviews, telephone calls, postal questionnaires and, increasingly, online, via the Internet and email. Whichever method is adopted, the great advantage of surveys is that they allow researchers to collect large amounts of comparable data, which can be manipulated, usually using computer software, to find out whether there are any significant correlations between variables.

Standardized, open-ended, semi-structured questionnaires

Three types of questionnaire are used in surveys. Some contain a standardized, or fixed-choice, set of questions, to which only a fixed range of responses is possible – for instance, '*Yes / No / Don't know*' or '*Very likely / Likely / Unlikely / Very unlikely*'. Such surveys have the advantage that responses are easy to count and compare, since only a small number of categories are involved. On the other hand, because they do not allow for subtleties of opinion or verbal expression, the information they yield is likely to

be restricted in scope and sometimes misleading.

Other questionnaires are open-ended: respondents have more opportunity to express their views in their own words and are not limited to making fixed-choice responses. Open-ended questionnaires typically provide more detailed information than standardized ones. The researcher can follow up answers to probe more deeply into what the respondent thinks. On the other hand, the lack of standardization means that responses may be more difficult to compare statistically.

A very popular and widely used compromise between these two is the semi-structured interview questionnaire, which presents some standardized questions – the data from which may be analysed statistically later – but also includes interview prompts for more in-depth answers and sometimes allows interviewees to stray from the schedule when necessary. Semi-structured interview schedules tend to pursue relevant research themes rather than highly specific, researcher-defined questions.

Questionnaire items are normally listed so that a team of interviewers can ask the questions and record responses in the same predetermined order. All the items must be readily understandable to interviewers and interviewees alike. In the large national surveys undertaken regularly by government agencies and research organizations, interviews are carried out more or less simultaneously across the whole country. Those who conduct the interviews and those who analyse the results could not do their work effectively if they constantly had to check with each other about ambiguities in the questions or answers.

Questionnaires should also take into consideration the characteristics of respondents. Will they see the point the researcher has in mind in asking a particular question? Have they enough information to answer usefully? Will they answer at all? The terms of a questionnaire might be unfamiliar to the respondents. For instance, the question 'What is your marital status?' might baffle some people. It would be more appropriate to ask, 'Are you single, married, separated, or divorced?' Most surveys are preceded by pilot studies in order to pick up problems not anticipated by the investigator. A pilot study is a trial run in which just a few people complete a questionnaire. Any difficulties can then be ironed out before the main survey is done.

Sampling

Often sociologists are interested in the characteristics of large numbers of individuals – for example, the political attitudes of the British population as a whole. It would be impossible to study all these people directly, so in such situations researchers engage in sampling – they concentrate on a sample, or small proportion, of the overall group. One can usually be confident that results from a population sample, as long as it was properly chosen, can be generalized to the total population. Studies of only two to three thousand voters, for instance, can give a very accurate indication of the attitudes and voting intentions of the entire population. But to achieve such accuracy, a sample must be representative: the group of individuals studied must be typical of the population as a whole. Representative sampling is more complex than it might seem, and statisticians have developed rules for working out the correct size and nature of samples.

A particularly important procedure used to ensure that a sample is representative is random sampling, in which a sample is chosen so that every member of the population has the same probability of being included. The most sophisticated way of obtaining a random sample is to give each member of the population a number and then use a computer to generate a random list, from which the sample is derived – for instance, by picking every tenth number.

One famous early example of survey research was called, 'The People's Choice?', a study carried out by Paul Lazarsfeld and colleagues more than 60 years ago

(Lazarsfeld et al. 1948). This study, which investigated the voting intentions of residents of Erie County, Ohio, during the 1940 campaign for the US presidency, pioneered several of the main techniques of survey research in use to this day. In order to probe a little more deeply than a single questionnaire could do, the team interviewed each member of a sample of voters on seven separate occasions. The aim was to trace and understand the reasons for changes in voting attitudes.

The research had a number of hypotheses to test. One was that relationships and events close to voters in a community can influence voting intentions more than distant world affairs, and the findings on the whole confirmed this. The researchers developed sophisticated measurement techniques for analysing political attitudes; yet their work also made significant contributions to theoretical thinking. The study showed that some individuals – opinion leaders – tend to shape the political opinions of those around them. People's views are not formed in a direct fashion, but in a two-step process. In the first step, opinion leaders react to political events; in the second step, those leaders influence people around them – relatives, friends and colleagues. The views expressed by opinion leaders, filtered through personal relationships, then influence the responses of other individuals towards political issues of the day. This study shows that good survey research does more than simply describe social phenomena, it can also aid our theoretical understanding.

There are other types of sampling that are used by sociologists. In some types of research, it may be necessary to use convenience sampling. This means taking your sample from wherever you can! Because convenience sampling is less systematic and rigorous than other types, the results it generates have to be treated with caution. Nonetheless, in applied research or studies of hard-to-reach social groups who may be reluctant to come forward (substance misusers or people who self-harm, for example), it may be the only practical way of gathering an adequate sample. Similarly, snowball sampling, in which existing participants are used to recruit other participants (usually via their own network of contacts and friends) is a tried and tested method of gaining access to a larger sample than would otherwise be the case.

Advantages and disadvantages of surveys

Surveys are widely used in sociological research, for several reasons. Responses to questionnaires can be more easily quantified and analysed than material generated by most other research methods; large numbers of people can be studied; and, given sufficient funds, researchers can employ an agency specializing in survey work to collect the responses. The scientific method is the model for this kind of research, as surveys give researchers a statistical measure of what they are studying.

Many sociologists today, however, are critical of the survey method. They argue that an *appearance* of precision can be given to findings whose accuracy may be dubious, given the relatively shallow nature of most survey responses. Levels of non-response are sometimes high, especially when questionnaires are sent and returned through the mail. It is not uncommon for studies to be published, based on results derived from little over half of those in a sample, although normally an effort is made to re-contact non-respondents or to substitute other people. Little is known about those who choose not to respond to surveys or refuse to be interviewed, but survey research is often experienced as intrusive and time-consuming.

Experiments

An experiment can be defined as an attempt to test a hypothesis under highly controlled conditions established by an

USING YOUR SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION

2.2 Statistical terminology

Research in sociology often makes use of statistical techniques in the analysis of findings. Some are highly sophisticated and complex, but those most often used are easy to understand. The most common are **measures of central tendency** (ways of calculating averages) and **correlation coefficients** (measures of the degree to which one variable relates consistently to another).

There are three methods of calculating averages, each of which has certain advantages and shortcomings. Take as an example the amount of personal wealth (including all assets such as houses, cars, bank accounts and investments) owned by 13 individuals. Suppose they own the following amounts:

1. £000 (zero)
2. £5,000
3. £10,000
4. £20,000
5. £40,000
6. £40,000
7. £40,000
8. £80,000
9. £100,000
10. £150,000
11. £200,000
12. £400,000
13. £10,000,000

The **mean** corresponds to the average, arrived at by adding together the personal wealth of all 13 people and dividing the result by 13. The total is £11,085,000; dividing this by 13, we reach a mean of £852,692.31. This mean is often a useful calculation because it is based on the whole range of data provided. However, it can be misleading where one or a small number of cases are very different from the majority. In the above example, the mean is not in fact an appropriate measure of central tendency, because the presence of one very large figure, £10,000,000, skews the picture. One might get the impression when using the mean to summarize this data that most of the people own far more than they actually do.

In such instances, one of two other measures may be used. The **mode** is the figure that occurs most frequently in a given set of data. In our example, it is £40,000. The problem with the mode is that it does not take into account the overall distribution of the data – i.e., the range of figures covered. The most frequently occurring case in a set of figures is not necessarily representative of their distribution as a whole and thus may not be a useful average. In this case, £40,000 is too close to the lower end of the figures.

The third measure is the **median**, which is the middle of any set of figures; here, this would be the seventh figure, again £40,000. Our example gives an odd number of figures: 13. If there had been an even number – for instance, 12 – the median would be calculated by taking the mean of the two middle cases, figures 6 and 7. Like the mode, the median gives no idea of the actual range of the data measured.

Sometimes a researcher will use more than one measure of central tendency to avoid giving a deceptive picture of the average. More often, he will calculate the **standard deviation** for the data in question. This is a way of calculating the **degree of dispersal**, or the range, of a set of figures – which in this case goes from zero to £10,000,000.

Correlation coefficients offer a useful way of expressing how closely connected two (or more) variables are. Where two variables correlate completely, we can speak of a perfect positive correlation, expressed as 1.0. Where no relation is found between two variables – they have no consistent connection at all – the coefficient is zero. A perfect negative correlation, expressed as 21.0, exists when two variables are in a completely inverse relation to one another. Perfect correlations are never found in the social sciences. Correlations of the order of 0.6 or more, whether positive or negative, are usually regarded as indicating a strong degree of connection between whatever variables are being analysed. Positive correlations on this level might be found between, say, social class background and voting behaviour.

Classic Studies 2.1 The social psychology of prison life

The research problem

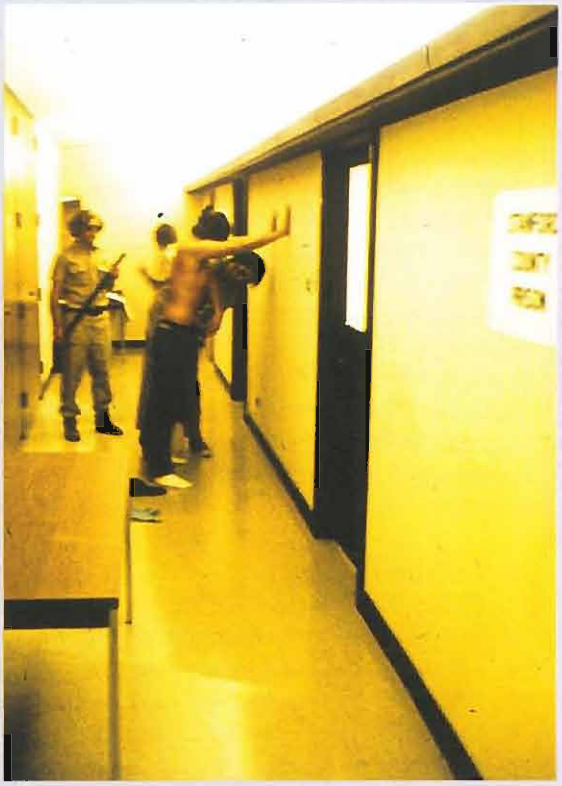
Most people have not experienced life in prison and find it hard to imagine how they would cope 'inside'. How would you fare? Could you work as a prison officer? What kind of a prison officer would you be? A disciplinarian maybe? Or perhaps you would adopt a more humanitarian approach to your prisoners? In 1971, a research team led by Philip Zimbardo decided to try and find out what impact prison would have on 'ordinary people'.

In a study funded by the US Navy, Zimbardo set out to test the 'dispositional hypothesis', which dominated within the armed forces. This hypothesis suggested that constant conflicts between prisoners and guards were due to the individual characters of the guards and inmates – their personal dispositions. Zimbardo thought this may be wrong and set up an experimental prison to find out.

Zimbardo's explanation

Zimbardo's research team set up a fake jail at Stanford University, advertised for male volunteers to participate in a study of prison life and selected 24 mainly middle-class students who did not know each other prior to the experiment. Each participant was then randomly assigned as guard or prisoner. Following a standard induction process which involved being stripped naked, de-loused and photographed, also naked, prisoners stayed in jail 24 hours a day, but guards worked shifts and went home in between times. Standardized uniforms were used for both roles. The aim was to see how playing these different roles would lead to changes in attitude and behaviour. The results shocked the investigators.

Students who played at being guards quickly assumed an authoritarian manner; they displayed real hostility towards the prisoners, ordering them around and verbally abusing and bullying them. The prisoners, by contrast, showed a mixture of apathy and rebelliousness – a response often noted among inmates in real prisons. These effects were so marked and the level of tension so high that the 14-day experiment had to be called off after just 6 days



Reaction to the mock prison regime during the Stanford prison experiment led to one inmate staging a hunger strike to be let out.

because of the distress of the participants. Even before this, five 'prisoners' were released because of extreme anxiety and emotional problems. Many 'guards', though, were unhappy that the study had ended prematurely.

On the basis of the findings, Zimbardo concluded that the dispositional hypothesis could not account for the participants' reactions. Instead, he proposed an alternative 'situational' explanation – behaviour in prisons is influenced by the prison situation itself, not by the individual characteristics of those involved. In particular, the expectations attached to the roles being played tended to shape behaviour. Some of the guards' behaviour had deteriorated – they treated prisoners badly, regularly handing out punishments and appearing to take pleasure in the distress of the prisoners. Zimbardo suggests

that this is due to the power relationships the jail had established. Their control over prisoners' lives very quickly became a source of enjoyment for the guards. On the other hand, following a short period of rebelliousness, prisoners very rapidly exhibited a 'learned helplessness' and dependency. As researchers, the study tells us something important about why social relationships very often deteriorate within prisons and, by implication, other 'total institutions' (Goffman 1968 [1961]). This has little to do with individual personalities and much more to do with the prison environment and the social roles within it.

Critical points

Critics argue that there were real ethical problems with the study. Participants were not given full information about the purpose of the research and it is therefore questionable whether they could really have given 'informed consent'. Should the study even have been allowed to go ahead? The sample selected was clearly not representative of the population as a whole; all were students and male. Generalizing about the effects of 'prison life' would therefore be very difficult with such a small and unrepresentative sample. A final criticism is that the constructed situation may invalidate the findings. For example, participants knew their imprisonment would only last 14 days and they were paid $15 a day for their participation. Established problems of prisons such as racism and involuntary homosexuality were also absent. Critics say that the experiment is therefore not a meaningful comparison with real prison life.

Contemporary significance

In spite of the somewhat artificial situation – it was an experiment, after all – Zimbardo's findings have been widely referred to since the 1970s. For example, Zygmunt Bauman's (1989) *Modernity and the Holocaust* draws on this study to help explain the behaviour of inmates and guards in Nazi-run concentration camps in the Second World War. Just as importantly, the general thesis emerging from the research – that institutional settings can shape social relations and behaviour – continues to inform contemporary sociological studies, such as those investigating care homes for older people, residential homes for disabled people and many more.

investigator. Experiments are often used in the natural sciences, as they offer major advantages over other research procedures. In an experimental situation the researcher directly controls the circumstances being studied. Psychologists studying individual behaviour also use laboratory-based experimentation extensively. However, compared with these disciplines, the scope for experimentation in sociology is quite restricted. Most sociological studies, even those of individual actions, look to investigate the relationship between micro- and macrosocial phenomena. To remove individuals from their social context for the purposes of experimentation effectively prevents this.

Sometimes, sociologists may want to explore group dynamics – the way individuals behave when in groups – and experiments may then be possible. However, only small groups of individuals can be brought into a laboratory setting, and in such experiments people know that they are being studied and may not behave normally. Such

THINKING CRITICALLY

What is your first response to the Zimbardo study – can such an experimental situation really reproduce the authentic experience of a prison? Which aspects of the prison experience could an experiment *never* replicate? Thinking more critically now, should social scientists be allowed to 'experiment' on human beings at all? If not, does that mean there are things we will just never know about? If they should, what limits should there be on such experiments?

changes in subject behaviour are referred to as the 'Hawthorne effect'. In the 1930s, researchers conducting a work-productivity study at the Western Electric Company's Hawthorne plant near Chicago found to their surprise that worker productivity continued to rise regardless of which experimental conditions were imposed (levels of lighting, break patterns, work team size and so forth). The workers were conscious of being under scrutiny and accelerated their natural work pace. Nevertheless, as 'Classic Studies 2.1' shows, we can still learn things about social life from small-scale experiments.

Biographical research

In contrast to experiments, biographical research belongs purely to sociology and the other social sciences; it has no place in natural science. Biographical research has become much more popular and widely used in sociology in recent decades and includes oral histories, narratives, autobiographies, biographies and life histories (Bryman 2008). These methods are used to explore how individuals experience social life and periods of social change, and how they interpret their relationships with others in the context of a changing world. In this way, biographical methods allow new voices to enter sociological research; life histories are an example of such research methods.

Life histories consist of biographical material assembled about particular individuals – usually as recalled by the individuals themselves. Life histories have been successfully employed in studies of major importance. One celebrated early study was *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*, by W. I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki, the five volumes of which were first published between 1918 and 1920 (Thomas and Znaniecki 1966). Thomas and Znaniecki were able to provide a more sensitive and subtle account of the experience of migration than would have been possible without the interviews, letters and newspaper articles they collected.

Other procedures of research do not usually yield as much information as the life-history method does about the development of beliefs and attitudes over time. Life-historical studies rarely rely wholly on people's memories, however. Normally, sources such as letters, contemporary reports and newspaper descriptions are used to expand on and check the validity of the information that individuals provide.

Sociologists' views differ on the value of biographical methods. Some feel they are too unreliable to provide useful information, but others believe they offer sources of insight that few other research methods can match. Indeed, some sociologists have begun to offer reflections on their own lives within their research studies, as a way of offering insights into the origins and development of their theoretical assumptions (see Mouzelis 1995).

Comparative research

The research methods described so far are generally applied in a comparative context. Comparative research is of central importance in sociology, because making comparisons allows us to clarify what is going on in a particular area of research. Let us take the rate of divorce in many developed societies – i.e. the number of divorces granted each year – as an example. In the early 1960s there were fewer than 30,000 divorces per year in the UK; by the early 1980s this figure had risen to around 160,000 or more. Do these changes reflect specific features of British society? We can find out by comparing divorce rates in the UK with those of other countries. Such a comparison reveals that compared to most other Western societies the overall trends are similar. A majority of Western countries have experienced steadily climbing divorce rates over the past half century.

Historical analysis

As discussed in chapter 1, a historical perspective is often essential in sociological research. For we frequently need a *time perspective* to make sense of the material we collect about a particular problem.

Sociologists commonly want to investigate past events directly. Some periods of history can be studied in a direct way while there are still survivors around – such as in the case of the Holocaust in Europe during the Second World War. Research in oral history means interviewing people about events they witnessed at some point earlier in their lives. This kind of research work, obviously, can only stretch at the most some 60 or 70 years back in time.

For historical research on an earlier period, sociologists use documentary research from written records, often contained in the special collections of libraries or archives. The range of useful documents is extensive, taking in personal sources such as diaries; official sources such as policy documents, records of births and deaths and tax records; documents from private bodies like businesses and voluntary organizations; as well as magazines and newspapers. Depending on the research question, historical documents such as these can all constitute primary sources, just as much as the data recorded in interviews with war survivors. However, historical sociologists also make much use of secondary sources: accounts of historical events written by people afterwards. Most documentary studies make use of both types. However, sociologists face the same issues as historians when they make use of such sources. How authentic are the documents? Is the information within them reliable? Do they represent only a partial viewpoint? Documentary research requires a patient, systematic approach to sources and their interpretation.

An interesting example of the use of historical documents is sociologist Anthony Ashworth's study of trench warfare during the First World War (Ashworth 1980). Ashworth was concerned with analysing what life was like for men who had to endure being under constant fire, crammed in close proximity for weeks on end. He drew on a diversity of documentary sources: official histories of the war, including those written about different military divisions and battalions; official publications of the time; the notes and records kept informally by individual soldiers; and personal accounts of war experiences. By drawing on such a variety of sources, Ashworth was able to develop a rich and detailed description of life in the trenches. He discovered that most soldiers formed their own ideas about how often they intended to engage in combat with the enemy and often effectively ignored the commands of their officers. For example, on Christmas Day, German and Allied soldiers suspended hostilities, and in one place the two sides even staged an informal soccer match.

Comparative-historical research

Ashworth's research concentrated on a relatively short time period, but there have been many studies that have investigated social change over much longer periods and applied comparative research in that historical context. One of the more recent modern classics of comparative historical sociology is Theda Skocpol's (1979) analysis of social revolutions, discussed in 'Classic Studies 2.2'.

Sociological research in the real world

All research methods, as was stressed earlier, have their advantages and limitations. Hence, it is common to combine several methods in a single piece of research, using each to supplement and check on the others, in a process known as triangulation. We can see the value of combining methods – and, more generally,

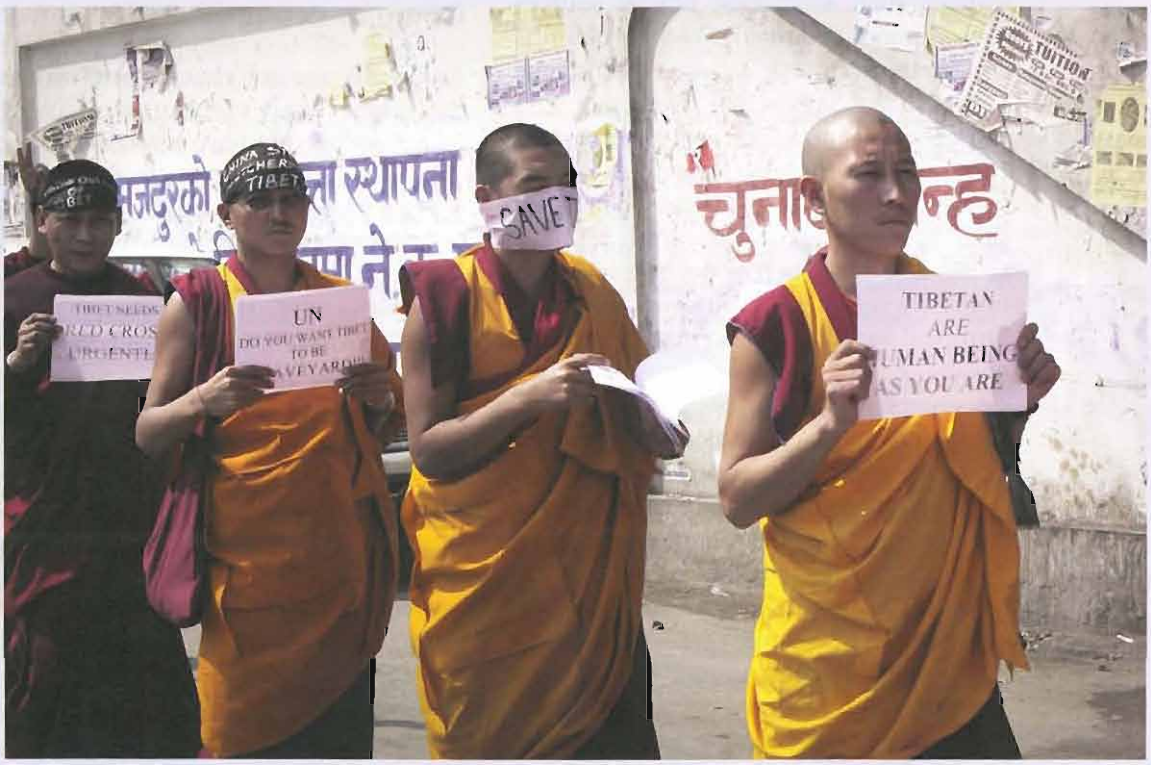
Classic Studies 2.2 Theda Skocpol's comparison of social revolutions

The research problem

As all students of sociology and history are taught, the French Revolution of 1789 transformed France forever. But why did it happen then and not at some other time? Was it an historical accident or was it inevitable? The early twentieth-century revolutions in China and Russia not only turned those countries into communist societies, but significantly shaped the direction of the modern world itself. Again, why did they happen then? What caused them? The American sociologist Theda Skocpol (1947–), set out to address these questions and to uncover the similarities and differences between them. Skocpol set herself an ambitious task: to produce a theory of the origins and nature of revolution grounded in detailed empirical study. The result was a book, published as *States and Social Revolutions* (1979), that is now one of the classic studies of long-term social transformation.

Skocpol's explanation

Skocpol looked at the processes of revolution in three different historical contexts: the 1789 French Revolution (1786–1800); the 1917 revolutions in Russia (1917–21) and the revolutionary period in China (1911–49). Given the essentially historical questions she asked, her main method was the use and careful interpretation of a range of primary and secondary documentary sources. Although there are many differences between the three cases of revolution, Skocpol argues that their underlying structural causes are in fact similar. She rejects the Marxist idea that revolutions are the product of mass (class-based) movements with deep grievances. Instead, she agrees with the thesis that, 'revolutions are not made, they come'. That is, social revolutions are largely the result of the unintended consequences of intentional human action. Before the Russian Revolution, for instance, various political groups



Social unrest does not necessarily lead to revolution. It is unclear what the outcome of protests in Tibet against Chinese rule will be.

were trying to overthrow the pre-existing regime, but none of these – including the Bolsheviks, who eventually came to power – anticipated the revolution that occurred. A series of clashes and confrontations gave rise to a process of social transformation much deeper and more radical than anyone had foreseen.

Skocpol's explanation is that all three revolutions occurred in predominantly agrarian societies and were made possible only when the existing state structures (administrative and military) were breaking down as they came under intense competitive pressure from other states. In this context, it was peasant revolts and mass mobilizations that brought about social revolutions in France, China and Russia. Thus Skocpol argued against the widespread notion that peasants were *not* a 'revolutionary class'. Some similarities with other revolutions in Vietnam, Cuba, Mexico and Yugoslavia can also be seen. Skocpol's causal explanation focuses on state structures; as these began to break down, a power vacuum was created and states lost their legitimacy, enabling revolutionary forces to take power.

Skocpol's research makes use of the 'logic of scientific experiment' for comparative studies, outlined by John Stuart Mill in the mid-nineteenth century. Skocpol adopts Mill's 'method of similarity', taking three similar events (revolutions) in very different national contexts. This allows her to look for possible key similarities across the three cases which can be identified as *independent variables* and thus, help to explain the causes of political revolutions.

Critical points

Some of Skocpol's critics have raised questions about her thesis's structural argument. This, they say, leaves little room for active agency on the part of people. How did peasant groups revolt? Did leaders not play a part in the revolutions? Could things have turned out differently if individual actors and groups had chosen alternative courses of action? Are individuals so powerless to influence change in the face of structural pressures? A further criticism is of Skocpol's notion of 'cause' in this context. Some have argued that what her argument amounts to is really a set of sophisticated generalizations in relation to the cases she studied. And although such generalizations work quite well for these specific cases, this is not the same thing as a general causal theory of social revolutions. So, critics say, despite setting out to discover the underlying causes and nature of social revolutions, in the end, Skocpol's study showed that each revolution has to be studied in its own right.

Contemporary significance

Skocpol's study has become a modern classic for two reasons. First, it developed a powerful causal explanation of revolutionary change, which emphasized the underlying social structural conditions of revolution. Such a strong central thesis was, nevertheless, underpinned by very detailed analysis of primary and secondary documentary sources. Hence, Skocpol successfully demonstrated that comparative-historical sociology could combine the study of large-scale, long-term social change with the empirical investigation of historical events 'on the ground'. In essence, she brought together the macro- and microsociological aspects into one theoretical framework. Second, Skocpol made a very significant contribution to our understanding of revolutions. She showed that there are enough similarities across different revolutions to warrant pursuing general theories of social change. In this way, her thesis helped to bridge the gap between mainstream historical studies and the sociology of revolutions.

the problems and pitfalls of real sociological research – by looking once again at Laud Humphreys' *Tearoom Trade*.

One of the questions that Humphreys wanted to answer was: 'What kind of men came to the tearooms?' But it was very hard for him to find this out, because all he could really do in the toilets was observe. The norm of silence in the toilets made it difficult to ask any questions, or even to talk. In addition, it would have been very odd if he had begun to ask personal questions of

people who basically wanted to be anonymous.

Humphreys' solution was to try to find out more about the men in the 'tearooms' using survey methods. Standing by the door of the toilets, he would write down the car number-plates of people who pulled up to the car park and went into the toilets for sex. He then gave the numbers to a friend who worked at the Department of Motor Vehicles, securing the addresses of the men.

Months later, Washington University in St Louis, in the United States, where Laud was working, was conducting a door-to-door survey of sexual habits. Humphreys asked the principal investigators in that survey if he could add the names and addresses of his sample of tearoom participants. Humphreys then disguised himself as one of the investigators and went to interview these men at their homes, supposedly just to ask only the survey questions but actually also to learn more about their social backgrounds and lives. He found that most of these men were married and otherwise led very conventional lives. He often interviewed wives and other family members as well.

THINKING CRITICALLY

Do you think Zimbardo's project would be allowed today? On reflection, *should* such projects be allowed in sociology at all? Considering Laud Humphreys' study of tearooms *and* Zimbardo's prison experiment, can the knowledge benefits of a research study ever justify compromising a researcher's own ethical position?

Restating the obvious?

Because sociologists often study things that we have some personal experience of, one can sometimes wonder if sociology is merely 'a painful elaboration of the obvious' (Wright 2000). Is sociology merely a restatement, in abstract jargon, of things we already know? Is it simply the tedious definition of social phenomena with which we are already familiar? Sociology at its worst can be all of these things, but it is never appropriate to judge any discipline by what its worst practitioners do. In fact, good sociology sharpens our understanding of the obvious (Berger 1963) or it completely transforms our common sense. In either event, good sociology is neither tedious nor a restatement of the obvious. Discussions of a new topic in this text sometimes begin with definitions of things that you may already understand. It is necessary for any academic discipline to define its terms. However, when we define a family, for example, as a unit of people who are related to one another, we do so not as an endpoint but instead as a beginning. Without defining our terms, we often cannot move forward to sharper levels of understanding later on – good sociology never defines terms as an end in itself.

The influence of sociology

Sociological research is rarely of interest only to the intellectual community of sociologists. For a start, much sociological research funding comes from government sources and is directly linked to social issues and problems. Many studies of crime and deviance, for example, target specific offences or types of offender with a view to gaining a better knowledge so that the social problems associated with crime can be tackled more effectively. Sociologists also work with voluntary agencies, public bodies and businesses, bringing their research skills to bear on matters of interest not just to the sociologist. A fair amount of this work is applied social research, which does not simply aim to produce better knowledge, but also seeks to inform interventions aimed at improving social life. A study of the effects on children of parental alcohol use, for example, may be interested in whether a particular treatment programme has any effect on reducing alcoholism. Sociology's

impact is not restricted to policy-oriented research, however.

The results of sociological research are often disseminated throughout society. Sociology, it must be emphasized, is not just the *study* of societies; it is a significant element *in the continuing life* of those societies. Take the transformations taking place in relation to marriage, sexuality and the family (discussed in chapters 9 and 14). Few people do not have some knowledge of these changes, as a result of the filtering down of sociological research. Our thinking and behaviour are affected by sociological knowledge in complex and often subtle ways, thus reshaping the very field of sociological investigation. A way of describing this phenomenon, using the technical concepts of sociology, is to say that sociology stands in a 'reflexive relation' to the human beings whose behaviour is studied. Reflexivity, as we shall see in chapter 3, describes the interchange between sociological research and human behaviour. We should not be surprised that sociological findings often correlate closely with common sense. The reason is not simply that sociology comes up with findings we knew already; it is, rather, that sociological research continually influences what our common-sense knowledge of society actually is.

Summary points

1. Sociologists investigate social life by posing distinct questions and trying to find the answers to these by systematic research. These questions may be factual, comparative, developmental or theoretical.
2. All research begins from a research problem, which interests or puzzles the investigator. Gaps in the existing literature, theoretical debates, or practical issues in the social world may suggest research problems. There are a number of clear steps in the development of research strategies – although these are rarely followed exactly in actual research.
3. A causal relationship between two events or situations is one in which one event or situation brings about the other. This is more problematic than it seems at first. Causation must be distinguished from correlation, which refers to the existence of a regular relationship between two variables. A variable can be differences in age, income, crime rates, etc. We need to also distinguish independent variables from dependent variables. An independent variable is a variable that produces an effect on another. Sociologists often use controls to ascertain a causal relationship.
4. In fieldwork or participant observation, the researcher spends lengthy periods of time with a group or community being studied. Survey research involves sending or administering questionnaires to samples of a larger population. Documentary research uses printed materials, from archives or other resources, as a source for information. Other research methods include experiments, biographical methods, historical analysis and comparative research.
5. Each of these various methods of research has its limitations. For this reason, researchers will often combine two or more methods in their work, each being used to check or supplement the material obtained from the others. This process is called triangulation.
6. Sociological research often poses ethical dilemmas. These may arise either where deception is practised against those who are the subjects of the research, or where the publication of research findings might adversely affect the feelings or lives of those studied. There is no entirely satisfactory way to deal with these issues, but all researchers have to be sensitive to the dilemmas they pose.

Further reading

Books on research methods are very numerous, especially those pitched at introductory level students. This selection is therefore merely the tip of a large iceberg of literature.

Novice researchers need a text that is both informative and practical, so something like Judith Bell's *Doing Your Research Project: A Guide for First-time Researchers in Education, Health and Social Science*, 4th edn (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2007) is a very good place to begin thinking about and planning a research project. Similarly, Keith F. Punch's *Introduction to Social Research: Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches*, 2nd edn (London: Sage Publications, 2005) does exactly what it says and covers a lot of issues and debates. Gary D. Bouma and Rod Ling's *The Research Process, Fifth Edition* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2005) is also an excellent introduction to research methods.

For something more sophisticated and comprehensive, you could then try Alan Bryman's *Social Research Methods*, 3rd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), which has become very widely adopted by lecturers for their research methods courses. Tim May's *Social Research: Issues, Methods and Process*, 3rd edn (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2003) is a similarly much-used and reliable guide.

One other book worth looking at is Darrell Huff's *How to Lie with Statistics* (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1991), which is apparently the best-selling statistics book ever written (see J. M. Steele, 'Darrell Huff and fifty years of how to lie with statistics', *Statistical Science*, 20/3 (2005): 205–9). This is probably because its irreverent tone makes it attractive to students. It is, however, an excellent guide to the misuse of statistical information in society, which carries a serious message.

Finally, a good dictionary is usually a good investment, so Victor Jupp's *The SAGE Dictionary of Social Research Methods* (London: Sage Publications, 2006) is well worth consulting.

Internet links

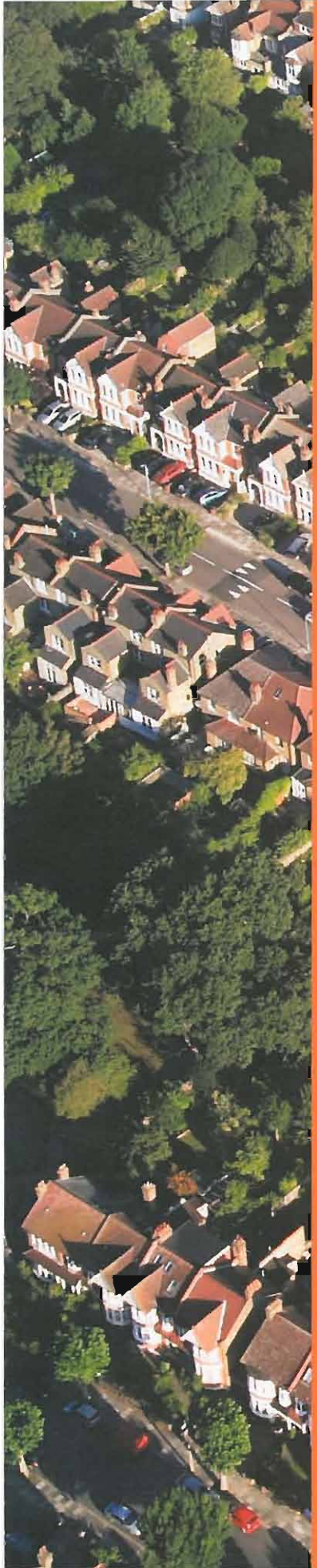
Ipsos MORI – a merged company (Ipsos UK and MORI) focusing on market research and social research:
www.ipsos-mori.com/

Intute – social science web resources for education and research:
www.intute.ac.uk/socialsciences/

UK National Statistics Online, which includes lots of survey research, but other types as well:
www.statistics.gov.uk/default.asp

The UK Data Archive – a centre of expertise in relation to the collection and storage of data on a variety of subjects:
www.data-archive.ac.uk/

CESSDA – Council of European Social Science Data Archives – houses many social science data archives from across Europe covering many types of research:
www.nsd.uib.no/cessda/home.html



CHAPTER 3

Theories and Perspectives in Sociology

(opposite) Does the environmental issue of global climate change demand new forms of sociological theorizing?

In chapter 1 we saw that, like other scientific disciplines, sociologists need to devise abstract interpretations – theories – to explain the variety of facts and evidence they collect in their research studies. They also need to adopt a theoretical approach at the outset of their empirical studies if they are to formulate adequate research questions and narrow down the search for evidence. But sociological theorizing does not take place in a vacuum outside the wider society. This is clear from the questions posed by the discipline's founders, which were closely tied to some of the major social issues of the day. For example, Marx sought to explain the dynamics of the capitalist economy and the causes of poverty and social inequality. Durkheim's studies investigated the character

of industrial society and the process of secularization. Weber tried to explain the emergence of capitalism and the consequences of modern bureaucratic forms of organization. And all three were concerned to understand what was unique about modern societies and where they were heading. Some sociologists continue to be motivated today by these 'big questions'.

However, the central problems within societies seem to be changing, as are the sociological theories that aim to understand and explain them. What are the social and political consequences of globalization? How and why are gender relations being transformed? What is the future for multicultural societies? Indeed, what is the future for human populations across the world in the light of dire scientific forecasts of global warming and other environmental problems? In order to address these new issues, sociologists have been forced to re-evaluate the utility of the classical perspectives and, where these are found wanting, to develop novel theories of their own. We will look at some of the latter in this chapter. Before that, we have to establish why a chapter dedicated to theory is needed and what you should expect from it.

So what is left to do? This chapter rounds off an interlinked block of three at the start of the book. Taken together, the block provides a basic introduction to the discipline of sociology. In chapter 1 we explored what sociology – the study of human societies – adds to the sum total of scientific knowledge. Chapter 2 then presented some of the main research methods and techniques which sociologists use in their research – their 'tools of the trade', as it were. And in this chapter, we provide a relatively brief account of the history and development of sociological theorizing, along with some of the central problems that have exercised generations of sociologists since the nineteenth century. For all newcomers to sociology, such an historical perspective is vital. Not only will it help readers to understand better how the discipline emerged and changed into its current state, but it should prevent us all from trying too hard to reinvent the (theoretical) wheel, when there is no need to do so. Critics of sociological theorizing – more than a few from within the discipline itself – complain that too many 'new' theories are really 'old' theories dressed up in new language. But an awareness of the development of sociological theory can help us to avoid falling into this particular trap.

Coming to terms with the array of theories and perspectives in sociology is challenging for those new to the discipline. It would be much easier if sociology had a central theory around which all sociologists could work, and for a time in the 1950s and '60s, the structural functionalist approach of Talcott Parsons did come close to being that central theory. However, as we saw in chapter 1, this is just not the case today, as the present period of sociological theorizing is characterized by a diversity of theoretical approaches and perspectives. And of course, with such diversity comes more competition and disagreement. All this makes the task of evaluating competing theories more difficult than it once was, but you should not be put off. Sociological theories are necessary because without theory our understanding of social life would be very weak. Good theories help us to arrive at a deeper understanding of societies and to explain the social changes that affect us all.

Robert K. Merton (1957) argued strongly for 'middle-range' theories that try to explain a specific aspect of social life, rather than grand theories aiming to explain large-scale social structures or the historical development of modern societies (see chapter 1). One reason why we might well agree with Merton is that it is very difficult to test grand theories by empirical research. But sociology can easily accommodate *both* types. Indeed, the insights we can garner from grand theories often makes the difficulties associated with empirical testing well worth the effort. Over the last decade or two, we have seen something of a return to grand theorizing as social scientists try to understand the momentous social, political

Figure 3.1 Chronology of major sociological theorists and schools, 1750–2000

and technological transformations of recent times (Skinner 1990). Such an enterprise has been part of the sociological tradition from the start, and it appears ever more necessary for it to continue in the rapidly globalizing world we live in today.

Next, we trace the emergence of sociological theory and the establishment of the discipline of sociology through the work of the 'classical founders' and the traditions of enquiry they began. We then explore some key theoretical issues around which debates in sociological theory have focused, before ending the chapter with a look at the way in which the rapid and wide-ranging social changes since the 1970s have

forced sociologists to devise new approaches to their theorizing. Figure 3.1 provides a simple chronological chart, which illustrates the emergence and development of sociological theories and perspectives through certain influential theorists and schools. The place of individuals in the time-sequence is determined roughly by the date of their major publication(s) and the place of schools by their date of formation. This is of course merely a selection and is not intended to be exhaustive. The chart aims to provide some key theoretical signposts, which can be referred to throughout the chapter and, indeed, the book as a whole.

THINKING CRITICALLY

Read carefully and reflect on the simplified chronology of theorists and schools in figure 3.1. Why do you think there seem to be more attempts to produce theoretical syntheses, mixing elements from the different perspectives, at the present time than there were in the past?

Towards sociology

As we saw in chapter 1, a sociological perspective was made possible by two revolutionary transformations. The Industrial Revolution of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries radically transformed the material conditions of life and the ways of making livings forever, bringing with it, initially at least, many new social problems such as urban overcrowding, poor sanitation and accompanying disease and industrial pollution on an unprecedented scale. Social reformers looked for ways to mitigate and solve such problems, which led them to carry out research and gather evidence on the extent and nature of the problems to reinforce their case for change.

The French Revolution of 1789 marked the symbolic endpoint of the older European agrarian regimes and absolute monarchies as republican ideals of freedom, liberty and citizenship rights came to the fore. This revolution is often seen as, in part, the outcome of mid-eighteenth-century European Enlightenment ideas that challenged religious and traditional authorities and promoted philosophical and scientific notions of reason, rationality and critical thinking as the keys to progress in human affairs.

Enlightenment philosophers saw the advancement of reliable knowledge in the natural sciences, particularly in astronomy, physics and chemistry, as showing the way forward for the study of social life. The English physicist, Sir Isaac Newton (1643–1727), was singled out as an exemplary scientist whose notions of Natural Law and scientific method appealed to Enlightenment scholars, who argued that such laws could be found (and should be sought using similar methods) in social and political life as well.

Positivism and social evolution

Auguste Comte saw the science of society (which he termed 'sociology') as essentially similar to natural science. His positivist approach was based on the principle of direct observation, which could be explained by theoretical statements based on establishing causal, law-like generalizations. The task of sociology, according to Comte, was to gain reliable knowledge of the social world in order to make predictions about it, and, on the basis of those predictions, to intervene and shape social life in progressive ways. Comte's positivist philosophy was clearly inspired by what he saw as the fabulous predictive power of the natural sciences. Anyone who has watched (probably on television) NASA's space shuttles taking off and spending days orbiting the Earth before landing in the manner of an aeroplane has witnessed this predictive power in action. Thinking about the different types of accurate knowledge that are required to achieve such a feat of science

and engineering shows why the natural sciences are held in high regard.

But could such reliable, predictive knowledge ever be achieved in relation to human beings? Most sociologists today think not and even fewer would use the term 'positivist' to describe their own work. Probably the main reason why so many sociologists reject Comtean positivism is because they see the idea of shaping and controlling people and societies as impossible, potentially dangerous or both. Critics say that self-conscious human beings cannot be studied in the same way as, say, frogs, because they are capable of acting in ways that confound our predictions about them. But even if Comte was right and humans *could* be scientifically studied, their behaviour forecast and interventions made to direct it in positive directions, who would decide what constitutes a 'positive direction'? Scientists themselves? Politicians? Religious authorities? The twentieth century saw many attempts to control human populations, including those of hard-line communist regimes based on 'scientific Marxism' and fascist governments drawing on theories of 'scientific racism' to justify mass murder. Social scientists today cannot un-know the appalling human consequences of such uses of scientific theories and there has been increasing scepticism about Comte's notion of sociology as a predictive science.

Nevertheless, although Comte is not held in particularly high regard by most sociologists today, it is important to remember his formative role in establishing the case for a science of society.

See chapter 1, 'What is Sociology?', for a wider discussion of Comte's ideas.

Comte's ideas were extremely influential and his theory of the development of the sciences was an inspiration to other thinkers working with theories of evolutionary social development. Comte saw each science as passing through three stages: the theological (or religious), the metaphysical (or philosophical) and finally the positive (or scientific), with each stage representing a form of human mental development. He argued that the history of the sciences demonstrated this pattern of movement, with social life being the last area to move into the positive stage and sociology the final discipline.

English philosopher and sociologist Herbert Spencer (1820–1903) drew on Comte's ideas and was among the first to argue that, just as the world of nature was subject to biological evolution, so societies were subject to social evolution. This took the form of *structural differentiation* – through which simple societies develop over time into more and more complex forms with an increasingly diverse array of separate social institutions; and *functional adaptation* – the way that societies accommodate themselves to their environment. Spencer argued that it was through structural differentiation that societies became functionally better adapted, and the industrial societies of the nineteenth century were essentially demonstrating a form of social evolution, emerging out of the more static and hierarchical societies that preceded them. Spencer also thought that the principle of 'survival of the fittest' applied in social as well as biological evolution, and he was not in favour of state intervention to support the vulnerable or disadvantaged (Taylor 1992).

Although Spencer's theory of social evolution was widely known and his books were well received in his lifetime, like many other evolutionary theories in sociology, in the twentieth century his work fell into decline within the discipline and few sociology courses now make more than passing reference to him. His fate stands in stark contrast to another of the grand theorists of the nineteenth century, Karl Marx, whose influence, not only on sociology, but also on world history itself, it is hard to overestimate.

Karl Marx: the capitalist revolution

In chapter 1, Marx's basic ideas on class conflict and social change were introduced and at this point you may want to refresh your knowledge of these. Marx and his collaborator, Friedrich Engels, never considered themselves professional sociologists. They did seek a scientific understanding of society, however, and, from this, an explanation of long-term social change. Marx viewed the emergence of his social scientific work as marking a break with philosophy and philosophical forms of thought. He argued that 'the philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways, the point however is to change it'. His interest in and commitment to the European industrial working class was closely linked to his studies of capitalism and its workings.

Marx's theoretical approach: historical materialism

Marx's work is important for sociology in a number of ways and references to it will occur regularly throughout this book, but we will concentrate on just one aspect in this chapter: his analysis of capitalism, which is part of his broader theory of class conflicts as being the driving force of history. This 'grand theory' has formed the basis of many later research studies and theoretical developments in sociology and the social sciences. Recognizably 'Marxist' ideas also formed the basis of many political movements and governments in the twentieth century, including the communist regimes of the former Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, Cuba, Vietnam and China.

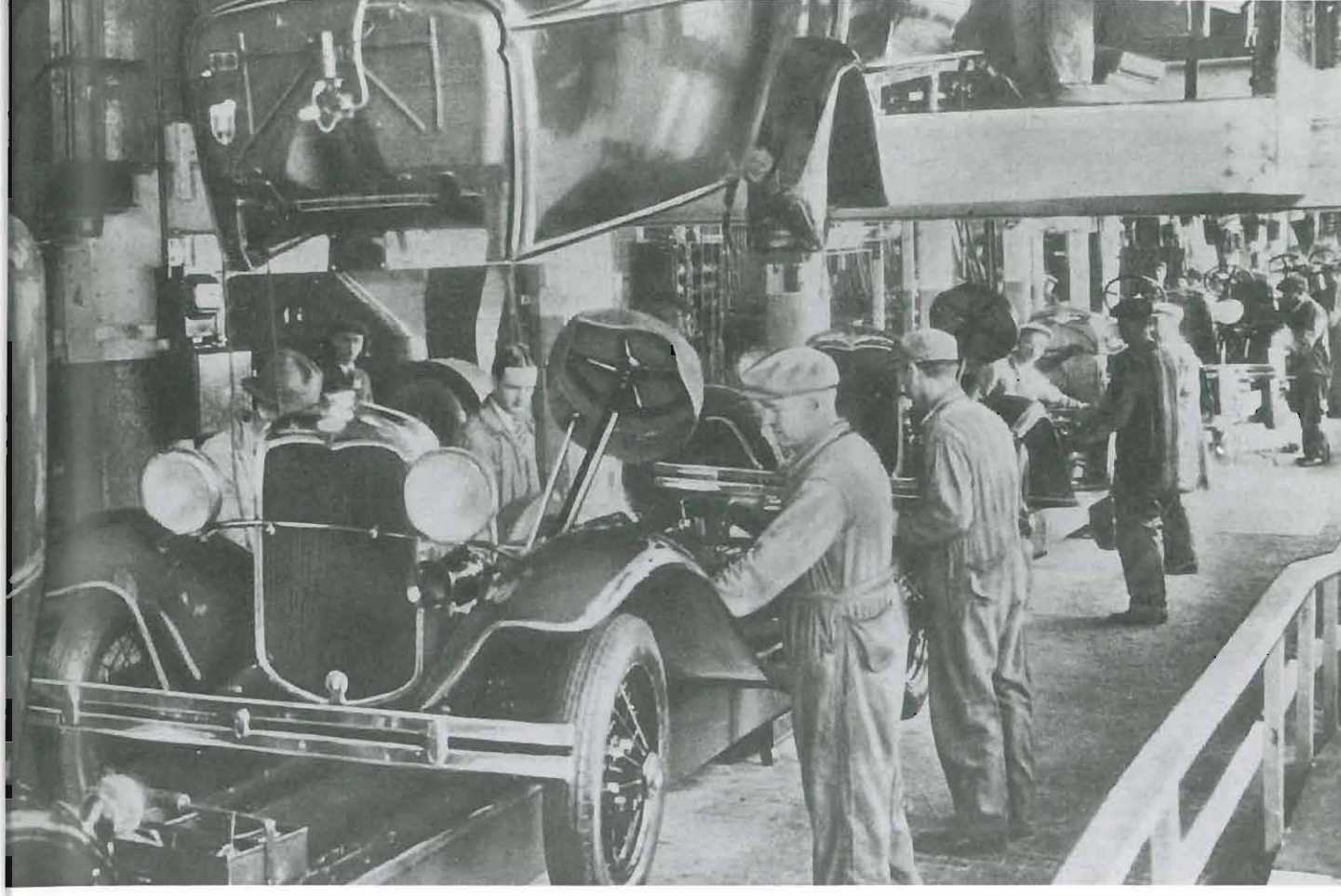
Marx's theoretical perspective is sometimes referred to as historical materialism; more accurately perhaps, it is a materialist conception of history. This means that Marx is opposed to idealism, a philosophical doctrine which says that the historical development of societies is driven by abstract ideas or ideals, like freedom and democracy. Instead, Marx argues that the dominant ideas and ideals of an age are reflections of the dominant way of life, specifically of a society's mode of production. For example, in an age when absolute monarchs reigned, it is not surprising that the dominant ideas suggested that kings and queens had a 'divine right [from God] to rule'; in our own age of free-market capitalism, it is again unsurprising that the dominant ideas are those of sovereign individuals who 'make free choices'. As Marx argues, the dominant ideas of an age are those of the ruling groups. Marx's 'historical materialism' is, therefore, primarily concerned with how people work collectively to produce a life together. How do they produce food, shelter and other material goods and what kind of division of labour exists which enables them to do so?

THINKING CRITICALLY

What is your own assumption about social change? Can ideas change history? Marx suggests not, but can you think of any examples where theories and ideas *have* had the effect of changing society? How might Marxists respond? How would an historical materialist explanation differ from the idealist one?

Successive modes of production: a successful grand theory?

Marx's historical studies led him to argue that there had been a very long, but structured, historical development of human societies. In the ancient past, small-scale human groups existed with no developed system of property ownership. Instead, all the resources acquired were communally owned and no class divisions were present. Marx called this a form of *primitive communism*. As the production of these groups increased, this mode of production was effectively outgrown and a new mode emerged, this time with some private prop-



Marx argued that as workers were brought together in large numbers, class-consciousness would develop.

erty ownership (including slavery), such as in ancient Greece and Rome. From here, societies developed based on settled agriculture and feudal property relations. The European system of *feudalism* was based on a class division between landowners and landless peasants and tenant farmers, who were forced to work for the landowners in order to survive.

But the feudal mode of production also reached its productive limitations and the system gave way to the *capitalist society* with which we are now familiar. The first capitalists began to invest in workshops and manufacturing in the sixteenth century; by the time of the French Revolution in 1789, they had grown numerous and powerful enough to become a revolutionary force in history.

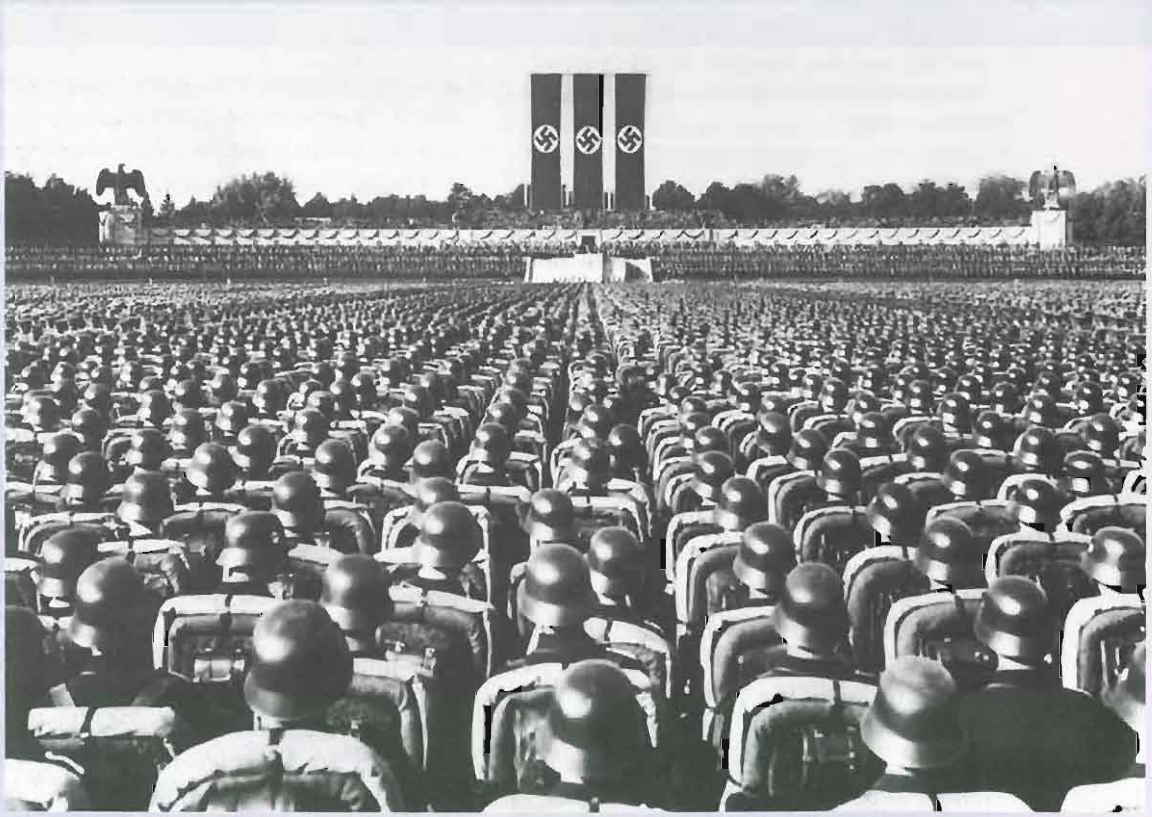
Under capitalism, class antagonisms were greatly simplified, with society 'splitting into two great camps' – the property owners (capitalists or the *bourgeoisie*) and the workers (or proletariat). The capitalist revolution broke the bounds of traditional feudal production systems, demanding a new discipline and long hours from workers so that capitalists could extract a profit from using their labour power. Marx produces a glowing account of capitalism. In its first 100 years it had 'created more massive and more colossal productive forces than have all preceding generations together' (Marx and Engels 2001[1848]). Capitalism has been a genuinely revolutionary mode of production. But such achievements have been based on terrible exploitation of workers and, consequently, inevitable and endemic

Neo-Marxism: the Frankfurt School of critical theory

The apparent 'failure' of the European working classes to overthrow capitalism and install communist regimes, the rise of fascism and Nazism in the 1930s and the 'corruption' of communism within the Soviet Union and its allies all presented later Marxists with a dilemma. Is Marx's theory still adequate for understanding the development of capitalism or not? If it is, then an orthodox form of Marxism remains valuable. But if not, then new forms of Marxist theory (neo-Marxism) will be needed, which may have to break with some of Marx's original ideas.

Marxist thought, in fact, developed in several directions over the twentieth century, particularly amongst 'Western Marxists', who rejected the Soviet version of communism (Kolakowski 2005). One group of Marxists within Western Marxism has been especially influential – namely the Frankfurt School of critical theory. Originally based at the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt under the directorship of Max Horkheimer, many critical theorists were forced out of Germany when the National Socialists expelled around one-third of the University's staff, resulting in their relocation to Europe and America. The Nazis systematically undermined universities and removed or forced out many Jewish intellectuals.

Drawing on the ideas of Marx, Freud and the philosophy of Immanuel Kant, the Frankfurt School produced a series of important studies of capitalism, fascism, mass culture and the emerging consumer society in the USA. For example, Theodore Adorno (1976 [1950]) and his colleagues analysed the emergence and popularity of fascism as, in part, a consequence of the rise of an authoritarian personality-type, susceptible to the attractions of a strong leader. Herbert Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man* (1964)



The rise of facism in Europe forced Western Marxists to rethink Marx's ideas.

distinguished between 'real' human needs and the many 'false' needs produced by the consumer form of industrial capitalism with its seductive advertising, which suppressed people's ability to think critically, instead producing a one-dimensional and uncritical form of thinking.

In studies such as these, we can see the Frankfurt thinkers attempting to come to terms with a very different form of capitalism from that which Marx had investigated. At the same time, the optimistic Marxist vision of a working-class revolution began to fade, as the obstacles to revolution seemed to mount up in the consumer-centred capitalist societies.

The latest critical theorist to exert an influence in sociology is the German social philosopher Jürgen Habermas. Amongst other things, Habermas devised a theory of 'communicative action' based on the deceptively simple notion that when people make statements to each other (he calls these 'speech acts'), they expect to be understood. But much of the time, he argues, asymmetrical power relations in society work systematically to distort such communication, giving rise to fundamental misunderstandings and a lack of genuine debate and communication. The solution is not to abandon modern ways of rational thinking, as some postmodern thinkers would have it, but to deepen our modernity by defending and extending democracy and eliminating the huge inequalities of power and status that prevent proper human communication. Habermas continues to this day to work in the tradition of neo-Marxist critical theory.

Since the collapse of the communist bloc countries of Eastern Europe following the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, and the ending of the Soviet Union's communist regime in 1991, Marx's ideas, and Marxist theories generally, have lost ground in sociology. Some have even talked of a crisis in Marxist thought as a result of the demise of actually existing socialism and communism (Gamble 1999). However, a broadly Marxist analysis of capitalist economies continues to play a part in debates about the direction of contemporary social change.

alienation amongst the industrial workforce.

Just like feudalism, Marx expected capitalism itself to give way to another mode of production, communism, brought about by disaffected workers who develop class-consciousness (an awareness of their exploited position) in which private property is abolished and communal social relations are established. Unlike primitive communism though, modern communism would have all the benefits of the highly productive capitalist system at its disposal. This would be an advanced, humane and sophisticated form of communism, which was able to deliver on the communist principle 'from each, according to his [*sic*] ability, to each, according to his need' (Marx 1978[1875]).

Evaluation

Marx's theory of capitalism has been important for sociology. It challenged the early assumption that the problems brought about by industrialization could be resolved within the system itself. For Marx, a theory of industrialism per se makes no sense. Industrial development required industrialists, and these were capitalist entrepreneurs. To understand the industrial system as debated and discussed by Comte and Spencer also means being able to grasp the new structural social relationships: capitalistic social relationships, favouring a few and disadvantaging the majority. Marx's

THINKING CRITICALLY

What is your own answer to why the communist revolution, forecast by Marx, has not materialized? List all the factors that may have prevented the working class from revolting against capitalism. How serious is the absence of Marxist-style revolution for Marxist theory? Can we now say that the theory has been definitively falsified?

perspective also provides a useful reminder that factories, workshops and offices, along with computers, robots and the Internet, do not simply materialize from thin air. They are the products of social relations, which can be riven with conflict rather than agreement.

Marx also shows that grand theorizing can be helpful. The concept of a mode of production is a useful one, insofar as it allows us to place the welter of historical evidence into a common framework, which is then easier to understand. Many social scientists have worked with this framework, expanding, refining or criticizing it since Marx's death. Many continue to do so even today. Though Marx's theory may be flawed, most sociologists would agree that discovering those flaws has been immensely fruitful for sociology as a whole.

However, Marx's work also illustrates the main problem with grand theories – namely the difficulty of subjecting them to empirical testing. How could this thesis be tested against the available evidence? What would we have to find in order conclusively to prove it to be wrong or to falsify it? Does the fact that a communist revolution has not – so far – happened in the highly industrialized countries show that the theory's central prediction was misguided? If so, does that also mean that other aspects of it are similarly wrong-headed? What about the historical materialist approach in general – is it, too, badly flawed? How long should we wait for the revolution to occur, before discarding the theory? Later Marxists have sought to explain exactly why a global communist revolution has not occurred and in doing so have been forced to modify Marx's ideas. 'Classic Studies 3.1' looks at one especially influential group, whose theories have influenced the development of conflict sociology.

Establishing sociology

Comte, Spencer, Marx and other early theorists laid some of the foundations for sociology's development. But in the period they lived through, there was no formal discipline of sociology, nor did the subject have any institutional presence within universities. If sociology was to become part of Comte's 'hierarchy of the sciences', then it needed to carve out a place alongside the natural sciences in the academy, where a sociological training could be offered to students. In short, sociology needed to become respectable, and Emile Durkheim's work in France went a long way towards achieving this aim. However, it took much longer for sociology to become a firmly established subject within universities.

Emile Durkheim: the social level of reality

Durkheim is a pivotal figure in the development of academic sociology. Following a conventional philosophical training, he moved decisively away from philosophy – which he saw as too far removed from the big issues of the day – and towards social science, which he perceived to be closer to making clear what were the main moral questions facing French society. Durkheim's first academic position was at the University of Bordeaux, where he taught sociology and education, or 'pedagogy'. While he was in Bordeaux, he published widely and was the first French scholar to be promoted to Professor of Social Science. In 1902 Durkheim's reputation took him to the prestigious Sorbonne, The University of Paris, and in 1906 he became Professor of the Science of Education. Seven years later, Durkheim became the first ever Professor of the Science of Education and Sociology (Coser 1977). Sociology finally had a foothold within the academic establishment.

The second aspect of Durkheim's influence on modern sociology was in relation to the nature of the discipline itself. Durkheim saw that the study of specifically *social* phenomena was needed whenever research into people's actions went beyond

their individual interactions. Social institutions and social forms – such as social movements or the family – outlive the particular individuals who inhabit them and they therefore must have a reality of their own. This reality cannot adequately be understood by an individualistic psychology or abstract philosophical speculation, but demands a genuinely sociological explanation. In Durkheim's terms, what we call 'the social' is a level of reality *in its own right* that cannot be reduced to mere action, nor is it a simple aggregate of individual consciousnesses.

This explains why Durkheim focused on group phenomena and social facts such as comparative suicide rates (see chapter 1), social solidarity and religion. In his view, the psychology of individuals was not the proper subject for sociologists to study. Just one example of this perspective can be seen in *The Division of Labour in Society* (1893), where Durkheim outlined his now famous distinction between the *mechanical* forms of solidarity found in less complex societies and the *organic* solidarity that characterizes large-scale, modern, industrial societies. Mechanical solidarity exists when individualism is minimized and the individual is subsumed within the collectivity. By contrast, *organic solidarity* is generated by the extensive division of labour within industrial societies, which tends to produce differences rather than similarities.

Durkheim therefore rejected the idea – common at the time and since – that modern industrialism inevitably destroys social solidarity and threatens the social fabric of society. In fact, said Durkheim, *stronger* bonds of mutual interdependence are created under organic forms of solidarity, which hold out the potential for a better balance between individual differences and collective purpose. Here we can see how Durkheim's scientific sociological analysis is closely tied to the moral and social problems of the day – how can industrial societies hold together in an age of increasing individualism?

Evaluation

As we saw in chapter 1, Durkheim's approach to sociology is known as functionalism; the study of society and the way its institutions connect together and change. And though functionalism has been very influential in sociology in the past, today it is in retreat. There are several reasons why.

First, many critics have argued that functionalism is good at explaining consensus – why societies hold together and share a common morality – but it is much less able to explain conflict and radical social change. Others argue that Durkheimian functionalism seems to prioritize societies' constraints over people and does not allow enough room for the creative actions of individuals. Finally, functional analysis tends to impute purposes and needs to society itself. For example, we might say that the function of the education system is to train young people for the *needs* of a modern society. This functionalist argument seems to suggest that societies can have 'needs' in the same way the people do. But is this really an adequate form of explanation? Modern economies may well require certain skills from people, but is the present education system the only or even the best way to provide for them? What we really want to know is how, exactly, the modern education system came into being. How did it develop over time into its present form, and could things have been different? Functionalism does not prioritize such questions.

THINKING CRITICALLY

Reflecting on Durkheim's ideas, what did he mean by 'social facts' and in what ways are they 'thing-like'? Durkheim rejected the idea that sociologists should study individual psychology. Do you agree with him or are there good reasons why sociologists should be interested in the psyche of the human individual? What reasons can you suggest?

Twentieth-century structural functionalism

In the 1940s, '50's and '60s, a version of functionalist theory, structural functionalism, became the central paradigm of sociology. Although the perspective was never totally dominant, it is hard for students today, who may be used to the idea that sociology as a discipline is *inevitably* pluralistic, argumentative and theoretically diverse, to appreciate just how different *doing* sociology was at that time. Sociology and structural functionalism were often seen as one and the same thing (Davis 1949). Two American sociologists particularly stand out during this period: Robert Merton and his mentor Talcott Parsons.

Parsons combined the ideas of Durkheim, Weber and Vilfredo Pareto into his own brand of structural functionalism, which began from the so-called, 'problem of social order' (Lee and Newby 1983). This problem asks how society can hold together when all the individuals within it are self-interested and pursue their own wants and needs, often at the expense of others. Philosophers like Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) answered this by saying that the emergence of the modern state, with all of its policing and military powers, was the crucial factor. The state protected all individuals from one another and from external enemies but, in return, citizens were required to accept the state's legitimate right to exercise its powers. An informal contract existed between state and each individual.

Parsons rejected this solution. He saw that people's conformity to social rules was not simply produced through the *negative* fear of punishment; instead, people conformed in *positive* ways, teaching others society's moral rules and norms of behaviour. Such positive commitment to an orderly society showed, says Parsons, that social rules are not merely an external force acting on individuals, but have become internalized via the continual process of socialization. Society does not simply exist 'out there' but exists 'in here' as well.

Having established the primacy of a sociological understanding of social order,

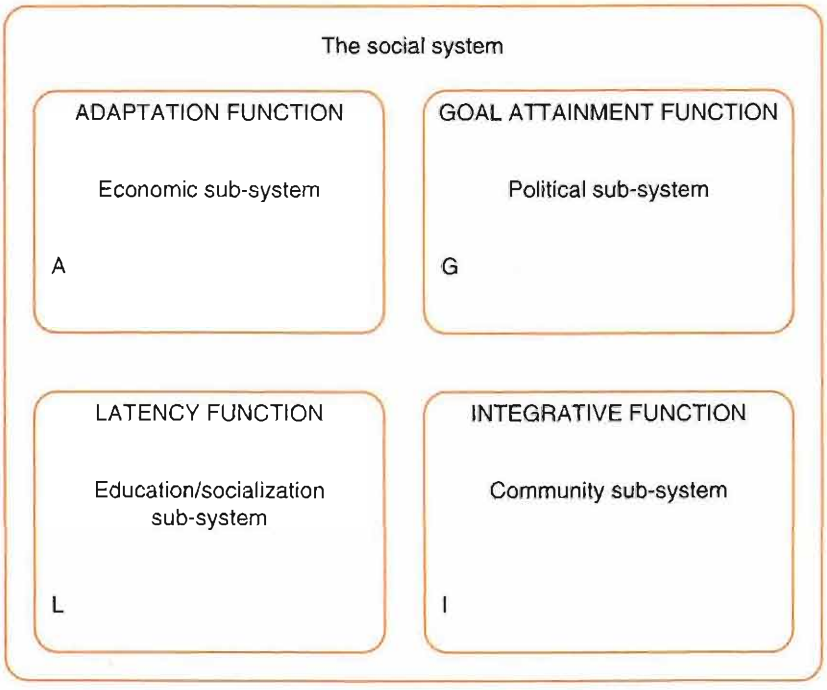


Figure 3.2 Parsons's AGIL scheme

What is the main social function of ceremonies and rituals such as rain dances? Can you think of any ceremonies which perform similar functions in modern societies?

Parsons turned his attention to the functioning of the social system itself. To do this, he devised a model based on identifying the needs of the system, known as the AGIL paradigm (Parsons and Smelser 1956). Parsons argued that if a social system is to continue, then there are four basic functions it must perform. First, it must be capable of adapting to its environment and gather enough resources to do so. Second, it must set out and put in place goals to be attained and the mechanisms for their achievement. Third, the system must be integrated and the various sub-systems must be coordinated effectively. Finally, the social system must have ways of preserving and transmitting its values and culture to new generations.

In less abstract terms, Parsons saw the economic sub-system as performing an adaptive function, the political sub-system as setting society's goals and means of attaining them, the community sub-system ('societal community') as doing integrative work and the educational sub-system (along with other socializing agencies) as transmitting culture and values – the latency function (see figure 3.2). Clearly, Parsons's structural functionalism was a form of systems theory, which tended to give priority to the overall system and its 'needs'. But it was always vulnerable to the charge that it over-emphasized consensus and agreement, while paying less attention to fundamental conflicts of interest and small-scale interactional processes, through which social order and disorder are produced and reproduced. The task of solving these problems passed to Robert Merton, who pursued a version of Parsons's

functionalism, but did so in a much more critical way.

As we have already noted above, Merton saw that while many sociological studies focused on either the macro-level of society as a whole or the micro-level of social interactions, this polarization had failed to 'fill in the gaps' between macro- and micro-levels. To rectify this, Merton argued for middle-range theories in particular areas or on specific subjects. An excellent example from his own work is his study of working-class criminality and deviance. He set out to explain why there was so much acquisitive crime amongst the working classes. His explanation was that in an American society which promotes the cultural goal of material success, but offers very few legitimate opportunities for lower social-class groups, working-class criminality represented an adaptation to the social circumstances that many young people found themselves in. But the fact that they aimed to achieve the kind of material success the system promoted also meant that these people were not evil or incapable of being reformed. Rather, it was the structure of social life that was in need of reform.

This thesis shows that Merton did not simply follow Parsons's version of functionalism, but actually tried to develop it into new directions. In doing so, his perspective moved closer to conflict theory. He distinguished between **manifest** and **latent functions**: the former are observable consequences of action, the latter are those aspects that remain unspoken. In studying latent functions, Merton argued, we can learn much more about the way that societies work. For example, we might observe a rain dance amongst tribal people, the manifest function of which appears to be to bring about rain. But if we look deeper, we may find that the rain dance often fails and yet continues to be practised, because its latent function is to build and sustain group solidarity.

Similarly, where Parsons had focused on the functional aspects of society's institutions and legitimate forms of behaviour, Merton argued that these also contained certain **dysfunctional** elements. The existence of dysfunctions allowed Merton to discuss the potential for conflicts within society in ways that Parsons did not.

» See chapter 21, 'Crime and Deviance', for a more detailed discussion and critique of Merton's ideas.

What became of structural functionalism? Following the death of Parsons in 1979, Jeffrey Alexander (1985) sought to revisit and revive the approach, aiming to tackle its theoretical flaws to make it more useful to modern sociology. But by 1997, even Alexander was forced to concede that the internal contradictions of neofunctionalism meant that it was finished. Instead, he argued for a new reconstruction of sociological theory going beyond functionalism (Alexander 1997). Parsonian structural functionalism is, to all intents and purposes, for the time being at least, defunct within mainstream sociology.

THINKING CRITICALLY

What conclusions do you draw from the rise and fall of structural functionalism? What are the main problems with Parsons's systems theory, and are such theories appropriate for studying human societies?

Nonetheless, some reference to the functions of social institutions continues to inform sociological research, and the concept of 'function' in social analysis does have a place. More importantly, Durkheim's notion that sociology should take society's central problems and apply a sociological perspective to our understanding of them is a valuable one. It is typical of all of the early sociological theorists and of many contemporary sociologists too. For example, Parsons's ideas became so influential partly

because they spoke to the developed societies about their post-1945 situation, which was one of gradually increasing affluence and political consensus. But they lost ground in the late 1960s and '70s as internal and external social conflicts began to mount, with new peace and anti-nuclear movements, protests against the American war in Vietnam and radical student movements emerging across Europe and North America. At that point, conflict theories came to be perceived as more capable of understanding and accounting for the situation.

As we will see later in the chapter, one important reason why contemporary theorists are seeking out new theoretical directions is precisely because the central problems of our societies have changed. While the early sociologists tried to understand industrialism, urbanization and capitalism, a new series of issues faces sociologists today. Globalization, multiculturalism and environmental degradation are amongst the new central problems of societies today and, arguably, these demand different theories and perspectives that take us away from the classical traditions.

Max Weber: capitalism and religion

In a major work, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1992 [1904–5]), Weber set out to tackle a fundamental problem: why did capitalism develop in the West and nowhere else? For some 13 centuries after the fall of ancient Rome, other civilizations were much more prominent than the West in world history. Europe, in fact, was a rather insignificant area of the globe, while China, India and the Ottoman Empire in the Near East were all major powers. The Chinese, in particular, were a long way ahead of the West in terms of their level of technological and economic development. What happened to bring about a surge in economic progress in Europe from the seventeenth century onwards?

To answer this question, Weber reasoned, we must show what it is that separates modern industry from earlier types of economic activity. We find the desire to accumulate wealth in many different civilizations, and this is not difficult to explain: people have valued wealth for the comforts, security, power and enjoyment it can bring. They wish to be free of want, and, having accumulated wealth, they use it to make themselves comfortable.

Religion in the heart of capitalism?

If we look at the economic development of the West, Weber argued, we find something quite different: an attitude towards the accumulation of wealth found nowhere else in history. This attitude is what Weber called the 'spirit of capitalism' – a set of beliefs and values held by the first capitalist merchants and industrialists. These people had a strong drive to accumulate personal wealth. Yet, quite unlike the wealthy elsewhere, they did not seek to use their accumulated riches to follow a luxurious lifestyle. Their way of life was in fact self-denying and frugal; they lived soberly and quietly, shunning the ordinary manifestations of affluence. This very unusual combination of characteristics, Weber tried to show, was vital to early Western economic development. For unlike the wealthy in previous ages and in other cultures, these groups did not dissipate their wealth: instead, they reinvested it to promote the further expansion of the enterprises they headed.

The core of Weber's theory is that the attitudes involved in the spirit of capitalism derived from religion. Christianity in general played a part in fostering such an outlook, but the essential motivating force was provided by the impact of Protestantism and one variety of Protestantism in particular: Puritanism. The early capitalists were mostly Puritans, and many subscribed to Calvinist views. Weber argued that certain Calvinistic doctrines were the direct source of the spirit of capitalism. One was the idea that human beings are God's instruments

on earth, required by the Almighty to work in a vocation – an occupation for the greater glory of God.

A second important aspect of Calvinism was the notion of predestination, according to which only certain predestined individuals are to be among the 'elect' – to enter heaven in the afterlife. In Calvin's original doctrine, nothing a person does on this earth can alter whether he or she happens to be one of the elect; this is pre-determined by God. However, this belief caused such anxiety among his followers that it was modified to allow believers to recognize certain signs of election.

Success in working in a vocation, indicated by material prosperity, became the main sign that a person was truly one of the elect. A tremendous impetus towards economic success was created among groups influenced by these ideas. Yet this was accompanied by the believer's need to live a sober and frugal life. The Puritans believed luxury to be an evil, so the drive to accumulate wealth became joined to a severe and unadorned lifestyle.

The early entrepreneurs had little awareness that they were helping to produce momentous changes in society; they were impelled above all by religious motives. The ascetic – that is, self-denying – lifestyle of the Puritans has subsequently become an intrinsic part of modern civilization. As Weber wrote:

> The Puritan wanted to work in a calling; we are forced to do so. For when asceticism was carried out of the monastic cells into everyday life, and began to dominate worldly morality, it did its part in building the tremendous cosmos of the modern economic order. . . . Since asceticism undertook to remodel the world and to work out its ideals in the world, material goods have gained an increasingly and finally an inexorable power over the lives of men as at no previous period in history. . . . The idea of duty in one's calling prowls about in our lives like the ghost of dead religious beliefs. (1992: 182)

Evaluation

Weber's theory has been criticized from many angles. Some have argued, for example, that the outlook he called 'the spirit of capitalism' can be discerned in the early Italian merchant cities in the twelfth century, long before Calvinism was ever heard of. Others have claimed that the key notion of 'working in a vocation', which Weber associated with Protestantism, already existed in Catholic beliefs. Yet the essentials of Weber's account are still accepted by many and the thesis he advanced remains as bold and illuminating as it did when first formulated. If Weber's thesis is valid, then modern economic and social development has been decisively influenced by something that seems at first sight utterly distant from it – a set of religious ideals. This is something that Marx did not see within capitalist economic relations.

Weber's theory meets several important criteria in theoretical thinking in sociology. First, it is counterintuitive – it suggests an interpretation that breaks with what common sense would suggest. The theory thus develops a fresh perspective on the issues it covers. Most authors before Weber gave little thought to the possibility that religious ideas could have played a fundamental role in the origins of capitalism. Second, the theory makes sense of something that is otherwise puzzling: why individuals would want to live frugally while making great efforts to accumulate wealth. Third, the theory is capable of illuminating circumstances beyond those it was originally developed to understand. Weber emphasized that he was trying to understand only the early origins of modern capitalism. Nonetheless, it seems reasonable to suppose that parallel values to those instilled by Puritanism might be involved in other situations of successful capitalist development. Finally, a good theory is not just one that happens to be valid. It is also one that is fruitful in terms of how far it generates new ideas and stimulates further research.

Weber's theory, like Marx's analysis of capitalism, has certainly been highly successful in these respects, providing the springboard for a vast amount of subsequent research and theoretical analysis. Weber's approach to sociology also forms the basis for the tradition known as interactionism.

THINKING CRITICALLY

Weber's theory of the origins of capitalism goes way beyond Merton's concept of a 'middle range theory'. But could the available evidence ever effectively test it? List all the elements of capitalism described by Weber. What, if anything, does this theory add to our understanding of the nature, character and likely future development of modern capitalism?

Symbolic interactionism, phenomenology and ethnomethodology

Along with Max Weber, the American social behaviourist George Herbert Mead is credited as laying the foundations for a general approach to sociology called *interactionism*. This is a general label covering all those approaches that investigate the social interactions amongst individuals, rather than starting from society or its constituent social structures. Interactionists often reject the very idea that social structures exist objectively or they just do not focus on them at all. Herbert Blumer (who coined the term 'symbolic interactionism') argued that all talk of social structures or social systems is unjustified, as only individuals and their interactions can be said really to exist at all.

Symbolic interactionism focuses on micro-level interaction and the way in which meanings are constructed and transmitted across the members of society. G. H. Mead (1934) argued that the individual's self is a social self, produced in the process of interaction rather than being biologically given. Mead's theory traces the emergence and development of the self through a series of stages in childhood and his ideas on the social self underpins much interactionist research (see chapter 1 for a detailed discussion of Mead's ideas). The home of this perspective for some 30 years until 1950 was the University of Chicago's Department of Sociology (known as The Chicago School), though by no means all Chicago sociologists were symbolic interactionists. The department was also home to the 'ecological' approach of Louis Wirth, Robert E. Park and Ernest Burgess (see chapter 6, 'Cities and Urban Life', for a discussion of this approach). Nonetheless, the institutional base for key interactionists, including Mead, was an important factor in extending this approach.

Arguably, the most successful symbolic interactionist is Erving Goffman. Goffman's studies of mental 'asylums', processes of stigmatization and the ways in which people present their selves in social encounters have all become sociological classics, as much for their methodological and observational style as for their findings. In developing his 'dramaturgical analysis', which works with the metaphor of the theatre, Goffman's ideas have had a very wide influence on students across the world.

» See chapter 7, 'Social Interaction and Everyday Life', for a wider discussion of Goffman's perspective.

Phenomenology is a second interactionist perspective, which deals with the ways in which social life is actually experienced. Literally, it is the systematic study of phenomena; things as they appear in our experience. Its roots lie in the philosophical work of the German philosopher Edmund Husserl, though in sociological research, the Austrian-born philosopher and sociologist Alfred Schutz has been the more important figure. Schutz concentrated attention on people's experiences of everyday life and the ways in which they come to be

Children who struggle at school may be labelled as failures, which in turn can be a powerful force in shaping their concept of self.

taken-for-granted. Schutz calls this adopting a 'natural attitude'. For Schutz, the task of phenomenological sociology is to understand better how this happens and what its consequences are.

Schutz was particularly interested in *typifications* – the way that experienced phenomena are classified according to previous experience. Typification is commonplace. When we meet someone we will perhaps think, 'Oh she's *that* kind of person' or 'He seems an honest type'. Typification helps to order our world and make it more predictable. But if it becomes stereotypification, it can also be dangerous – the illegitimate generalization about people based simply on their membership of a certain social group. Examples include racism, sexism and negative attitudes towards all disabled people.

People also tend to make the assumption that everyone thinks in much the same way as they do, and they can therefore safely forget about possible problems of interpersonal communication. Once these kinds of assumption become internalized, they fade from view and become sedimented below the surface of conscious existence to form the basis of the natural attitude. In this way, people come to experience important aspects of the social world, such as language and culture, as objective and external to themselves. Phenomenology has not had the same impact on sociology as some of the other perspectives, though it did give rise to ethnomethodology.

Ethnomethodology – the systematic study of the methods used by 'natives' (members of a particular society) to construct their social worlds – is the third interactionist perspective. It traces its roots back to phenomenological philosophy, but only rose to prominence in the 1960s with the research studies of Harold Garfinkel and Aaron Cicourel. Ethnomethodologists were highly critical of mainstream sociology,

particularly Parsonian structural functionalism, which Garfinkel saw as treating people as if they were 'cultural dopes' – passive recipients of society's socializing agents, rather than creative actors in their own right. Garfinkel took issue with Durkheim's famous statement that sociologists should 'treat social facts as things'. For Garfinkel, this should only be the starting point for ethnomethodological enquiry, not assumed in advance of it. This means that ethnomethodology seeks instead to uncover just how Durkheim's social facts are created by society's members.

» Ethnomethodology is discussed more widely in chapter 7, 'Social Interaction and Everyday Life'.

In contrast to many symbolic interactionist, phenomenological and ethnomethodological studies, the work of Max Weber appears to sit much more closely to the mainstream of sociology. Although he certainly was interested in social interactions and the micro level of social life, Weber's work on world religions, economic sociology and legal systems was also historically informed, strongly comparative in orientation and concerned with the overall development and direction of the modern world. This is in contrast to the interactionist tradition as it developed after Weber's death, which has become rather more exclusively focused on the micro level during the twentieth century.

Theoretical dilemmas

Controversies sparked by the work of the classical theorists, as well as by the later theoretical ideas and perspectives discussed above, continue today. But since the time of the classical sociologists, it has become commonplace to argue that their work, and that of sociology in general, has set up a series of theoretical dilemmas. There are several basic theoretical dilemmas – matters of continuing or recurring controversy or dispute – which these clashes of viewpoint bring to our attention, some of which concern very general matters to do with how we should interpret human activities and social institutions. In short, these are questions about how we *can* or *should* 'do' sociology. We shall outline four such dilemmas here.

1 One dilemma concerns human action and social structure. The issue is the following: how far are we creative human actors, actively controlling the conditions of our own lives? Or is most of what we do the result of general social forces outside our control? This issue has always divided, and continues to divide, sociologists. Weber and the symbolic interactionists, for example, stress the active, creative components of human behaviour. Other approaches, such as that of Durkheim and functionalism, emphasize the constraining nature of social influences on our free actions.
2 A second theoretical controversy concerns consensus and conflict in society. Some standpoints in sociology, as we have seen – including functionalism – emphasize the inherent order and harmony of human societies. Those taking this view regard continuity and consensus as the most evident characteristics of societies, however much they may change over time. Other sociologists, such as Marxists, accentuate the pervasiveness of social conflict. They see societies as plagued with divisions, tensions and struggles. To them, it is illusory to claim that people tend to live amicably with one another most of the time; even when there are no open confrontations, they say, there remain deep divisions of interest, which at some point are liable to break out into active conflicts.
3 There is a third basic theoretical dilemma which hardly figures at all in the orthodox traditions of sociology, but

which cannot be ignored. This is the problem of how we are to incorporate a satisfactory understanding of gender within sociological analysis. The founding figures of sociology were all men, as we saw in chapter 1, and they paid virtually no attention to the fact that human beings are gendered. Even those women who were involved in sociology were, until recently, largely neglected. In the works of the early male sociologists, human individuals appear as if they were 'neuter' – they are abstract 'actors', rather than differentiated women and men. Since we have very little to build on in relating issues of gender to the more established forms of theoretical thinking in sociology, this is perhaps, at the current time, the most acutely difficult problem to grapple with.

One of the main theoretical dilemmas associated with gender is the following: should we build 'gender' as a general category into our sociological thinking? Or, alternatively, do we need to analyse gender issues by breaking them down into more specific influences affecting the behaviour of women and men in different contexts? We can put this in another way: are there characteristics that separate men and women, in terms of their identities and social behaviour, in all cultures? Or are gender differences always to be explained mainly in terms of other differences which divide societies (such as class divisions)?

4 A fourth problem concerns not so much the general characteristics of human behaviour or of societies as a whole, but rather features of modern social development. It is to do with the determining influences affecting the origins and nature of modern societies, and derives from the differences between non-Marxist and Marxist approaches. The dilemma centres on the following issue: how far has the modern world been shaped by the economic factors which Marx singled out – in particular, the mechanisms of capitalist economic enterprise? How far, on the other hand, have other influences – such as social, political or cultural factors – shaped social development in the modern era? These controversies are so fundamental for sociological theory that we shall consider the different ideas developed about them in some detail.

Social structure and human action

A major theme pursued by Durkheim, and many other sociologists since, is that the societies of which we are members exert social constraint over our actions. Durkheim argued that society has primacy over the individual person. Society is far more than the sum of individual acts; it has a 'firmness' or 'solidity' comparable to structures in the material environment. Think of a person standing in a room with several doors. The structure of the room constrains the range of her or his possible activities. The siting of the walls and the doors, for example, defines the routes of exit and entry. Social structure, according to Durkheim, constrains our activities in a parallel way, setting limits to what we can do as individuals. It is 'external' to us, just as the walls of the room are.

This point of view is expressed by Durkheim in a famous statement:

> When I perform my duties as a brother, a husband or a citizen and carry out the commitments I have entered into, I fulfil obligations which are defined in law and custom and which are external to myself and my actions. . . . Similarly, the believer has discovered from birth, ready fashioned, the beliefs and practices of his religious life; if they existed before he did, it follows that they exist outside him. The systems of signs that I employ to express my thoughts, the monetary system I use to pay my debts, the credit instruments I utilize in my commercial relationships, the practices I follow in my profession, etc. – all function independently of the use I make of them. (1982 [1895])

Although the type of view Durkheim expresses has many adherents, it has also met with sharp criticism. What is 'society', the critics ask, if it is not the composite of many individual actions? If we study a group, we do not see a collective entity, only individuals interacting with one another in various ways. What we call 'society' is only an aggregate of many individuals behaving in regular ways in relation to each other. According to the critics, including most sociologists influenced by symbolic interactionism, as human beings we have reasons for what we do, and we inhabit a social world permeated by cultural meanings. Social phenomena, according to them, are precisely *not* like 'things', but depend on the symbolic meanings with which we invest what we do. We are not the creatures of society, but its creators.

It is unlikely that this controversy will ever be fully resolved, since it has existed since modern thinkers first started systematically to try to explain human behaviour. Moreover, it is a debate which is not just confined to sociology, but preoccupies scholars in all fields of the social sciences. You must decide, in the light of your reading of this book, which position you think more nearly correct.

Yet the differences between the two views can be exaggerated. While both cannot be wholly right, we can fairly easily see connections between them. Durkheim's view is clearly in some respects valid. Social institutions do precede the existence of any given individual; it is also evident that they exert constraint over us. Thus, for example, I did not invent the monetary system which exists in Britain. Nor do I have a choice about whether I want to use it or not if I wish to have the goods and services that money can buy. The system of money, like all other established institutions, exists independently of every individual member of society, and it constrains the activities of each individual.

On the other hand, it is obviously mistaken to suppose that society is 'external' to us in the same way that the physical world is. For the physical world would go on existing whether or not any human beings were alive, whereas it would plainly be nonsensical to say this of society. While society is external to each individual taken singly, by definition it cannot be external to all individuals taken together.

Moreover, although what Durkheim calls 'social facts' might constrain what we do, they do not *determine* what we do. I could choose to live without using money, should I be firmly resolved to do so, even if it were to prove very difficult to eke out an existence from day to day. As human beings, we do make choices, and we do not simply respond passively to events around us. The way forward in bridging the gap between 'structure' and 'action' approaches is to recognize that we actively make and remake social structure during the course of our everyday activities. For example, the fact that I use the monetary system contributes in a minor, yet necessary, way to the very existence of that system. If everyone, or even the majority of people, at some point decided to avoid using money, the monetary system would dissolve.

As mentioned in chapter 1, a useful term for analysing this process of the active making and remaking of social structure is structuration. This is a concept which I (Anthony Giddens) have introduced into sociology in recent years. 'Structure' and 'action' are necessarily related to one another. Societies, communities or groups only have 'structure' insofar as people behave in regular and fairly predictable ways. On the other hand, 'action' is only possible because each of us, as an individual, possesses an enormous amount of socially structured knowledge.

The best way to explain this is through the example of language. To exist at all, language must be socially structured – there are properties of language use which every speaker must observe. What someone says in any given context, for instance, would not make sense unless it followed certain grammatical rules. Yet the structural qualities of

language only exist insofar as individual language users actually follow those rules in practice. Language is constantly in the process of structuration.

Erving Goffman and other writers on social interaction (discussed in chapter 7) are quite right to suggest that all human agents are highly knowledgeable. We are what we are as human beings largely because we follow a complex set of conventions – for example, the rituals that strangers observe when passing by on the street. On the other hand, as we apply that knowledge ability to our actions, we give force and content to the very rules and conventions we draw on. Structuration always presumes what the author calls 'the duality of structure'. This means that all social action presumes the existence of structure. But at the same time, structure presumes action, because 'structure' depends on regularities of human behaviour.

THINKING CRITICALLY

How satisfactory do you think the concept of structuration is in resolving the structure-action problem? Does it mean that the interactionists are wrong – that there are social structures after all? If so, can structuration theory explain their emergence?

Consensus or conflict?

It is also useful to begin with Durkheim when contrasting the consensus and conflict viewpoints. Durkheim sees society as a set of interdependent parts. For most functionalist thinkers, in fact, society is treated as an integrated whole, composed of structures which mesh closely with one another. This is very much in accord with Durkheim's emphasis on the constraining, 'external' character of 'social facts'. However, the analogy here is not with the walls of a building, but with the physiology of the body.

A body consists of various specialized parts (such as the brain, heart, lungs, liver and so forth), each of which contributes to sustaining the continuing life of the organism. These necessarily work in harmony with one another; if they do not, the life of the organism is under threat. So it is, according to Durkheim, with society. For a society to have a continuing existence over time, its specialized institutions (such as the political system, religion, the family and the educational system) must work in harmony with one another. The continuation of a society thus depends on cooperation, which in turn presumes a general consensus, or agreement, among its members over basic values.

Those who focus mainly on conflict have a very different outlook. Their guiding assumptions can easily be outlined using Marx's account of class conflict as an example. According to Marx, societies are divided into classes with unequal resources. Since such marked inequalities exist, there are divisions of interest, which are 'built into' the social system. These conflicts of interest at some point break out into active change. Not all of those influenced by this viewpoint concentrate on classes to the degree to which Marx did; other divisions are regarded as important in promoting conflict – for example, divisions between racial groups or political factions. Society is seen as essentially full of tension regardless of which conflict groups are stronger than others; even the most stable social system represents an uneasy balance of antagonistic groupings.

As with the case of structure and action, it is not likely that this theoretical debate can be completely brought to a close. Yet, once more, the difference between the consensus and conflict standpoints seems wider than it is. The two positions are by no means wholly incompatible. All societies probably involve some kind of general agreement over values, and all certainly involve conflict.

Moreover, as a general rule of sociological analysis we always have to examine the connections between consensus and con-

flict within social systems. The values held by different groups and the goals that their members pursue often reflect a mixture of common and opposed interests. For instance, even in Marx's portrayal of class conflict, different classes share some common interests as well as being pitted against one another. Thus capitalists depend on a labour force to work in their enterprises, just as workers depend on capitalists to provide their wages. Open conflict is not continuous in such circumstances; rather, sometimes what both sides have in common tends to override their differences, while in other situations the reverse is the case.

A useful concept which helps analyse the interrelations of conflict and consensus is that of ideology – values and beliefs which help secure the position of more powerful groups at the expense of less powerful ones. Power, ideology and conflict are always closely connected. Many conflicts are about power, because of the rewards it can bring. Those who hold most power may depend mainly on the influence of ideology to retain their dominance, but are usually also able to use force if necessary. For instance, in feudal times aristocratic rule was supported by the idea that a minority of people were 'born to govern', but aristocratic rulers often resorted to the use of violence against those who dared to oppose their power.

The neglected issue of gender

Issues of gender scarcely feature in the writings of the major figures who established the framework of modern sociology. The few passages in which they did touch on gender questions, however, allow us at least to specify the outlines of a basic theoretical dilemma – even if there is little in their works to help us try to resolve it. We can best describe this dilemma by contrasting a theme which occasionally occurs in Durkheim's writings with one that appears in those of Marx. Durkheim (1952 [1897]) notes at one point, in the course of his discussion of suicide, that man is 'almost entirely the product of society', while woman is 'to a far greater extent the product of nature'. Expanding on these observations, he says of man: 'his tastes, aspirations and humour have in large part a collective origin, while his companion's are more directly influenced by her organism. His needs, therefore, are quite different from hers.' In other words, women and men have different identities, tastes and inclinations because women are less socialized and are 'closer to nature' than men.

No one today would accept a view stated in quite this manner. Female identity is as much shaped by socialization as that of males. Yet, when modified somewhat, Durkheim's claim does represent one possible view of the formation and nature of gender. This is that gender differences rest fundamentally on biologically given distinctions between men and women. Such a view does not necessarily mean believing that gender differences are mostly inborn. Rather, it presumes that women's social position and identity are mainly shaped by their involvement in reproduction and childrearing. If this view is correct, differences of gender are deeply embedded in all societies. The discrepancies in power between women and men reflect the fact that women bear children and are their primary caretakers, whereas men are active in the 'public' spheres of politics, work and war.

Marx's view is substantially at odds with this. For Marx, gender differences in power and status between men and women mainly reflect other divisions, especially, in his eyes, class divisions. According to him, in the earliest forms of human society neither gender nor class divisions were present. The power of men over women only came about as class divisions appeared. Women came to be a form of 'private property' owned by men, through the institution of marriage. Women will be freed from their situation of bondage when class divisions are overcome. Again, few if any would accept this analysis

today, but we can make it more plausible by further generalizing it. Class is not the only factor shaping social divisions which affects the behaviour of men and women. Other factors include ethnicity and cultural background. For instance, it might be argued that women in a minority group (say, black people in the United States) have more in common with men in that minority group than they do with women in the majority (that is, with white women). Or it may be the case that women from a particular culture (like a small hunting and gathering culture) share more common characteristics with the males of that culture than they do with women in an industrial society.

The issues involved in this third dilemma are highly important, and bear directly on the challenge that feminist authors have thrown down to sociology. No one can seriously dispute that a great deal of sociological analysis in the past has either ignored women or has operated with interpretations of female identity and behaviour that are drastically inadequate. In spite of all the new research on women carried out in sociology over the past 20 years, there are still many areas in which the distinctive activities and concerns of women have been insufficiently studied. But 'bringing the study of women into sociology' is not in and of itself the same as coping with problems of gender, because gender concerns the relations between the identities and behaviour of women and men. For the moment, it has to be left as an open question how far gender differences can be illuminated by means of other sociological concepts (class, ethnicity, cultural background and so forth), or how far, on the contrary, other social divisions need to be explained in terms of gender. Certainly some of the major explanatory tasks of sociology in the future will depend on tackling this dilemma effectively.

The direction of social change

The Marxist perspective

As we saw earlier in the chapter, Marx's writings threw down a powerful challenge to sociological analysis, which has not been ignored. From his own time to the present day, many sociological debates have centred on Marx's ideas about the development of modern societies. Marx sees modern societies as capitalistic and the driving impulse behind social change in the modern era is the pressure towards constant economic transformation, which is an integral part of capitalist production. Capitalism is a vastly more dynamic economic system than any preceding one. Capitalists compete with one another to sell their goods to consumers, and, in order to survive in a competitive market, firms have to produce their wares as cheaply and efficiently as possible. This leads to constant technological innovation, because increasing the effectiveness of the technology used in a particular production process is one way in which companies can secure an edge over their rivals.

There are also strong incentives to seek out new markets in which to sell goods, acquire cheap raw materials and make use of cheap labour power. Capitalism, therefore, according to Marx, is a restlessly expanding system, pushing outwards across the world. This is how Marx explains the spread of Western industry globally.

Marx's interpretation of the influence of capitalism has found many supporters, and subsequent authors have considerably refined Marx's own portrayal. On the other hand, numerous critics have set out to rebut his view, offering alternative analyses of the influences shaping the modern world. Virtually everyone accepts that capitalism has played a major part in creating the world in which we live. But other sociologists have argued both that Marx exaggerated the impact of purely economic factors in producing change, and that capitalism is less central to modern social development

Marx and Weber on the shaping of the modern world

Broadly Weberian ideas

1. The main dynamic of modern development is the expansion of capitalistic economic mechanisms.
2. Modern societies are riven with class inequalities, which are basic to their very nature.
3. Major divisions of power, like those affecting the differential position of men and women, derive ultimately from economic inequalities.
4. Modern societies (capitalist societies) are a transitional type – we may expect them to become radically reorganized in the future. Socialism will eventually replace capitalism.
5. The spread of Western influence across the world is mainly a result of the expansionist tendencies of capitalist enterprise.

Broadly Marxist ideas

1. The main dynamic of modern development is the rationalization of production.
2. Class is one type of inequality among many – such as inequalities between men and women – in modern societies.
3. Power in the economic system is separable from other sources. For instance, male–female inequalities cannot be explained in economic terms.
4. Rationalization is bound to progress further in the future, in all spheres of social life. All modern societies are dependent on the same basic modes of social and economic organization.
5. The global impact of the West comes from its command over industrial resources, together with superior military power.

than he claimed. Most of these writers have also been sceptical of Marx's belief that a socialist system would eventually replace capitalism.

Weber's alternative view

One of Marx's earliest and most acute critics was Max Weber, whose writings have sometimes been described as involving a lifelong struggle with 'the ghost of Marx' – that is, with the intellectual legacy that Marx left behind. The alternative position, which Weber worked out, remains important today. According to him, *non-economic* factors have played a key role in modern social development. This argument, in fact, is one of the main points of his book, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Religious values – especially those associated with Puritanism – were of fundamental importance in creating a capitalistic outlook. This outlook did not emerge, as Marx supposed, from economic changes as such.

Weber's understanding of the nature of modern societies and the reasons for the spread of Western ways of life across the world, contrasts substantially with that of Marx. According to Weber, capitalism – a distinct way of organizing economic enterprise – is one among other major factors shaping social development in the modern period. Underlying capitalistic economic mechanisms, and in some ways more fundamental than them, is the impact of science and bureaucracy. Science has shaped modern technology – and will presumably continue to do so in any future socialist society. Bureaucracy is the only way of organizing large numbers of people effectively, and therefore inevitably expands with economic and political growth. Weber refers to the development of science, modern technology and bureaucracy collectively as 'rationalization'. Rationalization means the organization of social and economic life according to principles of efficiency, on the basis of technical knowledge.

Marx or Weber?

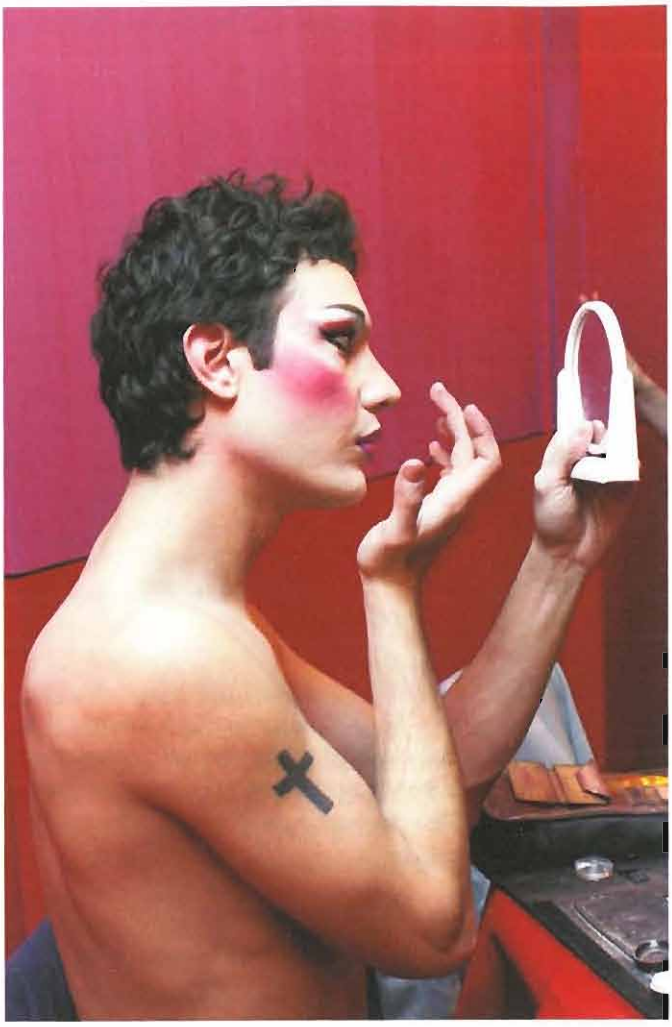
Which type of interpretation of modern societies, that deriving from Marx or that coming from Weber, is correct? Again, scholars are divided on the issue. And it must be

remembered that within each camp there are variations, so not every theorist on each side will agree with the others. The contrasts between Marxist and Weberian standpoints inform many areas of sociology. They influence not only how we analyse the nature of the industrialized societies, but our view of less developed societies also.

In addition, the two perspectives are linked to differing political positions, with authors on the left on the whole adopting views on the first side, liberals and conservatives those on the second side. Yet the factors with which this particular dilemma is concerned are of a more directly empirical nature than those involved in the other dilemmas. Factual studies of the paths of evolution of modern societies and less developed countries help us assess how far patterns of change conform to one side or the other.

The transformation of societies – and sociology

The dilemma of how the modern world was shaped is still important, but more recent theorists have tried to go beyond both Marx and Weber. Yet other sociologists, including postmodernists (some of whom were originally Marxists), now discount Marx altogether. They believe that his attempt to find general patterns of history was inevitably doomed to failure. For such postmodern thinkers, sociologists should simply give up on the sorts of theory that both Marx and Weber sought to develop – overall interpretations of social change or what we have here called 'grand theory'. Many sociologists now view contemporary societies as developing in ways that the classical theorists could not have foreseen. This is why they have come to the conclusion that it may be time to develop alternative ways of thinking about and theorizing the globalizing social world in which, increasingly, we all live.



Judith Butler's ideas on the performance of gender have been influential in undermining essentialist notions of gender identity.

Gender equality and feminist theory

The rise of the women's movement led to some radical changes within sociology and other disciplines. Feminism has led to a broad-based assault on the perceived male bias both in sociological theory and methodology, and in the very subject matter of sociology. Look back at figure 3.1 (page 71) and count the number of women in the chart to see just how male-dominated soci-

ology has been. Not only has this male domination of sociology been challenged, but there have also been calls for a comprehensive reconstruction of the discipline itself – both the questions that form its core and the presentation of discussions surrounding them.

Feminist perspectives in sociology emphasize the centrality of gender in analysing the social world. While the diversity of feminist viewpoints makes it difficult to speak in generalities, we can safely say that most feminists agree that knowledge is integrally related to questions of sex and gender. Because men and women have different experiences and view the world from different perspectives, they do not construct their understandings of the world in identical ways. Feminists often charge that traditional sociological theory has denied or ignored the 'gendered' nature of knowledge and has instead projected conceptions of the social world, which are male-dominated. Males have traditionally occupied positions of power and authority in society and have an investment in maintaining their privileged roles, according to feminists. Under such conditions, gendered knowledge becomes a vital force in perpetuating established social arrangements and legitimating male domination.

Feminism approaches in sociology are discussed further in chapter 14, 'Sexuality and Gender'.

Some feminist writers have argued that it is a mistake to suppose that either 'men' or 'women' are groups with their own interests or characteristics. Several of these writers, such as Donna Haraway (1989, 1991), Hélène Cixous (1976) and Judith Butler (1990, 1997, 2004), have been influenced by poststructuralist and postmodern thinking, which is discussed further below. According to Butler, gender is not a fixed category, an essence, but a fluid one, exhibited in what people *do* rather than what they *are*. If, as Butler (1990) argues, gender is something that is 'done' or performed, then it is also something that we should fight to 'undo' when it is used by one group to exert power over another (see chapter 7, 'Social Interaction and Everyday Life').

Susan Faludi has also pursued the theme of gender identity. In *Stiffed: The Betrayal of Modern Man* (2000), a book on masculinity, Faludi shows that the idea that men dominate in all spheres is a myth. On the contrary, there is something of a crisis of masculinity today in the world that men supposedly own and run. Some groups of men are still confident and feel in control; many others find themselves marginalized and lacking in self-respect. The success that at least some women have achieved is part of the reason, but so too are changes in the nature of work. The impact of information technology, for example, has made many less-skilled men redundant to society's needs, while the shift towards the service sector has led to a 'feminization of the workplace', which many men seem reluctant to enter.

See chapter 20, 'Work and Economic Life', for a discussion of service employment.

Feminist theory has changed and developed markedly since the 1980s and the themes it pursues are very different from those that emerged from within 1960s feminist movements. Whilst the latter saw feminism as a movement primarily concerned with equalizing the life chances of men and women, today feminist and queer theory question what exactly men and women are. Is there, in fact, any essential gendered being at all? The main issue for contemporary feminist theory may well be whether such questions are able to connect with the lives of women in both the developed and developing societies (see Shiva 1993).

Feminist movements are discussed further in chapter 22, 'Politics, Government and Social Movements'.

THINKING CRITICALLY

From your own experience, has substantial gender equality now been achieved in the developed world? Is there still a place for feminist movements and theory in an age of broad gender equality? Thinking more critically, what issues should feminists concentrate on today if they are to tap into the concerns of younger women ?

Poststructuralism and postmodernity

Michel Foucault and poststructuralism

Michel Foucault (1926–84), Jacques Derrida (1976, 1978) and Julia Kristeva (1974, 1977) are the most influential figures in an intellectual movement known as poststructuralism. However, it is the work of Foucault that has had by far the most influence on sociology and the social sciences. In his work, he attempted to illustrate shifts of understanding which separate thinking in our modern world from that of earlier ages. In his writings on crime, the body, madness and sexuality, Foucault analysed the emergence of modern institutions such as prisons, hospitals and schools that have played an increasing role in controlling and monitoring the social population. He wanted to show that there was 'another side' to Enlightenment ideas about individual liberty – one concerned with discipline and surveillance. Foucault advanced important ideas about the relationship between power, ideology and discourse in relation to modern organizational systems.

The study of power – how individuals and groups achieve their ends against those of others – is of fundamental importance in sociology. Marx and Weber, among the classical founders, laid particular emphasis on power; Foucault continued some of the lines of thought they pioneered. The role of discourse is central to his thinking about power and control in society. He used the term to refer to ways of talking or thinking about particular subjects that are united by common assumptions. Foucault demonstrated, for example, the dramatic way in which discourses of madness changed from medieval times through to the present day. In the Middle Ages, for example, the insane were generally regarded as harmless; some believed that they may even have possessed a special 'gift' of perception. In modern societies, however, 'madness' has been shaped by a medicalized discourse, which emphasizes illness and treatment. This medicalized discourse is supported and perpetuated by a highly developed and influential network of doctors, medical experts, hospitals, professional associations and medical journals.

Foucault's work is discussed in more detail in chapter 10, 'Health, Illness and Disability'.

According to Foucault, power works through discourse to shape popular attitudes towards phenomena such as crime, madness or sexuality. Expert discourses established by those with power or authority can often be countered only by competing expert discourses. In such a way, discourses can be used as a powerful tool to restrict alternative ways of thinking or speaking. Knowledge becomes a force of control. A prominent theme throughout Foucault's writings is the way power and knowledge are linked to technologies of surveillance, enforcement and discipline.

Foucault's radical new approach to social theory stands in opposition to the general consensus about the nature of scientific knowledge. This approach, which characterized many of his early works, has become known as Foucault's 'archaeology' of knowledge. Unlike other social scientists, who aim to make sense of the unfamiliar by drawing analogies with that which is familiar, Foucault set about the opposite task: to make sense of the familiar by digging into the past.

He energetically attacked the present – the taken-for-granted concepts, beliefs and structures which are largely invisible precisely because they are familiar. For example, he explored how the notion of 'sexuality' has not always existed, but has been created through processes of social development. Similar comments can be made about our modern-day conceptions of normal and deviant activity, of sanity and madness, and so forth. Foucault attempted to reveal the assumptions behind our current beliefs and practices and to make the present 'visible' by accessing it from the past. However, we cannot have general theories about society, social development or modernity; we can only understand fragments of them.

The postmodern turn in social theory

Since the mid-1980s, advocates of postmodernism claim that the classic social thinkers took their inspiration from the idea that history has a shape – it 'goes somewhere' and leads to progress. But this notion has now collapsed. There are no longer any 'grand narratives' or 'metanarratives' – overall conceptions of history or society – that make any sense (Lyotard 1985). Not only is there no general notion of progress that can be defended, there is also no such thing as history. The postmodern world is not destined, as Marx hoped, to be a socialist one. Instead, it is one dominated by the new media, which 'take us out' – disembed us – from our past.

Postmodern society is highly pluralistic and diverse. In countless films, videos, TV programmes and websites, images circulate around the world. We come into contact with many ideas and values, but these have little connection with the history of the areas in which we live, or indeed with our own personal histories. Everything seems constantly in flux. As one group of authors expressed things:

> Our world is being remade. Mass production, the mass consumer, the big city, big-brother state, the sprawling housing estate, and the nation-state are in decline: flexibility, diversity, differentiation, and mobility, communication, decentralisation and internationalisation are in the ascendant. In the process our own identities, our sense of self, our own subjectivities are being transformed. We are in transition to a new era. (Hall and Jacques 1988)

One important theorist of postmodernity is the French author Jean Baudrillard (whose work is discussed in more detail in chapter 17, 'The Media'). Baudrillard believes that the electronic media have destroyed our relationship to the past and created a chaotic, empty world. He was strongly influenced by Marxism in his early years. However, he argues that the spread of electronic communication and the mass media has reversed the Marxist theorem that economic forces shape society. Instead, social life is influenced, above all, by signs and images.

In a media-dominated age, Baudrillard says, meaning is created by the flow of images, as in TV programmes. Much of our world has become a sort of make-believe universe in which we are responding to media images rather than to real persons or places. Thus when Diana, Princess of Wales, died in 1997, there was an enormous outpouring of grief, not only in Britain but all over the world. Yet were people mourning a real person? Baudrillard would say not. Princess Diana existed for most people only through the media. Her death was more like an event in a soap opera than a real event in the way in which people experienced it; Baudrillard speaks of 'the dissolution of life into TV'.

Polish sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (1992) offers a helpful distinction, offering two ways of thinking about postmodern ideas. On the one hand, we could argue that the social world has rapidly moved in a postmodern direction. The enormous growth and spread of the mass media, new information technologies, more fluid movement of people across the world and the development of multicultural societies: all of these

Postmodern theory is exemplified by Baudrillard's ideas on the domination of social life by the mass media, particularly television.

mean that we no longer live in a modern world, but in a postmodern one. Modernity is dead and we are entering a period of postmodernity. The question then is, can a modern sociology adequately analyse a postmodern world? Is a *sociology of postmodernity* possible? The second view is that the postmodern changes above cannot be analysed using old sociological theories and concepts and we need to devise new ones. In short, we need a *postmodern sociology* for a postmodern world.

Bauman accepts that the modern project that originated in the European Enlightenment to rationally shape society no longer makes sense, at least not in the way thought possible by Comte, Marx or other classical theorists. However, since the turn of the century he has moved away from the term 'postmodern' – which he says has become corrupted through too diverse usage – and now describes our world as one of 'Liquid Modernity', reflecting the fact that it is in constant flux and uncertainty *in spite of* all attempts to impose (a modern) order and stability onto it (Bauman 2000, 2007).

One staunch critic of postmodern theory is Jürgen Habermas (1983), who argued that now is not the time to give up on the 'project' of modernity. He sees modernity as 'an incomplete project' and instead of resigning it to the dustbin of history, we should be extending it: pushing for more democracy, more freedom and more rational policies. Postmodernists were essentially pessimists and defeatists. It does seem that postmodern analyses are now losing ground to the theory of globalization, which has become the dominant theoretical framework for understanding the direction of social change in the twenty-first century.

THINKING CRITICALLY

Postmodern theory suggests that the 'project of modernity', with its ideas of reason, rationality and progress, is dead. List all the social changes which could support such a view. Does this list amount to the kind of fundamental social transformation identified by Baudrillard and others?

Globalization, risk and the 'revenge' of nature

The theory of globalization will be discussed extensively in chapter 4 and we will not anticipate that discussion here. Instead, we will look at three significant contemporary theories, which assume that globalization is rapidly changing human societies. These theories are chosen as representative of

sociologists who reject the radical postmodern idea of the death of modernity, but seek new ways of theorizing the changes globalization brings. You will have to decide whether such theories give us any more purchase on the direction of contemporary social change than the classical traditions built on the work of Marx, Durkheim and Weber.

Manuel Castells: the network economy

Manuel Castells began his academic career as a Marxist. As an expert on urban affairs, he sought to apply Marx's ideas to the study of cities. In recent years, however, Castells has moved away from Marxism. Like Baudrillard, he has become concerned with the impact of media and communications technologies. The information society, Castells argues, is marked by the rise of networks and a network economy. The new economy, which depends on the connections made possible by global communications, is certainly capitalist. However, the capitalist economy and society of today are quite different from those of the past. The expansion of capitalism is no longer based primarily, as Marx thought it would be, either on the working class or the manufacture of material goods. Instead, telecommunications and computers are the basis of production.

Castells' ideas on the 'network society' are discussed more fully in chapter 18, 'Organizations and Networks'.

Castells does not reveal much about how these changes are affecting gender relations. However, he does say a good deal about their effects on personal identity and everyday life. In the network society, personal identity becomes a much more open matter. We do not any longer take our identities from the past; we have actively to create them in interacting with others. This directly affects the sphere of the family and also more generally the structuring of male and female identities. Men and women no longer get their identities from traditional roles. Thus women's 'place' was once in the home, whereas that of men was to be 'out at work'. That division has now broken down.

Castells calls the new global economy the 'automaton' – he thinks that we no longer fully control the world we have created. His statements here echo those made a century earlier by Weber, who thought that the increase in bureaucracy would imprison us all in an 'iron cage'. As Castells puts it: 'Humankind's nightmare of seeing our machines taking control of our world seems on the edge of becoming reality – not in the form of robots that eliminate jobs or government computers that police our lives, but as an electronically based system of financial transactions' (2000: 56).

Yet Castells has not forgotten his Marxist roots altogether. He thinks that it may be possible to regain more effective control of the global marketplace. This will not come through any sort of revolution, but through the collective efforts of international organizations and countries which have a common interest in regulating international capitalism. Information technology, Castells concludes, can often be a means of local empowerment and community renewal. He quotes as an example the case of Finland. Finland is the most developed information society in the world. All schools in the country have Internet access and most of the population is computer literate. At the same time, Finland has a well-established and effective welfare state, which has been adapted to meet the needs of the new economy.

Anthony Giddens on social reflexivity

In my own writings, I also develop a theoretical perspective on the changes happening in the present-day world. We live today in what I call a 'runaway world', a world marked by new risks and uncertainties of the sort diagnosed by Beck (1999). But we should place the notion of trust alongside that of risk. Trust refers to the confidence

we have either in individuals or in institutions.

In a world of rapid transformation, traditional forms of trust tend to become dissolved. Trust in other people used to be based in the local community. Living in a more globalized society, however, our lives are influenced by people we never see or meet, who may be living on the far side of the world from us. Trust means having confidence in 'abstract systems' – for example, we have to have confidence in agencies for food regulation, the purification of water or the effectiveness of banking systems. Trust and risk are closely bound up with one another. We need to have confidence in such authorities if we are to confront the risks which surround us, and react to them in an effective way.

Living in an information age, in my view, means an increase in social reflexivity. Social reflexivity refers to the fact that we have constantly to think about, or reflect upon, the circumstances in which we live our lives. When societies were more geared to custom and tradition, people could follow established ways of doing things in a more unreflective fashion. For us, many aspects of life that for earlier generations were simply taken for granted become matters of open decision-making. For example, for hundreds of years people had no effective ways of limiting the size of their families. With modern forms of contraception, and other forms of technological involvement in reproduction, parents can not only choose how many children they have, but can even decide what sex their children will be. These new possibilities, of course, are fraught with new ethical dilemmas.

We have not *inevitably* lost control of our own future. In a global age, nations certainly lose some of the power they used to have. For instance, countries have less influence over economic policy than they once had. However, governments retain a good deal of power. Acting collaboratively, nations can get together to reassert their influence over the runaway world. The groups to which Beck points – agencies and movements working outside the formal framework of politics – can have an important role. But they will not supplant orthodox democratic politics. Democracy is still crucial, because groups in the area of 'sub-politics' make divergent claims and have different interests. Such groups may include, for example, those who are actively campaigning in favour of more tolerance of abortion, and those who believe entirely the opposite. Democratic government must assess and react to these varying claims and concerns.

There is a potential 'democracy of the emotions' emerging in everyday life. A democracy of the emotions refers to the emergence of forms of family life in which men and women participate in an equal fashion. Virtually all forms of traditional family were based on the dominance of men over women, something that was usually sanctioned in law. The increasing equality between the sexes cannot be limited only to the right to vote; it must also involve the personal and intimate sphere. The democratizing of personal life advances to the degree to which relationships are founded on mutual respect, communication and tolerance.

Ulrich Beck and ecological politics in an age of risk

Another German sociologist, Ulrich Beck, also rejects postmodernism. Rather than living in a world 'beyond the modern', we are moving into a phase of what he calls 'the second modernity'. The second modernity refers to the fact that modern institutions are becoming global, while everyday life is breaking free from the hold of tradition and custom. The old industrial society is disappearing and is being replaced by a 'risk society'. What the postmodernists see as chaos, or lack of pattern, Beck sees as risk or uncertainty. The management of risk is the prime feature of the global order.

Beck is not arguing that the contemporary world is more risky than that of previ-

ous ages. Rather, it is the nature of the risks we must face that is changing. Risk now derives less from natural dangers or hazards than from uncertainties created by our own social development and by the development of science and technology. For example, global warming – or climate change – represents possibly the most serious environmental issue today. But the scientific consensus is that this is not a simple natural disaster, but the product of excessive greenhouse gases from industrial pollution and modern transportation emissions over the past 250 years. Popular science writers have dubbed such reactions, the 'revenges of nature'.

The advance of science and technology creates new risk situations that are very different from those of previous ages. Science and technology obviously provide many benefits for us. Yet they create risks that are hard to measure. Thus no one quite knows, for example, what the risks involved in the development of new technologies, such as genetic modification or nanotechnology, might be. Supporters of genetically modified crops, for example, claim that at best they give us the possibility of ending malnutrition in the world's poorest countries and providing cheap food for everyone. Sceptics claim that they could have dangerous, unintended health consequences.

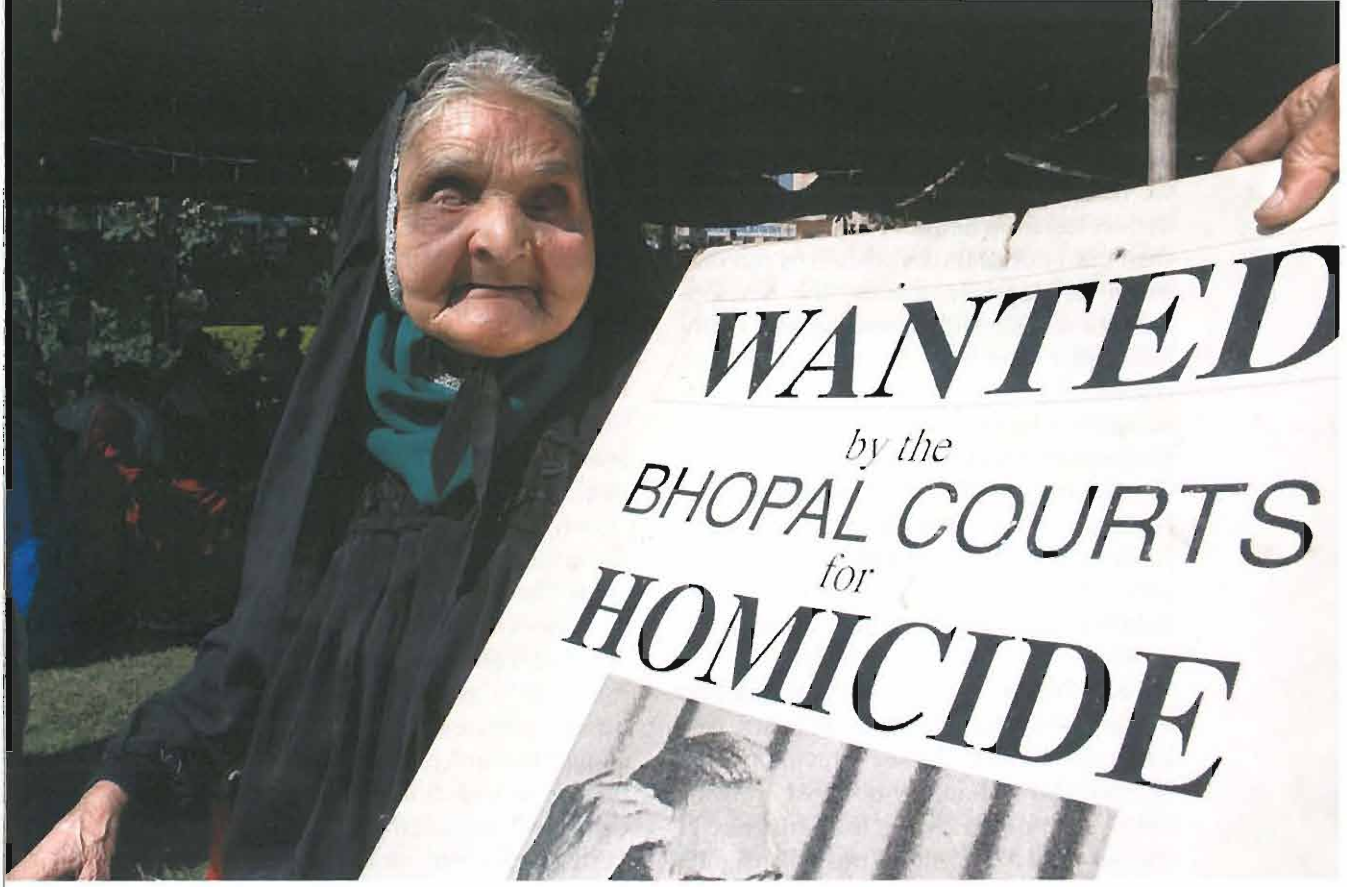
Beck's ideas on risk are discussed in more detail in chapter 5, 'The Environment'.

According to Beck, an important aspect of the risk society is that its hazards are not restricted spatially, temporally or socially. Today's risks affect all countries and all social classes; they have global, not merely personal, consequences. Many forms of manufactured risk, such as those to do with terrorism or pollution for example, cross national boundaries. The explosion at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant in Ukraine in 1986 provides a clear illustration of this point. Everyone living in the immediate vicinity of Chernobyl – regardless of age, class, gender or status – was exposed to dangerous levels of radiation. At the same time, the effects of the accident stretched far beyond Chernobyl itself; throughout Europe and beyond, abnormally high levels of radiation were detected long after the explosion.

Many decisions taken at the level of everyday life also become infused with risk. Risk and gender relations are actually closely linked, for example, as many new uncertainties have entered the relationships between the sexes (see chapter 9, 'Families and Intimate Relationships'). One example concerns the areas of love and marriage. A generation ago, in the developed societies, marriage was a fairly straightforward process of life transition – people moved from being unmarried to being married, and this was assumed to be a fairly permanent situation. Today, many people live together without getting married and divorce rates are high. Anyone contemplating a relationship with another person must take these facts into account, and is therefore involved in risk calculations. The individual must judge his or her likelihood of gaining happiness and security against this uncertain backdrop.

The threat of terrorism provides another example of how risk affects our society. The self-defined 'Islamic' terrorist attacks on New York and Washington in 2001, Bali in 2002, Casablanca and Madrid in 2004, London in 2005 and many more all changed the extent to which people thought of their communities as being at risk from violence. The fear of terrorism created inertia in economies around the world, particularly in the months after September 2001, as businesses became reluctant to risk large-scale investment. The terrorist attacks also changed the assessment that states made over the balance between the freedom of its citizens and their security.

In recent years, Beck's thinking has followed that of others (Vertovec and Cohen 2002; Benhabib 2006), developing into a



Shaira Khatoon lost both her eyes in an industrial disaster at a pesticide plant in Bhopal, India, in 1984. More than 15,000 people lost their lives in the month following the toxic explosion and some 500,000 were left permanently injured.

theory of cosmopolitanism (Beck 2006; Beck and Grande 2007). Beck's version of cosmopolitanism begins from a critique of 'nation-state-based' thinking; that is, theories within the social sciences which take national societies as the main unit of analysis. In *The Cosmopolitan Vision* (2006: 18) Beck argues that this 'national outlook', now 'fails to grasp that political, economic and cultural action and their (intended and unintended) consequences know no borders'. In our age of globalization, where national borders are becoming more permeable and individual states are less powerful, social reality is being transformed in a thoroughly cosmopolitan direction. This process of 'cosmopolitanization' is occurring even behind the backs of sociologists who continue to think in terms of national societies and their international relationships. If allowed to develop without direction, cosmopolitanization presents as many threats as opportunities, particularly for those who are exploited by multinational corporations traversing the globe seeking cheaper labour and maximal profits.

Beck argues that the nation-state is no longer able to cope in a world of global risks. Instead, there must be transnational cooperation between states. The narrow viewpoint of the nation-state becomes an impediment when it comes to dealing with new risks, such as global warming. When it comes to fighting against international terrorism, we must ask what we are fighting *for*. His ideal is a cosmopolitan system based on the acknowledgement and acceptance of cultural diversity. Cosmopolitan states do not fight only against terrorism, but also against the *causes* of terrorism in the world. To Beck, they provide the most positive way to deal with global problems, which appear insoluble at the level of the individual state, but manageable through cooperation.

The social changes of recent decades do not spell the end of attempts at social and political reform. Beck argues to the contrary: new forms of activism are appearing. We see the emergence of a new field of what Beck calls 'sub-politics'. This refers to the activities of groups and agencies operating outside the formal mechanisms of democratic politics, such as ecological, consumer or human rights groups. Responsibility for risk management cannot be left to politicians or scientists alone: other groups of citizens need to be brought in. Groups and movements that develop in the arena of sub-politics, however, can have a big influence on orthodox political mechanisms. For instance, responsibility for the environment, which was previously the province of ecological activists, has now been accepted as part of the conventional political framework.

Beck concedes that thinking in universal or cosmopolitan terms is not really new. Previously, the idea of citizenship beyond the nation-state was the preserve of well-travelled and well-connected social elites who *voluntarily* chose to see themselves as 'Europeans', for example, or as 'citizens of the world'. But this form of cosmopolitanism now has much stronger roots in reality and is therefore potentially more effective. Beck argues that it is not enough for sociologists simply to analyse the emerging cosmopolitan world society; they should also be involved in shaping it in positive directions if the problems associated with globalization are to be tackled.

THINKING CRITICALLY

Beck argues that we are moving into a global risk society. What are the implications of the environmental risks discussed above for the world's developing countries? Why might environmental risks be more evenly distributed globally than, say, poverty and malnutrition?

Conclusion: out with the old, in with the new?

Perhaps today we are at the beginning of a major new phase in the development of sociological theorizing. The ideas of the classic thinkers – Marx, Durkheim and Weber – were formed during times of great social, political and economic change, which their theories sought to understand. We are now living through a period of global transformation that is probably just as profound and yet is much more widely felt across larger areas of the world. We seem to need new theories to help us understand and explain the new developments that are transforming our societies today.

But this conclusion does not necessarily mean we should abandon the older theoretical perspectives altogether. Sociological theory cannot be successful if it only develops through internal debate. It has to give us insights into the key issues of the day and must be empirically adequate as well as internally coherent. What is likely to be more productive is to bring the older perspectives into contact with the new, in order to test and compare their effectiveness in helping us understand and explain the dramatic changes we are living through.

Summary points

1. A diversity of theoretical approaches is found in sociology. The reason for this is not particularly puzzling: theoretical disputes are difficult to resolve even in the natural sciences, and in sociology we face special difficulties because of the complex problems involved in subjecting our own behaviour to study. However, the dominance of Parsonian functionalism in the 1950 and '60s shows us that things have not always been this way and may change again in the future. Sociological theorizing needs to remain close to the central problems of the day in order to stay relevant.
2. Clashes of viewpoint in sociology bring to our attention several basic theoretical dilemmas. An important one concerns how we should relate human action to social structure. Are we the creators of society, or created by it? The choice between these alternatives is not as stark as it may initially appear, and the real problem is how to relate the two aspects of social life to one another.
3. A second dilemma concerns whether societies should be pictured as harmonious and orderly, or whether they should be seen as marked by persistent conflict. Again, the two views are not completely opposed, and we need to show how consensus and conflict interrelate.
4. A third basic dilemma concerns gender, and in particular whether we should build it as a general category into our sociological thinking. Feminist theorists have brought changes both in what sociologists think about, and in the way they think it.
5. A fourth dilemma is to do with the analysis of modern social development. Are processes of change in the modern world mainly shaped by capitalist economic development or by other factors, including non-economic ones? Positions taken in this debate are influenced to some extent by the political beliefs and attitudes held by different sociologists.
6. In tackling the issues of social development, recent theorists have tried to go beyond both Marx and Weber. Postmodern thinkers deny that we can develop any general theories of history or society at all, but these are now losing ground to theories of globalization.
7. Other theorists are critical of postmodernism, arguing that we can still develop overall theories of the social world, and in a way that will enable us to intervene to shape it for the better. Castells, Beck and Giddens are amongst this more recent strand of theorizing, which attempts to develop new ways of theorizing for a global age.

Further reading

Books on social and sociological theory are amongst the most numerous of any subject in sociology, so there should something to suit everyone's taste. For a well-written introduction to the theories discussed in this chapter, try Pip Jones, *Introducing Social Theory* (Cambridge: Polity, 2003). An alternative is Shaun Best's *A Beginner's Guide to Social Theory* (London: Sage, 2002). A different approach is taken by Steven Miles in *Social Theory in the Real World* (London: Sage, 2001), which shows how theory can help us to understand the world we live in.

From here, a somewhat more challenging text is Derek Layder's *Understanding Social Theory*, 2nd edn (London: Sage, 2005), which is very good on critical commentary. George Ritzer's *Sociological Theory*, 7th edn (Maidenhead: McGraw-Hill, 2007) is a similarly excellent book by a renowned expert in sociological theory.

For the more contemporary theorists, Austin Harrington's (ed.) *Modern Social Theory: An Introduction* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2004) is a useful collection, and for the classical theorists, Kenneth Morrison's *Marx, Durkheim, Weber: Formations of Modern Social Thought* (London: Sage, 2006) is deservedly into its second edition.

Of course, at some point it will be necessary to consult the ideas of the theorists in this chapter in their original texts. Ultimately this is the only way to form your own assessment of their relative merits and for that reason is strongly recommended.

Internet links

The Dead Sociologists' Society – sadly, exactly what it says. Very good resources on the classical theorists:
http://media.pfeiffer.edu/lridener/DSS/DEADSOC.HTML

Feminist theories and perspectives:
www.cddc.vt.edu/feminism/enin.html

The Frankfurt School of Critical Theory:
www.marxists.org/subject/frankfurt-school/index.htm

Phenomenologists and ethnomethodologists:
www.phenomenologyonline.com/scholars/scholars.html

A series of webpages below devoted to the work of some individual theorists:
Jean Baudrillard – http://englishscholar.com/baudrillard.htm
Judith Butler – www.theory.org.uk/ctr-butl.htm
Ulrich Beck – www.lse.ac.uk/collections/ sociology/whoswho/beck.htm
Manuel Castells – http://sociology.berkeley.edu/faculty/castells/
Michel Foucault – www.foucault.info/documents/
Anthony Giddens – http://old.lse.ac.uk/ collections/meetthedirector.20031001/
Erving Goffman – www.mdx.ac.uk/WWW/STUDY/xgof.htm

CHAPTER 4

Globalization and the Changing World

(opposite) A view of the Pyramids at Giza through a Pizza Hut window, juxtaposing one of the earliest civilizations with twenty-first-century life.

Planet Earth, geologists tell us, is a barely imaginable four and a half *billion* years old. Human beings have existed on earth for less than half a million years or so. Agriculture, the necessary basis of fixed settlements, is much more recent, being just 12,000 years old. Large-scale human civilizations date back no more than 6,000 years. If we can think of the entire span of human existence thus far as a 24-hour day, agriculture would have come into existence at 11.56 p.m. – four minutes to midnight – and civilizations at 11.57 p.m. Over this very long timescale of human history, human beings gradually spread into most parts of the planet as relationships between human groups became more regular and often riven with conflicts (Mennell 1990). This global development

of humanity has occupied most of human history.

The development of modern societies would get under way only at 11.59 and 30 seconds. Yet the last 30 seconds of this human day have arguably produced more rapid social and environmental change than in all the time leading up to it. The period sociologists call modernity has witnessed a much more *rapid* globalization of social life, connecting large-scale societies together in a whole variety of ways, from long-range economic exchanges and international political agreements to global tourism, electronic communications technology and more fluid migration patterns. In all these ways, people across the world have become more interconnected and interdependent than in previous times.

The sheer pace of change in the modern era is evident if we look at rates of population growth and technological development. Italian demographer, Massimo Livi-Bacci (1992), has studied the global human population and its long-term growth. From an estimated 6 *million* people in 10,000 BCE, the global population rose to almost 6 *billion* by 1990 (see table 4.1) and in 2007 stood at 6.6 billion. In itself, such a recent increase is staggering enough. However, Livi-Bacci's study shows that the pace of population growth has been very uneven, speeding up from around 1750, the start of the industrial era. Perhaps the most striking demographic aspect here is the 'doubling time' of the global population. Even in 1750, the time it took for the population to double in size was quite slow, taking more than 1,000 years; but by 1950 this was down to 118 years and in 1990 a mere 38 years. If such predictions are borne out in the future, there will be more than 10 billion people on planet Earth by 2025, all trying to eke out a living. Whether they will be able to do so is, in part, dependent on the carrying capacity of the natural environment and this is strongly influenced by the creativity of human technological development.

» Chapter 5, 'The Environment', looks more closely at the impact of such rapid human expansion on the natural environment and other species.

What Livi-Bacci's work shows us is the change of pace in the process of globalization introduced with the modern era, leading to a much more effective form of global society since the 1950s. In this chapter, we will look at previous types of society and some key turning points in the long-term, overall history of human affairs, before moving on to look at evidence and current debates on the rapid globalization process that, arguably, has occurred only over the last 60 years or so. Many social scientists see this contemporary form of globalization as *the* most significant development that will shape all of our futures.

First though, we look at the main types of society that existed in the past and which can still be found in parts of the world. Today we are accustomed to societies that contain tens of millions of people, many of them living together in crowded urban areas. But this situation is historically unusual. For most of human history, populations were much less densely populated than now and it is only over the past 100 years or so that any societies have existed in which the *majority* of the population are urban dwellers. To understand the forms of society that existed prior to modern industrialism, we have to call on the historical dimension of the sociological imagination.

Types of society

A disappearing world: the fate of pre-modern societies

The explorers, traders and missionaries sent out during Europe's great age of discovery met with many different peoples. As the anthropologist Marvin Harris has written, in his work, *Cannibals and Kings* (1978):

Table 4.1 Population, total births, and years lived (10,000 BCE – 1990)

Demographic index	10,000 BCE*	0	1750	1950	1990
Population (millions)	6	252	771	2530	5292
Annual growth (%)	0.008	0.037	0.064	0.596	1.845
Doubling time (years)	8369	1854	1083	116	38
Births (billions)	9.29	33.6	22.64	10.42	4.79
Life expectancy	20	22	27	35	55

NB: For births and life expectancy, the data refer to interval between the date at the head of the column and that of the preceding column (for the first column the interval runs from the hypothetical origin of the human species to 10,000 BCE).
*Many historians now use BCE (Before the Common Era) and CE (Common Era) rather than BC and AD.

Source: Adapted from Livi-Bacci 1992: 31

> In some regions – Australia, the Arctic, the southern tips of South America and Africa – they found groups still living much like Europe's own long-forgotten stone age ancestors: bands of twenty or thirty people, sprinkled across vast territories, constantly on the move, living entirely by hunting animals and collecting wild plants. These hunter-collectors appeared to be members of a rare and endangered species. In other regions – the forests of eastern North America, the jungles of South America, and East Asia – they found denser populations, inhabiting more or less permanent villages, based on farming and consisting of perhaps one or two large communal structures, but here too the weapons and tools were relics of prehistory. . . . Elsewhere of course, the explorers encountered fully developed states and empires, headed by despots and ruling classes, and defended by standing armies. It was these great empires, with their cities, monuments, palaces, temples and treasures that had lured all the Marco Polos and Columbuses across the oceans and deserts in the first place. There was China – the greatest empire in the world, a vast, sophisticated realm whose leaders scorned the 'red-faced barbarians', supplicants from puny kingdoms beyond the pale of the civilised world. And there was India – a land where cows were venerated and the unequal burdens of life were apportioned according to what each soul had merited in its previous incarnation. And then there were the native American states and empires, worlds unto themselves, each with its distinctive arts and religions: the Incas, with their great stone fortresses, suspension bridges, over-worked granaries, and state-controlled economy; and the Aztecs, with their bloodthirsty gods fed from human hearts and their incessant search for fresh sacrifices.

This seemingly unlimited variety of pre-modern societies can actually be grouped into three main categories, each of which is referred to in Harris's description: *hunters and gatherers* (Harris calls these, 'hunter-collectors' in his description above); larger *agrarian* or *pastoral societies* (involving agriculture or the tending of domesticated animals); and *non-industrial civilizations* or *traditional states*. As table 4.2 shows, with the emergence of each successive societal type came larger societies and an increase in the size of the global human population.

The earliest societies: hunters and gatherers

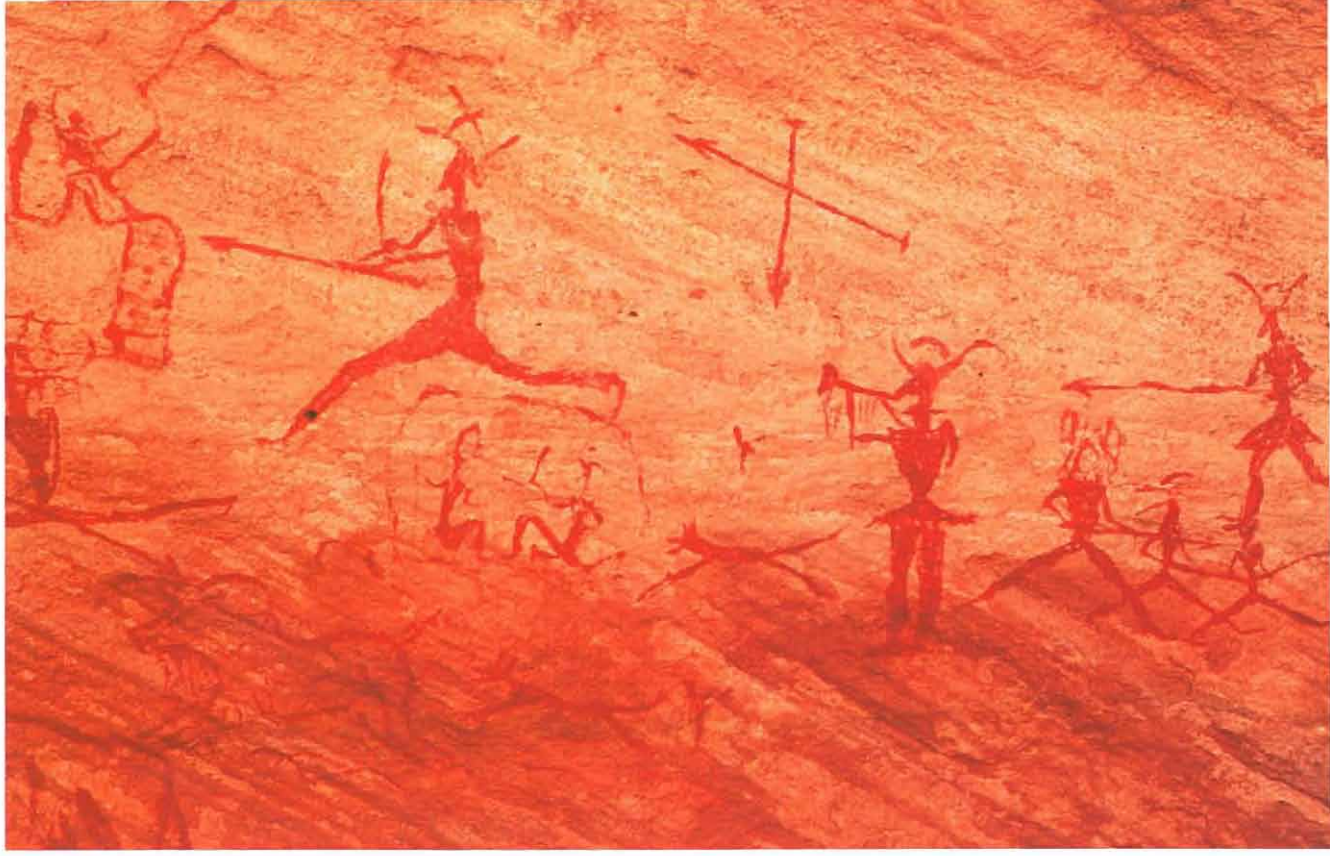
For all but a tiny part of their existence on this planet, human beings have lived in hunting and gathering societies. Hunters and gatherers gain their livelihood from hunting, fishing and gathering edible plants growing in the wild. These cultures continue to exist in some parts of the world, such as in a few arid parts of Africa and the jungles of Brazil and New Guinea. Most hunting and gathering cultures, however, have been destroyed or absorbed by the spread of

Table 4.2 Types of pre-modern human society

Type	Period of Existence	Characteristics
Hunting and gathering societies	50,000 BCE to the present. Now on the verge of complete disappearance.	Consist of small numbers of people gaining their livelihood from hunting, fishing and the gathering of edible plants. Few inequalities. Differences of rank limited by age and gender.
Agrarian societies	12,000 BCE to the present. Most are now part of larger political entities and are losing their distinct identity.	Based on small rural communities, without towns or cities. Livelihood gained through agriculture, often supplemented by hunting and gathering. Stronger inequalities than among hunters and gatherers. Ruled by chiefs.
Pastoral societies	12,000 BCE to the present. Today mostly part of larger states; their traditional ways of life are being undermined.	Size ranges from a few hundred people to many thousands. Dependent on the tending of domesticated animals for their subsistence. Marked by distinct inequalities. Ruled by chiefs, or warrior kings.
Traditional societies or civilizations	6000 BCE to the nineteenth century. All traditional states have disappeared.	Very large in size, some numbering millions of people (though small compared with larger industrialized societies). Some cities exist, in which trade and manufacture are concentrated. Based largely on agriculture. Major inequalities exist among different classes. Distinct apparatus of government headed by a king or emperor.

Western culture (the culture of Europe, the United States, Australasia) and those that remain are unlikely to stay intact for much longer. Currently, fewer than a quarter of a million people in the world support themselves through hunting and gathering – only 0.001 per cent of the world's population (see figure 4.1).

Compared with larger societies – particularly those in the developed world – little inequality is found in most hunting and gathering groups. Hunters and gatherers do not accumulate material wealth beyond what is needed to cater for their basic wants. Their main preoccupations are normally with religious values and with ceremonial and ritual activities. The material goods they need are limited to weapons for hunting, tools for digging and building, traps and cooking utensils. Thus there is little difference among members of the society in the number or kinds of material possessions – there are no divisions of rich and poor. Differences of position or rank tend to be



Pre-historic cave paintings show us something of the lives of the earliest hunter-gatherers.

limited to age and sex; men are almost always the hunters, while women gather wild crops, cook, and bring up the children. This division of labour between men and women, however, is very important: men tend to dominate public and ceremonial positions.

Hunters and gatherers are not merely 'primitive' peoples whose ways of life no longer hold any interest for us. Studying their cultures allows us to see more clearly that modern institutions are far from being 'natural' features of all human life. Of course, we should not idealize the circumstances in which hunters and gatherers have lived, but, nonetheless, the absence of war, the lack of major inequalities of wealth and power and the emphasis on cooperation rather than competition are all instructive reminders that the world created by modern industrial civilization is not necessarily to be equated in any obvious way with 'progress'.

Pastoral and agrarian societies

About 20,000 years ago, some hunting and gathering groups turned to the raising of domesticated animals and the cultivation of fixed plots of land as their means of livelihood. Pastoral societies are those that rely mainly on domesticated livestock, while agrarian societies are those that grow crops (practise agriculture). Many societies have had mixed pastoral and agrarian economies.

Depending on the environment in which they live, pastoralists rear and herd animals such as cattle, sheep, goats, camels and horses. Many pastoral societies still exist in the modern world, concentrated especially in areas of Africa, the Middle East and Central Asia. These societies are usually found in regions where there are dense grasslands, or in deserts or mountains. Such regions are not amenable to fruitful agriculture, but may support various kinds of livestock. Pastoral societies usually migrate

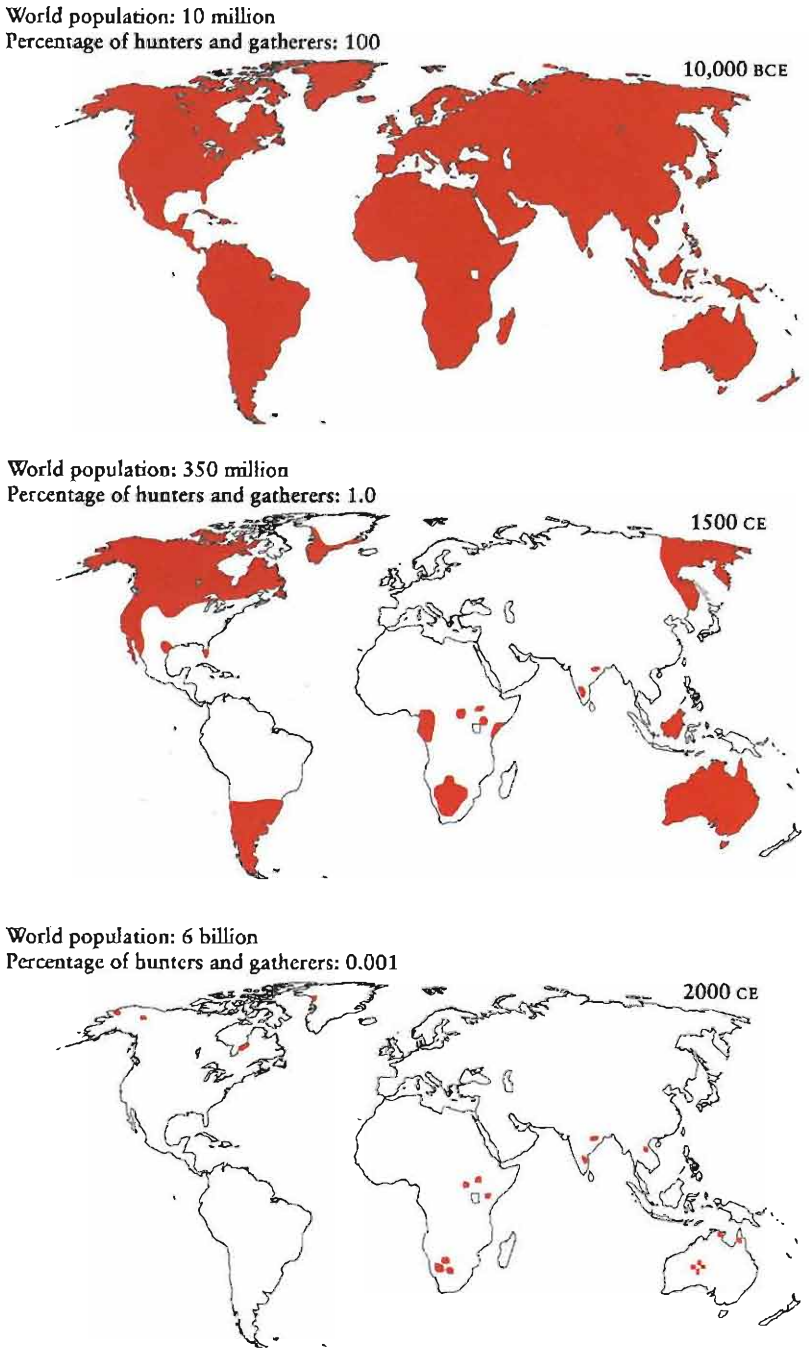


Figure 4.1 The decline of hunting and gathering societies

Source: Lee and De Vore (1968)

between different areas according to seasonal changes. Given their nomadic habits, people in pastoral societies do not normally accumulate many material possessions, although their way of life is more complex in material terms than that of hunters and gatherers.

At some point, hunting and gathering

groups began to sow their own crops rather than simply collect those growing in the wild. This practice first developed as what is usually called 'horticulture', in which small gardens were cultivated with the use of simple hoes or digging instruments. Like pastoralism, horticulture provided for a more assured supply of food than was possible by hunting and gathering and could therefore support larger communities. Since they were not on the move, people gaining a livelihood from horticulture could develop larger stocks of material possessions than either hunting and gathering or pastoral communities. Some people in the world still rely primarily on agriculture for their livelihood (see table 4.3).

Non-industrial or traditional civilizations

From about 6000 BCE onwards, we find evidence of larger societies than ever existed before, which contrast in distinct ways with earlier types (see figure 4.2). These societies were based on the development of cities, showed very pronounced inequalities of wealth and power and were associated with the rule of kings or emperors. Because they involved the use of writing, and science and art flourished, they are often called *civilizations*.

The earliest civilizations developed in the Middle East, usually in fertile river areas. The Chinese Empire originated in about 2000 BCE, when powerful states were also founded in what are now India and Pakistan. A number of large civilizations existed in Mexico and Latin America, such as the Aztecs of Mexico, the Mayas of the Yucatan Peninsula and the Incas of Peru.

Most traditional civilizations were also *empires*; they achieved the size they did through the conquest and incorporation of other peoples (Kautsky 1982). This was true, for instance, of traditional China and Rome. At its height, in the first century CE, the Roman Empire stretched from Britain in north-west Europe to beyond the Middle East. The Chinese empire, which lasted for more than 2,000 years, up to the threshold of the twentieth century, covered most of the massive region of eastern Asia now occupied by modern China. The emergence of these large-scale civilizations and empires shows that the long-term process of globalization has involved invasion, wars and violent conquest every bit as much as cooperation and mutual exchange between societies. Nevertheless, by the dawn of the modern era, human settlement had already taken place right across the globe.

These Masai warriors from Tanzania are among some of the few remaining pastoralists in the world today.

Table 4.3 Some agrarian societies remain

Country	Percentage of workers in agriculture
Rwanda	90
Uganda	82
Ethiopia	80
Nepal	76
Bangladesh	63
How the industrialized societies differ	
Japan	4.6
Australia	3.6
Germany	2.8
Canada	2.0
United Kingdom	1.4
United States	0.7

Source: CIA World Factbook 2007

The modern world: the industrialized societies

What has happened to destroy the forms of society which dominated the whole of history up to two centuries ago? The answer, in a word, is industrialization – a term we introduced in chapter 1. Industrialization refers to the emergence of machine production, based on the use of inanimate power resources (like steam or electricity). The industrial societies (sometimes also called 'modern' or 'developed' societies) are utterly different from any previous type of social order and their development has had consequences stretching far beyond their European origins.

In even the most advanced of traditional civilizations, most people were engaged in working on the land. The relatively low level of technological development did not permit more than a small minority to be freed from the chores of agricultural production. Modern technology has certainly transformed the ways of life enjoyed by a large proportion of the human population. As the economic historian David Landes (1969) has observed:

> Modern technology produces not only more, faster; it turns out objects that could not have been produced under any circumstances by the craft methods of yesterday. The best Indian hand-spinner could not turn out yarn so fine and regular as that of the [spinning] mule; all the forges in eighteenth-century Christendom could not have produced steel sheets so large, smooth and homogeneous as those of a modern strip mill. Most important, modern technology has created things that could scarcely have been conceived in the pre-industrial era: the camera, the motor car, the airplane, the whole array of electronic devices from the radio to the high-speed computer, the nuclear power plant, and so on almost ad infinitum.

Even so, the continuing existence of gross global inequalities means that such technological development is still not equally shared. The modes of life and social institutions characteristic of the modern world are radically different from those of even the recent past. During a period of only two or three centuries – a minute sliver of time in the context of human history – human social life has been wrenched away from the types of social order in which people lived for thousands of years.

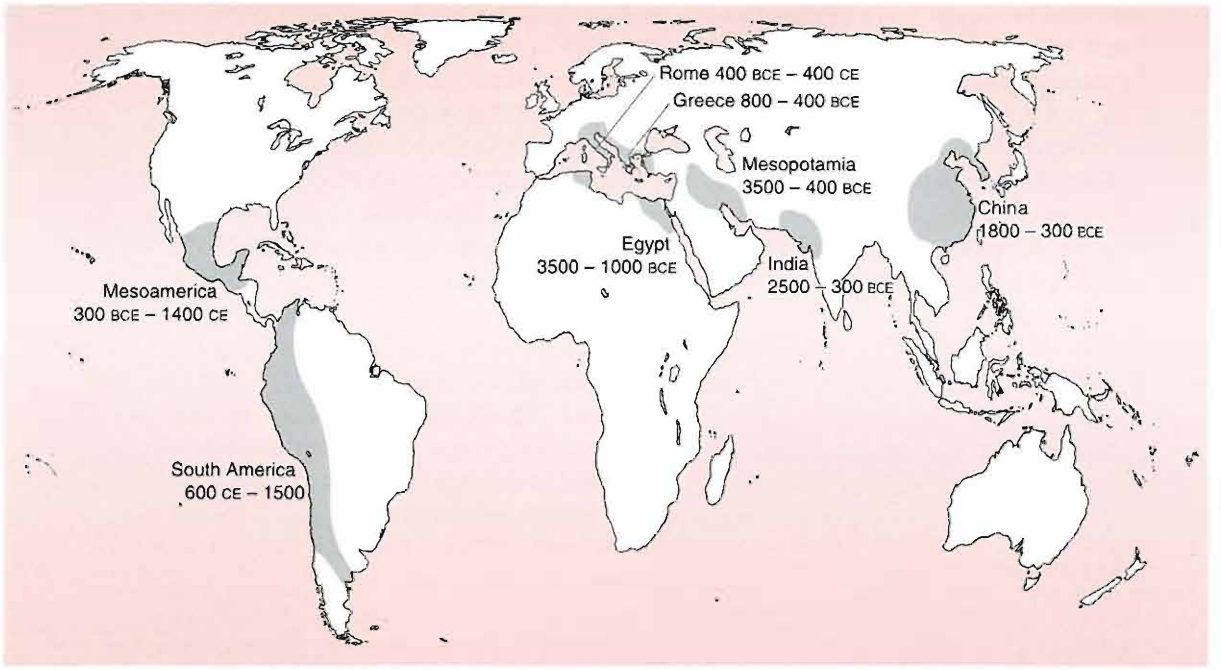


Figure 4.2 Civilizations in the ancient world

A central feature of industrial societies today is that a large majority of the employed population work in factories, offices or shops rather than in agriculture (as we saw in table 4.2). And over 90 per cent of people live in towns and cities, where most jobs are to be found and new job opportunities are created. The largest cities are vastly greater in size than the urban settlements found in traditional civilizations. In the cities, social life becomes more impersonal and anonymous than before and many of our day-to-day encounters are with strangers rather than with individuals known to us. Large-scale organizations, such as business corporations or government agencies, come to influence the lives of virtually everyone.

The role of cities in the new global order is discussed in chapter 6, 'Cities and Urban Life'.

A further feature of modern societies concerns their political systems, which are more developed and intensive than forms of government in traditional states. In traditional civilizations, the political authorities (monarchs and emperors) had little direct influence on the customs and habits of most of their subjects, who lived in fairly self-contained local villages. With industrialization, transportation and communication became much more rapid, making for a more integrated 'national' community.

The industrial societies were the first nation-states to come into existence. Nation-states are political communities, divided from each other by clearly delimited borders rather than the vague frontier areas that used to separate traditional states. National governments have extensive powers over many aspects of citizens' lives, framing laws that apply to all those living within their borders. Virtually all societies in the world today are nation-states.

The application of industrial technology has by no means been limited to peaceful processes of economic development. From the earliest phases of industrialization, modern production processes have been put to military use and this has radically altered ways of waging war, creating

weaponry and modes of military organization much more advanced than those of non-industrial cultures. Together, superior economic strength, political cohesion and military superiority account for the seemingly irresistible spread of Western ways of life across the world over the past two centuries. Once again, as we noted in our discussion of older types of society, we have to acknowledge that the globalization process has very often been characterized by violence and conquest.

Issues of war and violence are taken up in chapter 23, 'Nations, War and Terrorism'.

THINKING CRITICALLY

Take a few moments to reflect on just how different industrialized, modern societies are from previous types. What *three features* would you pick out as being the most significant ones that mark them out as very different types, and why? Marx once forecast that the industrialized countries showed to the non-industrialized ones a picture of their own future. In what ways has he been proved right, and how might it be argued that in important respects, he was wrong?

Global development

From the seventeenth to the early twentieth century, the Western countries established colonies in numerous areas that were previously occupied by traditional societies, using their superior military strength where necessary. Although virtually all of these colonies have now attained their independence, the policy of colonialism was central to shaping the social map of the globe as we know it today (colonialism was discussed in chapter 1 in relation to the coffee trade). In some regions, such as North America, Australia and New Zealand, which were only thinly populated by hunting and gathering communities, Europeans became the majority population. In other areas, including much of Asia, Africa and South America, local populations remained in the majority.

Societies of the first of these types, including the United States, have become industrialized and are often referred to as *developed* societies. Those in the second category are mostly at a much lower level of industrial development and are often referred to as *developing* societies, or the developing world. Such societies include China, India, most of the African countries (such as Nigeria, Ghana and Algeria) and those in South America (for example, Brazil, Peru and Venezuela). Since many of these societies are situated south of the United States and Europe, they are sometimes referred to collectively as the South and contrasted to the wealthier, industrialized North. This is a generalization, though, and as countries of the global south become industrialized, this simple division of the world becomes less and less accurate.

You may often hear developing countries referred to as part of the Third World. The term Third World was originally part of a contrast drawn between three main types of society found in the early twentieth century. First World countries were (and are) the industrialized states of Europe, the United States, Canada, Greenland, Australasia (Australia and New Zealand), South Africa and Japan. Nearly all First World societies have multiparty, parliamentary systems of government. Second World societies meant the communist countries of what was then the Soviet Union (USSR) and Eastern Europe, including, for example, Czechoslovakia, Poland, East Germany and Hungary. Second World societies had centrally planned economies, which allowed little room for private property or competitive economic enterprise. They were also one-party states: the Communist Party dominated both the political and economic systems. For some 75 years, world history was affected by a global rivalry known as the Cold War, between the Soviet Union and Eastern European countries on the one

Life in Russia has changed dramatically after the fall of communism. Older people have sometimes found it difficult to adapt, which has led to nostalgia for former communist leaders such as Stalin and Lenin.

hand and the capitalistic societies of the West and Japan on the other. Today that rivalry is over. With the ending of the Cold War and the disintegration of communism in the former USSR and Eastern Europe, the Second World has effectively disappeared.

Even though the Three Worlds model is still sometimes used in sociology textbooks, today it has outlived whatever usefulness it might once have had as a way of describing the countries of the world. For one thing, the Second World of socialist and communist countries no longer exists and even exceptions such as China are rapidly adopting capitalist economies. It can also be argued that the ranking of First, Second and Third Worlds always reflected a value judgement, in which 'first' means 'best' and 'third' means 'worst'. It is therefore best avoided.

The developing world

Many developing societies are in areas that underwent colonial rule in Asia, Africa and South America. A few colonized areas gained independence early, like Haiti, which became the first autonomous black republic in January 1804. The Spanish colonies in South America acquired their freedom in 1810, while Brazil broke away from Portuguese rule in 1822. However, most nations in the developing world have become independent states only since the Second World War, often following bloody anti-colonial struggles. Examples include

India, a range of other Asian countries (like Burma, Malaysia and Singapore) and countries in Africa (including, for example, Kenya, Nigeria, Zaire, Tanzania and Algeria).

While they may include peoples living in traditional fashion, developing countries are very different from earlier forms of traditional societies. Their political systems are modelled on systems that were first established in the societies of the West – that is to say, they are nation-states. While most of the population still live in rural areas, many of these societies are experiencing a rapid process of urban development.

» The growth of cities in the developing world is discussed in chapter 6, 'Cities and Urban Life'.

Although agriculture remains the main economic activity, crops are now often produced for sale in world markets rather than for local consumption. Developing countries are not merely societies that have 'lagged behind' the more industrialized areas. They have been in large part created by contact with Western industrialism, which has undermined earlier, more traditional systems. Conditions in some of the most impoverished of these societies have deteriorated rather than improved over more recent years. There are still around one billion people living on the equivalent of less than one US dollar a day.

» Global poverty is discussed briefly in chapter 12, 'Poverty, Social Exclusion and Welfare', and in more detail in chapter 13, 'Global Inequality'.

The world's poor are concentrated particularly in South and East Asia and in Africa and Latin America, although there are some important differences between these regions. For example, poverty levels in East Asia and the Pacific have declined over the past decade, while they have risen in the nations of sub-Saharan Africa. During the 1990s, the number of people living on less than one dollar per day in this region has grown from 241 million to 315 million (World Bank 2004). There have also been significant increases in poverty in parts of South Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean. Many of the world's poorest countries also suffer from a serious debt crisis. Payments of interest on loans from foreign lenders can often amount to more than governments' investments in health, welfare and education.

Newly industrializing countries

While the majority of developing countries are not as economically developed as the societies of the West, some have successfully embarked on a process of industrialization. These countries are sometimes referred to as *newly industrializing countries* (NICs), including Brazil and Mexico in Latin America and Hong Kong, South Korea, Singapore and Taiwan in East Asia. The rates of economic growth of the most successful NICs, such as those in East Asia, are several times those of the Western industrial economies. No developing country figured among the top 30 exporters in the world in 1968, but 25 years later South Korea was in the top 15.

The East Asian NICs have shown the most sustained levels of economic prosperity. They are investing abroad as well as promoting growth at home. South Korea's production of steel has doubled in the last decade and its shipbuilding and electronics industries are among the world's leaders. Singapore is becoming the major financial and commercial centre of Southeast Asia. Taiwan is an important presence in the manufacturing and electronics industries. All these changes in the NICs have directly affected countries such as the United States, whose share of global steel production, for example, has dropped significantly over the past 30 years. Types of society in the modern world are summarized in table 4.4.

Social change

We saw at the start of this chapter how the modern world is characterized by modes of

Table 4.4 Societies in the modern world

Type	First World societies	Second World societies	Developing societies ('Third World societies')	Newly industrializing societies (NICs)
Period of existence	Eighteenth century to the present.	Early twentieth century (Russian Revolution of 1917 to early 1990s).	Eighteenth century (mostly as colonized areas) to the present.	1970s to the present.
Characteristics	Based on industrial production and generally free enterprise. Majority of people live in towns and cities; a few work in rural agricultural pursuits. Major class inequalities, though less pronounced than in traditional states. Distinct political communities or nation-states, including the nations of West, Japan, Australia and New Zealand.	Based on industry, but the economic system is centrally planned. Small proportion of the population work in agriculture; most live in towns and cities. Major class inequalities persist. Distinct political communities or nation-states. Until 1989, composed of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, but social and political changes began to transform them into free enterprise economic systems, according to the model of First World societies.	Majority of the population work in agriculture, using traditional methods of production. Some agricultural produce sold on world markets. Some have free enterprise systems, while others are centrally planned. Distinct political communities or nation-states, including China, India and most African and South American nations.	Former developing societies now based on industrial production and generally free enterprise. Majority of people live in towns and cities, a few work in agricultural pursuits. Major class inequalities, more pronounced than First World societies. Average per capita income considerably less than First World societies. Include Hong Kong, South Korea, Singapore, Taiwan, Brazil and Mexico.

life and social institutions that are radically different from those of even the recent past. Social change is difficult to define, because there is a sense in which everything changes, all of the time. Every day is a new day; every moment is a new instant in time. The Greek philosopher Heraclitus pointed out that a person cannot step into the same river twice. On the second occasion, the river is different, since water has flowed along it and the person has changed in subtle ways too. While this observation is in a sense correct, we do of course normally want to say that it is the same river and the same person stepping into it on the two occasions. There is sufficient continuity in the shape or form of the river and in the physique and personality of the person with wet feet to say that each remains 'the same' through the changes that occur. Given this problem, how do sociologists account for the processes of change that have transformed the way humans lived?

Identifying significant change involves showing how far there are alterations in the *underlying structure* of an object or

situation over a period of time. In the case of human societies, to decide how far and in what ways a system is in a process of change we have to show to what degree there is any modification of *basic institutions* during a specific period. All accounts of social change also involve showing what remains stable, as a baseline against which to measure alterations. The nineteenth-century sociologist, Auguste Comte, once described this as the study of social *dynamics* (change) and social *statics* (stability). Even in the rapidly moving world of today there are still continuities with the distant past. Major religious systems, for example, such as Christianity or Islam, retain their ties with ideas and practices initiated some 2,000 years ago. Yet most institutions in modern societies clearly change much more rapidly than did institutions of the traditional world.

Influences on social change

Over the past 200 years, sociologists and other social theorists have tried to develop a grand theory that explains the nature of social change. But no single factor theory could account for the diversity of human social development, from hunting and gathering and pastoral societies to traditional civilizations, and finally to the highly complex social systems of today. We can, however, identify the main factors that have consistently influenced patterns of social change: *cultural* factors, the *physical environment* and *political* organization.

Cultural factors

The first main influence on social change consists of cultural factors, which include the effects of religion, communication systems and leadership. Religion may be either a conservative or an innovative force in social life (see chapter 16, 'Religion'). Some forms of religious belief and practice have acted as a brake on change, emphasizing above all the need to adhere to traditional values and rituals. Yet, as Max Weber emphasized, religious convictions frequently play a mobilizing role in pressures for social change.

A particularly important cultural influence that affects the character and pace of change is the nature of communication systems. The invention of writing, for instance, allowed for the keeping of records, making possible increased control of material resources and the development of large-scale organizations. In addition, writing altered people's perception of the relation between past, present and future. Societies that write keep a record of past events and know themselves to have a history. Understanding history can develop a sense of the overall movement or line of development a society is following and people can then actively seek to promote it further. With the advent of the Internet, communication has become much faster and distance is less of an obstacle. It has also generated a more effective sense of global society than previously, which is one important aspect of globalization.

Under the general heading of cultural factors, we should also place leadership. Individual leaders have had an enormous influence in world history. We have only to think of great religious figures (like Jesus), political and military leaders (like Julius Caesar) or innovators in science and philosophy (like Isaac Newton) to see that this is the case. A leader capable of pursuing dynamic policies and generating a mass following or radically altering pre-existing modes of thought can overturn a previously established order. The classical sociologist Max Weber examined the role of charismatic leadership in social change.

Weber's conception of leadership is discussed in chapter 16, 'Religion'.

However, individuals can only reach positions of leadership and become effective if favourable social conditions exist. Adolf Hitler rose to power in Germany in the 1930s, for instance, partly as a result of the tensions and crises that beset the country at that time, which prompted people to look

Gandhi – shown here on an Indian banknote – fits Weber's concept of a charismatic leader. He helped bring about independence for India from British rule.

for simple solutions. If those circumstances had not existed, he would probably have remained an obscure figure within a minor political faction. The same was true at a later date of Mahatma Gandhi, the famous pacifist leader in India during the period after the Second World War. Gandhi was able to be effective in securing his country's independence from Britain because the war and other events had unsettled the existing colonial institutions in India.

The physical environment

The physical environment has an effect on the development of human social organization. This is clearest in more extreme environmental conditions, where people must organize their ways of life in relation to weather conditions. Inhabitants of polar regions necessarily develop habits and practices different from those living in subtropical areas. People who live in Alaska, where the winters are long and cold, tend to follow different patterns of social life from people who live in the much warmer Mediterranean countries. Alaskans spend more of their lives indoors and, except for the short summer period, plan outdoor activities very carefully, given the inhospitable environment in which they live.

Less extreme physical conditions can also affect society. The native population of Australia has never stopped being hunters and gatherers, since the continent contained hardly any indigenous plants suitable for regular cultivation, or animals that could be domesticated to develop pastoral production. The world's early civilizations mostly originated in areas that contained rich agricultural land – for instance, in river deltas. The ease of communications across land and the availability of sea routes are also important: societies cut off from others by mountain ranges, impassable jungles or deserts

Global Society 4.1 Humans and the domestication of fire

Over the course of human history, human beings gradually learned how to exert more control over the natural environment and were able to pass on this useful knowledge to geographically distant groups and to their own younger generations. In *Fire and Civilization* (1992), Dutch sociologist Johan Goudsblom (1932–) argues that an especially significant development in early human development was the discovery of fire and the invention of techniques for making, managing and keeping it under control.

Human groups that learned how to make and use fire gained dominance over those that did not. Eventually all human societies were able to make and use fire. The domestication of fire also enabled human beings to dominate over other animal species. Goudsblom's developmental history of fire shows something of the way that human societies try to manipulate and manage the natural environment to their own advantage. In the process, though, there is also new pressure on societies to change their own social organization. From small domestic fires used for keeping warm and cooking food, all the way to modern central heating systems and large power plants, the gradual expansion of fire-making has necessitated more complex forms of social organization. When early humans learned how to make and manage small fires, they had to organize themselves to keep fires going, to monitor them and, at the same time, to stay safe. Much later, with the introduction of domesticated forms of fire into private homes, societies needed specialists in fire control, fire brigades and fire-prevention advisers. With the advent of large power-generating stations, it has become important to protect these, militarily if necessary, from potential attacks. Today, more people are more dependent on the easy availability and control of fire than ever before.

Goudsblom notes one further consequence of the domestication of fire: the changing psychology of individuals. To be able to use fire, people had to overcome their previous fears of it, perhaps borne of seeing naturally occurring bush fires, lightning strikes or volcanoes. This was not an easy task. It meant controlling their fears and emotions long enough to be able to take advantage of the possible benefits of fire use. Such emotional control slowly came to be experienced as 'natural', so that people today hardly ever think about how long it has taken for humans to arrive at such high levels of emotional control over their feelings and deep-seated fears.

However, even today, fires still cause harm; destroying homes, families and businesses. Fire is always threatening to escape the control of human societies, however firmly established that control might seem. The sociological lesson we can take from this study is that the relationship between human societies and the natural environment is an unavoidable two-way process: human societies try to exert control over the natural environment, but, as they do so, the natural environment also imposes certain constraints and requirements on them.

often remain relatively unchanged over long periods of time.

Although the natural environment is a physical constraint on social change, many human groups thrive and generate wealth even within the most inhospitable areas. This is true, for example, of Alaskans, who have been able to develop oil and mineral resources in spite of the harsh nature of their environment. Conversely, hunting and gathering cultures have frequently lived in highly fertile regions without becoming involved in pastoral or agricultural production.

Political organization

A third factor that strongly influences social change is the type of political organization. In hunting and gathering societies, this influence is at a minimum, since there are no political authorities capable of mobilizing the community. In all other types of society, however, the existence of distinct political agencies – chiefs, lords, kings and

governments – strongly affects the course of development a society takes. Political systems are not, as Marx argued, direct expressions of underlying economic organization; quite different types of political order may exist in societies that have similar production systems. For instance, some societies based on industrial capitalism have had authoritarian political systems (examples are Nazi Germany and South Africa under apartheid), while others are much more democratic (for example, the United States, Britain or Sweden).

Military power played a fundamental part in the establishment of most traditional states; it influenced their subsequent survival or expansion in an equally basic way. But the connections between the level of production and military strength are again indirect. A ruler may choose to channel resources into building up the military, for example, even when this impoverishes most of the rest of the population – as has happened in North Korea under the rule of Kim Il Sung and his son, Kim Jong Il.

Change in the modern period

Why has the period of modernity seen such a tremendous acceleration of social change in the direction of globalization? This is a complex issue, but the key factors can be categorized along lines similar to those that have influenced social change throughout history, except that the impact of the physical environment can be subsumed within the overall importance of *economic* factors.

Cultural influences

Among the cultural factors affecting processes of social change in modern times, both the development of science and the secularization of thought have contributed to the critical and innovative character of the modern outlook. We no longer assume that customs or habits are acceptable merely because they have the age-old authority of tradition. On the contrary, our ways of life increasingly require a 'rational' basis. For instance, a design for a hospital would not be based mainly on traditional tastes, but would consider its capability for serving the purpose of a hospital – effectively caring for the sick.

In addition to *how* we think, the *content* of ideas has also changed. Ideals of self-betterment, freedom, equality and democratic participation are largely creations of the past two or three centuries. Such ideals have served to mobilize processes of social and political change, including revolutions. These ideas cannot be tied to tradition, but rather suggest the constant revision of ways of life in the pursuit of human betterment. Although they were initially developed in the West, such ideals have become genuinely universal in their application, promoting change in most regions of the world.

Economic influences

Of economic influences, the most far-reaching is the impact of capitalism. Capitalism differs in a fundamental way from pre-existing production systems, because it involves the constant expansion of production and the ever-increasing accumulation of wealth. In traditional production systems, levels of production were fairly static, as they were geared to habitual, customary needs. Capitalism promotes the constant revision of the technology of production, a process into which science is increasingly drawn. The rate of technological innovation fostered in modern industry is vastly greater than in any previous type of economic order.

Consider the current development of information technology. In recent decades, the power of computers has increased many thousands of times over. A large computer in the 1960s was constructed using thousands of handmade connectors; an equivalent device today is not only much smaller, but requires just a handful of elements in an integrated circuit.

The impact of science and technology on how we live may largely be driven by economic factors, but it also stretches

beyond the economic sphere. Science and technology both influence and are influenced by political and cultural factors. Scientific and technological development, for example, helped create modern forms of communication such as radio and television. As we have seen, such electronic forms of communication have produced changes in politics in recent years. Radio, television and the other electronic media have also come to shape how we think and feel about the world.

Political influences

The third major type of influence on change in the modern period consists of political developments. The struggle between nations to expand their power, develop their wealth and triumph militarily over their competitors has been an energizing source of change over the past two or three centuries. Political change in traditional civilizations was normally confined to elites. One aristocratic family, for example, would replace another as rulers, while for the majority of the population life would go on relatively unchanged. This is not true of modern political systems, in which the activities of political leaders and government officials constantly affect the lives of the mass of the population. Both externally and internally, political decision-making promotes and directs social change far more than in previous times.

Political development in the past two or three centuries has certainly influenced economic change as much as economic change has influenced politics. Governments now play a major role in stimulating (and sometimes retarding) rates of economic growth and in all industrial societies there is a high level of state intervention in production, the government being far and away the largest employer.

Military power and war have also been of far-reaching importance. The military strength of the Western nations from the seventeenth century onwards allowed them to influence all quarters of the world – and provided an essential backing to the global spread of Western lifestyles. In the twentieth century, the effects of the two world wars have been profound: the devastation of many countries led to processes of rebuilding that brought about major institutional changes, for example in Germany and Japan after the Second World War. Even those states that were the victors – like the UK – experienced major internal changes as a result of the impact of the war on the economy.

Globalization

The concept of globalization has become widely used in debates in politics, business and the media over recent years. Thirty years ago, the term globalization was relatively unknown, but today it seems to be on the tip of everyone's tongue. Globalization refers to the fact that we all increasingly live in one world, so that individuals, groups and nations become ever more *interdependent*. As we saw in the chapter introduction, globalization in this sense has been occurring over a very long period of human history and is certainly not restricted to the contemporary world. Nevertheless, current debates are much more focused on the sheer pace and intensity of globalization over the past 30 years or so. It is this central idea of an intensification of the globalization process which marks this short period out as rather different, and it is this sense of the concept that will concern us here.

The process of globalization is often portrayed solely as an economic phenomenon. Much is made of the role of transnational corporations whose massive operations now stretch across national borders, influencing global production processes and the international distribution of labour. Others point to the electronic integration of global financial markets and the enormous volume of global capital flows. Still others focus on the unprecedented scope of world trade, involving a much broader range of goods and services than ever before.

Global Society 4.2 Sociology and globalization in the sixth edition

The concept of globalization has had an enormous impact on the social sciences, including sociology. Indeed, there is hardly a sociological topic that has *not* been influenced by the emerging global frame of reference. For this reason, it is not possible to cover the impact of globalization on sociology in this single chapter. What we *can* offer here is a quick reference guide to the presence of global issues and globalization throughout the various chapters that make up the book.

Chapter 1 – Introduction to globalization in sociology and illustrative example of coffee.
Chapter 5 – The global risk society; global environmental issues (including global warming).
Chapter 6 – Global cities and their governance.
Chapter 8 – Global life expectancy and issues of ageing societies across the world.
Chapter 9 – Families in a global context.
Chapter 10 – Globalization and disability; HIV/AIDS in global context.
Chapter 11 – Impact of globalization on stratification systems.
Chapter 13 – Globalization, inequalities and unequal life chances across the world.
Chapter 14 – Globalization and the gender order; the global sex industry.
Chapter 15 – The 'age of migration' and globalization.
Chapter 16 – Religious belief and responses to globalization.
Chapter 17 – Global mass media; the role of new technologies in processes of globalization.
Chapter 18 – International organizations and global social networks.
Chapter 19 – Education in global context; globalization and e-universities.
Chapter 20 – Globalization, the workplace and employment trends.
Chapter 21 – Globalization, organized crime and cybercrime.
Chapter 22 – Global spread of democracy; globalization and social movements.
Chapter 23 – Terrorism and globalization; old and new wars.

Although economic forces are an integral part of globalization, it would be wrong to suggest that they *alone* produce it. The coming together of political, social, cultural and economic factors creates contemporary globalization.

Factors contributing to globalization

Intensified globalization has been driven forward above all by the development of information and communication technologies that have intensified the speed and scope of interaction between people all over the world. As a simple example, think of the last football World Cup. Because of global television links, some matches are now watched by *billions* of people across the world.

The rise of information and communications technology

The explosion in global communications has been facilitated by a number of important advances in technology and the world's telecommunications infrastructure. In the post-Second World War era, there has been a profound transformation in the scope and intensity of telecommunications flows. Traditional telephonic communication, which depended on analogue signals sent through wires and cables with the help of mechanical crossbar switching, has been replaced by integrated systems in which vast amounts of information are compressed and transferred digitally. Cable technology has become more efficient and less expensive; the development of fibre-optic cables has dramatically expanded the number of channels that can be carried. The earliest transatlantic cables laid in the 1950s were capable of carrying fewer than

Classic Studies 4.1 Immanuel Wallerstein on the modern world-system

The research problem

Many students come to sociology to find answers to the big questions of social life. For example, why are some countries rich and others desperately poor? How have some previously poor countries managed to develop to become relatively wealthy, while others have not? Such questions concerning global inequalities and economic development underpin the work of the American historical sociologist, Immanuel Wallerstein (1930–). In addressing these issues, Wallerstein also sought to take forward Marxist theories of social change in a global age. In 1976 he helped to found the Fernand Braudel Center for the Study of Economies, Historical Systems and Civilizations at Binghamton University, New York, which has become a focus for his world-system research.

Wallerstein's explanation

Before the 1970s, social scientists had tended to discuss the world's societies in terms of those within the First, Second and Third worlds, based on their levels of capitalist enterprise, industrialization and urbanization (see table 4.4 above). The solution to Third World 'underdevelopment' was therefore thought to be more capitalism, industry or urbanization. Wallerstein rejected this dominant way of categorizing societies, arguing instead that there is only one world and that all societies are connected together within it via capitalist economic relationships. He described this complex intertwining of economies as the 'modern world-system', which was a pioneer of globalization theories. His main arguments about how this world-system emerged were outlined in a three-volume work, *The Modern World-System* (1974; 1980; 1989), which sets out his macrosociological perspective.

The origins of the modern world-system lie in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe, where colonialism enabled countries like Britain, Holland and France to exploit the resources of the countries they colonized. This allowed them to accumulate capital, which was ploughed back into the economy, thus driving forward production even further. This global division of labour created a group of rich countries, but also impoverished many others, thus preventing their development. Wallerstein argues that the process produced a world-system made up of a *core*, a *semi-periphery* and a *periphery* (see figure 4.3). And although it is clearly possible for individual countries to move 'up' into the core – as have some newly industrialized societies – or to drop 'down' into the semi-periphery and periphery, the structure of the modern world-system remains constant.

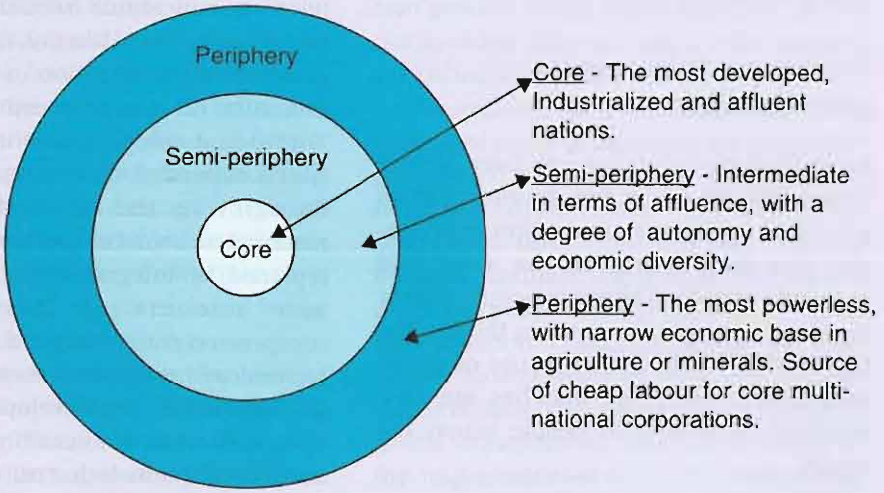


Figure 4.3 The modern world-system

Wallerstein's theory tries to explain why developing countries have found it so difficult to improve their position, but it also extends Marx's class-based conflict theory to the global level. In global terms, the world's periphery becomes the working class, while the core forms the exploitative capitalist class. In Marxist theory, this means any future socialist revolution is now more likely to occur in the developing countries, rather than the wealthy core as forecast by Marx. This is one reason why Wallerstein's ideas have been well received by political activists in the anti-capitalist and anti-globalization movements (the latter are discussed in chapter 22, 'Politics, Government and Social Movements').

Critical points

With its origins in the work of Karl Marx and Marxism, world-systems theory has faced some similar criticisms. First, world-systems theory tends to emphasize the economic dimension of social life and underplays the role of culture in explanations of social change. It has been argued, for example, that one reason why Australia and New Zealand were able to move out of the economic periphery more easily than others was due to their close ties with British industrialization, which enabled an industrial culture to take root more quickly. Second, the theory underplays the role of ethnicity, which is seen as merely a defensive reaction against the globalizing forces of the world-system. Therefore, major differences of religion and language are not seen as particularly important. Finally, it has been argued that Wallerstein uses his world-systems perspective to explain current events but is never prepared to consider that such events may falsify the theory or that alternative theories may provide a better explanation.

Contemporary significance

Wallerstein's work has been important in alerting sociologists to the interconnected character of the modern capitalist world economy and its globalizing effects. He therefore has to be given credit for early recognition of the significance of globalization, even though his emphasis on economic activity is widely seen as somewhat limited. Wallerstein's approach has attracted many scholars, and with an institutional base in the Fernand Braudel Center and an academic journal devoted to its extension – *The Journal of World-Systems Research* (since 1995) – world-systems analysis now seems to be an established research tradition.

100 voice paths, but by 1997 a single transoceanic cable could carry some 600,000 voice paths (Held et al. 1999). The spread of communications satellites, beginning in the 1960s, has also been significant in expanding international communications. Today, a network of more than 200 satellites is in place to facilitate the transfer of information around the globe.

The impact of these communications systems has been staggering. In countries with highly developed telecommunications infrastructures, homes and offices now have multiple links to the outside world, including telephones (both landlines and mobile phones), digital, satellite and cable television, electronic mail and the Internet. The Internet has emerged as the fastest-growing communication tool ever developed – some 140 million people worldwide were using the Internet in mid-1998. More than a billion people were estimated to be using the Internet by 2007 (table 4.5).

These forms of technology facilitate the compression of time and space (Harvey 1989): two individuals located on opposite sides of the planet – in Tokyo and London, for example – can not only hold a conversation in real time, but can also send documents and images to one another with the help of satellite technology. Widespread use of the Internet and mobile phones is deepening and accelerating processes of globalization; more and more people are becoming interconnected through the use of these technologies and are doing so in places that have previously been isolated or poorly served by

Internet access has become more freely available in more public settings, enabling online access to those without a personal computer at home.

traditional communications. Although the telecommunications infrastructure is not evenly developed around the world, a growing number of countries can now access international communications networks in a way that was previously impossible; over the past decade or so, Internet usage has been growing fastest in those areas that previously lagged behind – Africa and the Middle East for example (see table 4.5).

Information Flows

If, as we have seen, the spread of information technology has expanded the possibilities for contact among people around the globe, it has also facilitated the flow of information about people and events in distant places. Every day, the global media bring news, images and information into people's homes, linking them directly and continuously to the outside world. Some of the most gripping events of the past two or three decades – such as the fall of the Berlin Wall, the violent crackdown on democratic protesters in China's Tiananmen Square and the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 – have unfolded through the media before a truly global audience. Such events, along with thousands of less dramatic ones, have resulted in a reorientation in people's thinking from the level of the nation-state to the global stage. Individuals are now more aware of their interconnectedness with others and more likely to identify with global issues and processes than was the case in times past.

This shift to a global outlook has two significant dimensions. First, as members of

Table 4.5 The global spread of Internet usage

World Regions	Population (2007 est.)	Population % of world	Internet usage, latest data	% Population (penetration)	Usage % of world	% Usage growth 2000–7
Africa	933,448,292	14.2	33,334,800	3.6	3.0	638.4
Asia	3,712,527,624	56.5	398,709,065	10.7	35.8	248.8
Europe	809,624,686	12.3	314,792,225	38.9	28.3	199.5
Middle East	193,452,727	2.9	19,424,700	10.0	1.7	491.4
North America	334,538,018	5.1	233,188,086	69.7	20.9	115.7
Latin America/ Caribbean	556,606,627	8.5	96,386,009	17.3	8.7	433.4
Oceania / Australia	34,468,443	0.5	18,439,541	53.5	1.7	142.0
WORLD TOTAL	6,574,666,417	100.0	1,114,274,426	16.9	100.0	208.7

Source: www.internetworldstats.com, 2007

a global community, people increasingly perceive that social responsibility does not stop at national borders but instead extends beyond them. Disasters and injustices facing people on the other side of the globe are not simply misfortunes that must be endured but are legitimate grounds for action and intervention. There is a growing assumption that the international community has an obligation to act in crisis situations to protect the physical well-being or human rights of people whose lives are under threat. In the case of natural disasters, such interventions take the form of humanitarian relief and technical assistance. In recent years, earthquakes in Turkey and China, the Indian Ocean tsunami, famine in Africa and hurricanes in Central America have all been rallying points for global assistance.

There have also been stronger calls in recent years for interventions in the case of war, ethnic conflict and the violation of human rights, although such mobilizations are more problematic than in the case of natural disasters. Yet in the case of the first Gulf War in 1991 and the violent conflicts in the former Yugoslavia (Bosnia and Kosovo), military intervention was seen as justified by many people who argued that human rights and national sovereignty had to be defended.

Second, a global outlook means that people are increasingly looking to sources other than the nation-state in formulating their own sense of identity. This is a phenomenon that is both produced by and further accelerates processes of globalization. Local cultural identities in various parts of the world are experiencing powerful revivals at a time when the traditional hold of the nation-state is undergoing profound transformation. In Europe, for example, inhabitants of Scotland and the Basque region of Spain might be more likely to identify themselves as Scottish or Basque – or simply as Europeans – rather than as British or Spanish. The nation-state as a source of identity is waning in many areas, as political shifts at the regional and global levels loosen people's orientations towards the states in which they live.

Economic factors

Globalization is also being driven forward by the continuing integration of the world economy. In contrast to previous eras, the global economy is no longer primarily agricultural or industrial in its basis. Rather, it is increasingly dominated by activity that is

Coca-Cola is a transglobal enterprise, selling its products all over the world. This picture shows Diet Coke on sale in Jordan, in the Middle East.

weightless and intangible (Quah 1999). This *weightless economy* is one in which products have their base in information, as is the case with computer software, media and entertainment products and Internet-based services. This new economic context has been described using a variety of terms, which we will discuss in more detail in chapter 20, including 'post-industrial society', 'the information age' and 'the new economy'. The emergence of the knowledge society has been linked to the development of a broad base of consumers who are technologically literate and eagerly integrate new advances in computing, entertainment and telecommunications into their everyday lives.

The very operation of the global economy reflects the changes that have occurred in the information age. Many aspects of the economy now work through networks that cross national boundaries, rather than stopping at them (Castells 1996). In order to be competitive in globalizing conditions, businesses and corporations have restructured themselves to be more flexible and less hierarchical in nature. Production practices and organizational patterns have become more flexible, partnering arrangements with other firms have become commonplace and participation in worldwide distribution networks has become essential for doing business in a rapidly changing global market.

Transnational corporations

Among the many economic factors that are driving globalization, the role of transnational corporations is particularly important. Transnational corporations are companies that produce goods or market services in more than one country. These

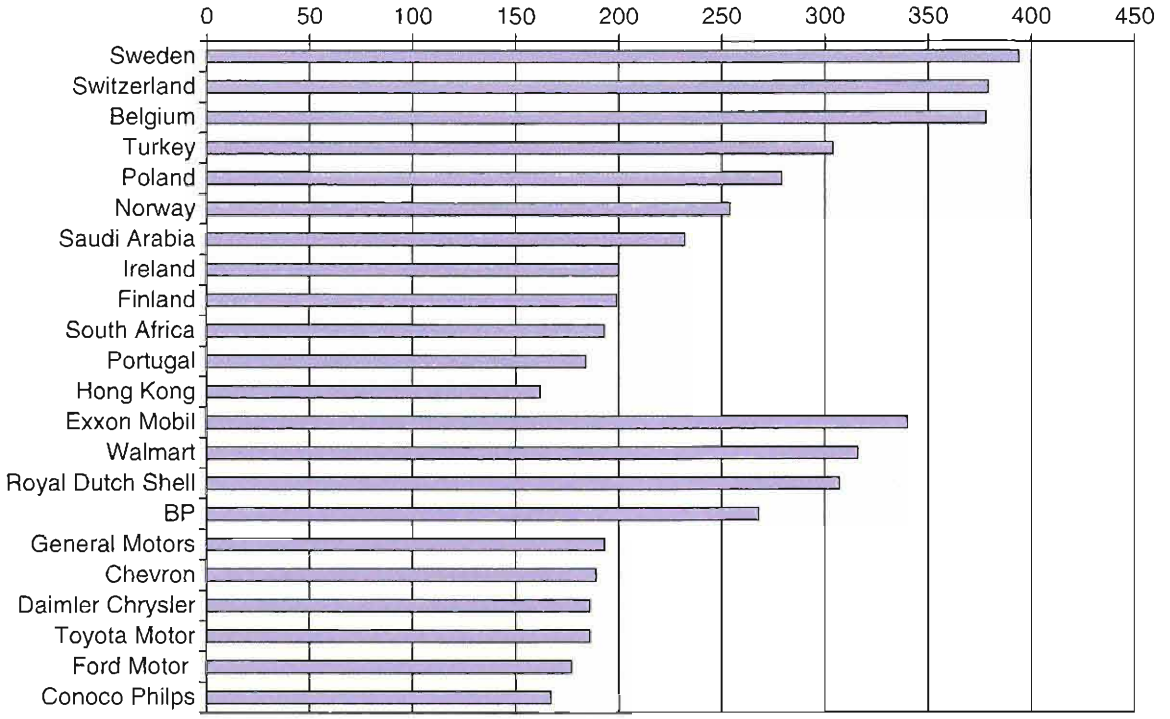


Figure 4.4 Revenue of world's biggest companies compared with GDP of selected countries, 2005–6

Source: Compiled from *Fortune* magazine's 'Global 500', 4 July 2006, and *The Economist*, 2005

may be relatively small firms with one or two factories outside the country in which they are based, or gigantic international ventures whose operations criss-cross the globe. Some of the biggest transnational corporations are companies known all around the world: Coca-Cola, General Motors, Colgate-Palmolive, Kodak, Mitsubishi and many others. Even when transnational corporations have a clear national base, they are oriented towards global markets and global profits.

Transnational corporations are at the heart of economic globalization. They account for two-thirds of all world trade, they are instrumental in the diffusion of new technology around the globe and they are major actors in international financial markets. As one observer has noted, they are 'the lynchpins of the contemporary world economy' (Held et al. 1999). Some 500 transnational corporations had annual sales of more than $10 billion in 2001, while only 75 *countries* could boast gross domestic products of at least that amount. In other words, the world's leading transnational corporations are larger economically than most of the world's countries (see figure 4.4). In fact, the combined sales of the world's largest 500 transnational corporations totalled $14.1 trillion – nearly half of the value of goods and services produced by the entire world.

Transnational corporations became a global phenomenon in the years following the Second World War. Expansion in the initial post-war years came from firms based in the United States, but by the 1970s, European and Japanese firms increasingly began to invest abroad. In the late 1980s and 1990s, transnational corporations expanded dramatically with the establishment of three

powerful regional markets: Europe (the Single European Market), Asia-Pacific (the Osaka Declaration guaranteed free and open trade by 2010) and North America (the North American Free Trade Agreement). Since the early 1990s, countries in other areas of the world have also liberalized restrictions on foreign investment. By the turn of the twenty-first century, there were few economies in the world that stood beyond the reach of transnational corporations. Over the past decade, transnational corporations based in industrialized economies have been particularly active in expanding their operations in developing countries and in the societies of the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.

THINKING CRITICALLY

Reflecting on your knowledge of transnational corporations to date, are they really more powerful than national governments? How could national governments increase the possibility of influencing their own nation's development? Which of the sociological theories we introduced in chapter 1 would best explain the rise and increasing power of transnational corporations?

The argument that manufacturing is becoming increasingly globalized is often expressed in terms of global commodity chains, the worldwide networks of labour and production processes yielding a finished product. These networks consist of all pivotal production activities that form a tightly interlocked 'chain' that extends from the raw materials needed to create the product to its final consumer (Gereffi 1995; Hopkins and Wallerstein 1996; Appelbaum and Christerson 1997).

Manufactures accounted for approximately three-quarters of the world's total economic growth during the period 1990–8. The sharpest growth has been among middle-income countries: manufactures accounted for only 54 per cent of these countries' exports in 1990, compared with 71 per cent just eight years later. China has moved from the ranks of a low- to a middle-income country, largely because of its role as an exporter of manufactured goods, and partly accounts for this trend. Yet the most profitable activities in the commodity chain – engineering, design and advertising – are likely to be found in the core countries, while the least profitable activities, such as factory production, usually are found in peripheral countries. The use of global commodity chains in the manufacture of the Barbie doll is examined in 'Using your sociological imagination 4.1'.

THINKING CRITICALLY

Which social groups, organizations and societies stand to benefit from the operation of global commodity chains? What are the negative consequences of such global economic activity and who stands to lose out? Does the globalizing of economic life primarily help or hinder the progress of the world's developing countries?

The electronic economy

The 'electronic economy' now underpins economic globalization. Banks, corporations, fund managers and individual investors are able to shift funds internationally with the click of a mouse. This new ability to move 'electronic money' instantaneously carries with it great risks, however. Transfers of vast amounts of capital can destabilize economies, triggering international financial crises such as the ones that spread from the Asian 'tiger economies' to Russia and beyond in 1998. As the global economy becomes increasingly integrated, a financial collapse in one part of the world can have an enormous effect on distant economies.

The political, economic, social and technological factors described above are joining together to produce a phenomenon that

USING YOUR SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION

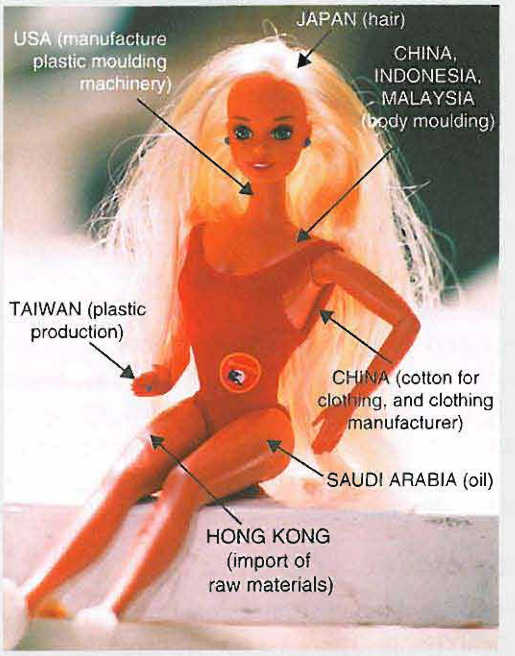
4.1 'Barbie' and the development of global commodity chains

One illustration of the global commodity chain can be found in the manufacture of the Barbie doll, the most profitable toy in history. The 40-something teenage doll sells at a rate of two per second, bringing the Mattel Corporation, based in Los Angeles, USA, well over a billion dollars in annual revenues. Although the doll sells mainly in the United States, Europe and Japan, Barbie can also be found in 140 countries around the world. Barbie is a truly global citizen (Tempest 1996). Barbie is global not only in sales, but in terms of her birthplace as well. Barbie was never made in the United States. The first doll was made in Japan in 1959, when that country was still recovering from the Second World War and wages were low. As wages rose in Japan, Barbie moved to other low-wage countries in Asia. Her multiple origins today tell us a great deal about the operation of global commodity chains.

Barbie is designed in the United States, where her marketing and advertising strategies are devised and where most of the profits are made. But the only physical aspect of Barbie that is 'made in the USA' is her cardboard packaging, along with some of the paints and oils that are used to decorate the doll.

Barbie's body and wardrobe span the globe in their origins:

1 Barbie begins her life in Saudi Arabia, where oil is extracted and then refined into the ethylene that is used to create her plastic body.
2 Taiwan's state-owned oil importer, the Chinese Petroleum Corporation, buys the ethylene and sells it to Taiwan's Formosa Plastic Corporation, the world's largest producer of polyvinyl chloride (PVC) plastics, which are used in toys. Formosa Plastics converts the ethylene into the PVC pellets that will be shaped to make Barbie's body.
3 The pellets are then shipped to one of the four Asian factories that make Barbie – two in southern China, one in Indonesia and one in Malaysia. The plastic mould injection machines that shape her body, which are the most expensive part of Barbie's manufacture, are made in the United States and shipped to the factories.
4 Once Barbie's body is moulded, she gets her nylon hair from Japan. Her cotton dresses are made in China, with Chinese cotton – the only raw material in Barbie that actually comes from the country where most Barbies are made.
5 Hong Kong plays a key role in the manufacturing process of the Chinese Barbies. Nearly all the material used in her manufacture is shipped into Hong Kong – one of the world's largest ports – and then trucked to the factories in China. The finished Barbies leave by the same route. Some 23,000 trucks make the daily trip between Hong Kong and southern China's toy factories.



'Global Barbie'

So where is Barbie actually from? The cardboard and cellophane box containing the 'My First Tea Party' Barbie is labelled 'Made in China', but, as we have seen, almost none of the materials that go into making her actually originate in that country. Out of her $9.99 retail price in the USA (about £5), China gets only about 35 cents, mainly in wages paid to the 11,000 peasant women who assemble her in the two factories. Back in the United States, on the other hand, Mattel makes about $1 in profits.

What about the rest of the money that is made when Barbie is sold for $9.99? Only 65 cents is needed to cover the plastics, cloth, nylon and other materials used in her manufacture. Most of the money goes to pay for machinery and equipment, transoceanic shipping and domestic trucking, advertising and merchandising, retail floor space – and, of course, the profits of Toys 'Я' Us and other retailers. What Barbie production and consumption shows us is the effectiveness of globalization processes in connecting together the world's economies. However, it also demonstrates the unevenness of globalization's impact, which enables some countries to benefit at the expense of others. This means that we cannot assume that global commodity chains will inevitably promote development right across the chain of societies involved.

lacks any earlier parallel in terms of its intensity and scope. The consequences of globalization are many and far-reaching, as we shall see later in this chapter. But first we will turn our attention to the main views about globalization that have been expressed in recent years.

Political changes

Contemporary globalization is also related to political change. There are several aspects to this. First, the collapse of Soviet-style communism that occurred in a series of dramatic revolutions in Eastern Europe in 1989 and culminated in the dissolution of the Soviet Union itself in 1991. Since the fall of communism, countries in the former Soviet bloc – including Russia, Ukraine, Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, the Baltic states, the states of the Caucasus and Central Asia and many others – have been moving towards Western-style political and economic systems. They are no longer isolated from the global community, but are becoming integrated within it. This development has meant the end to the system that existed during the Cold War, when countries of the First World stood apart from those of the Second World. The collapse of communism has hastened processes of globalization, but should also be seen as a result of globalization itself. The centrally planned communist economies and the ideological and cultural control of communist political authority were ultimately unable to survive in an era of global media and an electronically integrated world economy.

A second important political factor leading to intensifying globalization is the growth of international and regional mechanisms of government. The United Nations and the European Union are the two most prominent examples of international organizations that bring together nation-states into a common political forum. While the UN does this as an association of individual nation-states, the EU is a more pioneering form of transnational governance in which a certain degree of national sovereignty is relinquished by its member states. The governments of individual EU states are bound by directives, regulations and court judgements from common EU bodies, but they also reap economic, social and political benefits from their participation in the regional union.

Finally, globalization is being driven by international governmental organizations (IGOs) and international non-governmental organizations (INGOs). An IGO is a body that is established by participating governments and given responsibility for regulating or overseeing a particular domain of activity that is transnational in scope. The first such body, the International Telegraph Union, was founded in 1865. Since that time, a great number of similar bodies have been created to regulate issues ranging from civil aviation to broadcasting to the disposal of hazardous waste. In 1909, there were 37 IGOs in existence to regulate transnational affairs; by 1996, there were 260 (Held et al. 1999).

As the name suggests, international non-governmental organizations differ from IGOs in that they are not affiliated with government institutions. Rather, they are independent organizations that work alongside governmental bodies in making policy

Table 4.6 Conceptualizing globalization: three tendencies

	Hyperglobalizers (Ohmae 1990, 1995; Albrow 1997)	Sceptics (Boyer & Drache 1996; Hirst 1997; Hirst & Thompson 1999)	Transformationalists (Sassen 1991; Rosenau 1997)
What's new?	A global age	Trading blocs, weaker geo-governance than in earlier periods	Historically unprecedented levels of global inter-connectedness
Dominant features?	Global capitalism, global governance, global civil society	World less interdependent than in 1890s	'Thick' (intensive and extensive) globalization
Power of national governments?	Declining or eroding	Reinforced or enhanced	Reconstituted, restructured
Driving forces of globalization?	Capitalism and technology	Governments and markets	Combined forces of modernity
Pattern of stratification?	Erosion of old hierarchies	Increased marginalization of South	New architecture of world order
Dominant motif?	McDonald's, Madonna, etc.	National interest	Transformation of political community
Conceptualization of globalization?	A reordering of the framework of human action	Internationalization and regionalization	Reordering of inter-regional relations and action at a distance
Historical trajectory?	Global civilization	Regional blocs / clash of civilizations.	Indeterminate: global integration and fragmentation.
Summary argument	The end of the nation-state	Internationalization depends on government acquiescence and support	Globalization transforming government power and world politics.

Source: Adapted from Held et al. 1999: 10

decisions and addressing international issues. Some of the best-known INGOs – such as Greenpeace, Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders), the Red Cross and Amnesty International – are involved in environmental protection and humanitarian efforts. But the activities of thousands of lesser-known groups also link together countries and communities.

Contesting globalization

In recent years, globalization has become a hotly debated topic. Most people accept that there are important transformations occurring around us, but the extent to which it is valid to explain these as 'globalization' is contested. This is not entirely surprising. As an unpredictable and turbulent process, globalization is seen and understood very differently by observers.

David Held and colleagues (Held et al. 1999) have surveyed the controversy and divided its participants into three schools of thought: sceptics, hyperglobalizers and transformationalists. These three tendencies within the globalization debate are summarized in table 4.6. Note that the authors cited under each school are selected because their work contains some

of the key arguments that define that particular school's approach.

The sceptics

Some analysts argue that the idea of globalization is overstated and that most theories of globalization amount to a lot of talk about something that is not really new. The sceptics in the globalization controversy argue that present levels of economic interdependence are not unprecedented. Pointing to nineteenth-century statistics on world trade and investment, they contend that modern globalization differs from the past only in the intensity of interaction between nations.

The sceptics agree that there may now be more contact between countries than in previous eras, but in their eyes the current world economy is not sufficiently integrated to constitute a truly globalized economy. This is because the bulk of trade occurs within three regional groups – Europe, Asia-Pacific and North America – rather than a genuinely globalized context. The countries of the European Union, for example, trade predominantly amongst themselves. The same is true of the other regional groups, thereby invalidating the notion of a single global economy (Hirst 1997).

Many sceptics focus on processes of *regionalization* within the world economy – such as the emergence of major financial and trading blocs. To sceptics, the growth of regionalization is evidence that the world economy has become *less* integrated rather than more so (Boyer and Drache 1996; Hirst and Thompson 1999). Compared with the patterns of trade that prevailed a century ago, it is argued that the world economy is actually less global in its geographical scope and more concentrated on intense pockets of activity.

Sceptics also reject the view that globalization is fundamentally undermining the role of national governments and producing a world order in which they are less central. According to the sceptics, national governments continue to be key players because of their involvement in regulating and coordinating economic activity. Governments, for example, are the driving force behind many trade agreements and policies of economic liberalization.

The hyperglobalizers

Hyperglobalizers take an opposing position to that of the sceptics. They argue that globalization is a very real phenomenon whose consequences can be felt everywhere. Globalization is seen as a process that is indifferent to national borders, producing a new global order, swept along by powerful flows of cross-border trade and production. One of the best-known hyperglobalizers, the Japanese writer Kenichi Ohmae (1990, 1995), sees globalization as leading to a 'borderless world' – a world in which market forces are more powerful than national governments.

Much of the analysis of globalization offered by hyperglobalizers focuses on the changing role of the nation-state. It is argued that individual countries no longer control their economies because of the vast growth in world trade. National governments and the politicians within them are increasingly unable to exercise control over the issues that cross their borders – such as volatile financial markets and environmental threats. Citizens recognize that politicians are limited in their ability to address these problems and, as a result, lose faith in existing systems of governance. Some hyperglobalizers suggest that the power of national governments is also being challenged from above – by new regional and international institutions, such as the European Union, the World Trade Organization and others.

Taken together, these shifts signal to the hyperglobalizers the dawning of a global age in which national governments decline in importance and influence (Albrow 1997).

The transformationalists

Transformationalists take a position somewhere between sceptics and hyperglobaliz-

ers. They see globalization as the central force behind a broad spectrum of changes that are currently shaping modern societies, but though the global order *is* being transformed, many of the old patterns remain. National governments, for instance, still retain a good deal of power in spite of the advance of global interdependence. These transformations are not restricted to economics alone, but are equally prominent within the realms of politics, culture and personal life. Transformationalists contend that the current level of globalization is breaking down established boundaries between the internal and external, the international and domestic. In trying to adjust to this new order, societies, institutions and individuals are being forced to navigate contexts where previous structures have been shaken up.

Unlike hyperglobalizers, transformationalists see globalization as a dynamic and open process that is subject to influence and change. It is developing in a contradictory fashion, encompassing tendencies that frequently operate in opposition to one another. Globalization is, therefore, not a one-way process but a two-way flow of images, information and influences. Global migration, mass media and telecommunications are contributing to the diffusion of cultural influences. The world's vibrant 'global cities' such as London, New York and Tokyo are thoroughly multicultural, with ethnic groups and cultures intersecting and living side by side (Sassen 1991). According to transformationalists, globalization is a decentred and reflexive process characterized by links and cultural flows that work in a multidirectional way. Because globalization is the product of numerous intertwined global networks, it cannot be seen as being driven from one particular part of the world.

Rather than losing sovereignty, as the hyperglobalizers argue, nation-states are restructuring in response to new forms of economic and social organization that are non-territorial in basis, including corporations, social movements and international bodies. Transformationalists argue that we are no longer living in a state-centric world; governments are being forced to adopt a more active and outward-looking stance towards governance under the complex conditions of globalization (Rosenau 1997).

Evaluation

Which view is best supported by the evidence? At this point, probably that of the transformationalists, which suggests that global processes are having a great impact on many aspects of life across the world, but that this impact is not completely transforming the world's societies. However, we cannot be certain how globalization will progress in the future, as this partly depends on the actions and reactions of those groups, organizations and governments caught up in it, which are difficult to forecast.

Sceptics tend to underestimate just how much the world is changing; world finance markets, for example, are organized on a global level much more than they ever were before. It is also the case that the increasing movement of people around the world, alongside more immediately effective forms of communication, are transforming people's everyday experience of the world and their view of it. The sceptical viewpoint tends to underplay this experiential aspect of the process.

Hyperglobalizers, on the other hand, focus on *economic* globalization and tend to see this as a linear, or one-way process with a clearly defined endpoint: a global economy and, hence, a global society. In reality, the globalization process is more complex than this picture implies and the endpoint cannot be determined from present trends as these may well change. For example, the idea of a 'borderless world' may be an accurate description of the forces at work in economic globalization, but whether or not it becomes reality will depend on political decisions taken at national government level. Indeed, many countries around the world are seeking to tighten their border

controls precisely to prevent that borderless world ever being created in the first place.

Held et al's (1999) threefold scheme is useful, in so far as it alerts us to some of the main points at issue, but it is not the only way of thinking about globalization. For example, in this debate, all three positions focus primarily on the *modern* process of rapid globalization and its consequences for the future. However, it may be better to set contemporary globalization processes into a longer timeframe. In this chapter we made an early distinction between the global spread of human societies over the very long term and the intensified globalization process of recent times. In this way it is possible to see the extended development of human societies as leading *towards* more global patterns of interdependent relations, while also acknowledging that this was not and is not inevitable. An example will make this point clear.

As we noted earlier, historically, globalization has been as much the product of conflicts, wars and invasion as of cooperation and agreement between social groups and societies. Since 1945, the world has lived with the immense destructive potential of nuclear weapons and the prospect of conflict between nuclear powers resulting in mutually assured destruction (MAD) for the combatants (and others). Such a conflict would surely halt the current process of rapid globalization and eliminate most of those interdependent relations that some see as inevitably leading to a global society. With nuclear proliferation still a very significant international issue and nuclear power increasingly seen by governments as a solution to global warming (see chapter 5, 'The Environment'), this scenario cannot be completely ruled out even today. Human conflicts *have* made a major contribution to globalization, but they also have the potential to send it into reverse.

» **Chapter 23, 'Nations, War and Terrorism', contains an extended discussion of war and conflict.**

The impact of globalization

In chapter 1, we found that the chief focus of sociology has historically been the study of the industrialized societies. However, as sociologists we must also pay attention to the developing world, rather than leaving this to anthropologists. The industrialized and the developing societies have developed in interconnection with one another and are today more closely related than ever before. Those of us living in the industrialized societies depend on many raw materials and manufactured products from developing countries to sustain our lives. Conversely, the economies of most developing states depend on trading networks that bind them to the industrialized countries. We can only fully understand the industrialized order against the backdrop of societies in the developing world – in which by far the greater proportion of the world's population lives – sometimes described as the 'majority world'.

Take a close look at the array of products on display the next time you walk into a local shop or supermarket. The diversity of goods we in the West have come to take for granted as available for anyone with the money to buy them depends on amazingly complex economic connections stretching across the world. The store products have been made in, or use ingredients or parts from, a hundred different countries. These parts must be regularly transported across the globe, and constant flows of information are necessary to coordinate the millions of daily transactions.

As the world rapidly moves towards a single, unified economy, businesses and people move about the globe in increasing numbers in search of new markets and economic opportunities. As a result, the cultural map of the world changes: networks of peoples span national borders and even continents, providing cultural connections between their birthplaces and their adoptive countries (Appadurai 1986). Although there are between 5,000 and 6,000 languages spoken on the planet, around 98

Classic Studies 4.2 Anthony Giddens: riding the juggernaut of modernity

The research problem

What impact is globalization likely to have on people's everyday lives? How will globalization change the modern world that we all increasingly inhabit? Can anyone just ignore or escape the forces of globalization? In a series of books, articles and lectures since the early 1990s, I have tried to explore the characteristics of the emerging global form of modernity and its consequences for everyday life (1991a, 1991b, 1993, 2001). In particular, I have been interested in the decline of traditions, our increasing risk awareness and the changing nature of trust within our relationships.

Giddens's explanation

In *The Consequences of Modernity*, I outlined my view that the global spread of modernity tends to produce a 'runaway world', in which, it appears, no one and no government is in overall control. While Marx used the image of a monster to describe modernity, I liken it to riding onboard a huge truck or 'juggernaut':

> I suggest we should substitute that of the juggernaut – a runaway engine of enormous power, which, collectively as human beings, we can drive to some extent but which also threatens to rush out of our control and which could rend itself asunder. The juggernaut crushes those who resist it, and while it sometimes seems to have a steady path, there are times when it veers away erratically in directions we cannot foresee. The ride is by no means unpleasant or unrewarding; it can often be exhilarating and charged with hopeful anticipation. But, as long as the institutions of modernity endure, we shall never be able to control completely either the path or the pace of the journey. In turn, we shall never be able to feel entirely secure, because the terrain across which it runs is fraught with risks of high consequence. Feelings of ontological security and existential anxiety will co-exist in ambivalence. (1991b: 139)

The globalizing form of modernity is marked by new uncertainties, new risks and changes to people's trust in other individuals and social institutions. In a world of rapid change, traditional forms of trust are dissolved. Our trust in other people used to be based in local communities, but in more globalized societies, our lives are influenced by people we never meet or know, who may live on the far side of the world from us. Such impersonal relationships means we are pushed to 'trust' or have confidence in 'abstract systems', such as food production and environmental regulation agencies or international banking systems. In this way, trust and risk are closely bound together. Trust in authorities is necessary if we are to confront the risks around us and react to them in an effective way. But *this* type of trust is not habitually given, but the subject of reflection and revision.

When societies were more reliant on knowledge gained from custom and tradition, people could follow established ways of doing things without too much reflection. For modern people, aspects of life that earlier generations were able to take for granted become matters of open decision-making, producing what I call 'reflexivity' – the continuous reflection on our everyday actions and reformation of these in the light of new knowledge. For example, whether to marry (or divorce) is a very personal decision, which may take account of family and friends' advice. But official statistics and sociological research on marriage and divorce also filter into social life, becoming widely known and shared, thus becoming part of an individual's decision-making.

For me, these characteristic features of modernity point to the conclusion that global modernity is a form of social life that is discontinuous with previous forms. In many ways, the globalization of modernity marks not the ending of modern societies or a movement beyond them (as in *post*modernism – see chapter 3), but a new stage of 'late' or 'high' modernity which takes the tendencies embedded within modern life into a more far-reaching global phase.

Critical points

My critics argue that perhaps I exaggerate the discontinuity between modernity and previous

societies and that tradition and habit continues to structure people's everyday activities. The modern period is not so unique, they say, and modern people are not so different from those that went before. Others think that my account of globalizing modernity underplays the central sociological question of power; in particular the power of transnational corporations to influence governments and promote a form of globalization that privileges the needs of business at the expense of the world's poor. The concept of 'modernity' essentially masks the power of capitalist corporations. Finally, some have argued that I see reflexivity as a wholly positive development, reflecting the opening up of social life to more choice. However, such reflexivity could also be leading to heightened levels of 'anomie', as described by Durkheim, and in that sense, reflexivity may be more of a problem to be solved than a welcome element to be promoted.

Contemporary significance

Because theories of globalization are relatively recent and I continue to develop my theories of modern life, it is very much a 'work in progress'. The ideas I have developed have been taken in fruitful directions by other sociologists and, in that sense, it is satisfying to have provided a theoretical framework and some conceptual tools for younger generations to take forward and develop. As is evident from the contribution of the critics of my work on modernity, reflexivity and trust relationships, this has provoked much sociological debate. I hope that it will continue to do so in the future and readers will, no doubt, come to their own assessment of it.

per cent of these are used by just 10 per cent of the global population. Just a dozen languages have come to dominate the global language system, with more than 100 million speakers each: Arabic, Chinese, English, French, German, Hindi, Japanese, Malay, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish and Swahili. And just one language – English – has become 'hypercentral', as first choice for most second-language speakers. It is these 'bilinguals' who bind together the whole global language system (de Swaan 2001).

It is increasingly impossible for discrete cultures to exist as islands. There are few, if any, places on earth so remote as to escape radio, television, air travel – and the throngs of tourists they bring – or the computer. A generation ago, there were still tribes whose way of life was completely untouched by the rest of the world. Today, these peoples use machetes and other tools made in the United States or Japan, wear T-shirts and shorts manufactured in garment factories in the Dominican Republic or Guatemala, and take medicine manufactured in Germany or Switzerland to combat diseases contracted through contact with outsiders. These people also have their stories broadcast to people around the world through satellite television and the Internet. Within a generation or two at the most, all the world's once-isolated cultures will be touched and transformed by global culture, despite their persistent efforts to preserve their age-old ways of life.

The forces that produce a global culture will be discussed throughout this book. They include:

1 Television, which brings British and American culture (through networks and programmes such as the BBC, MTV or *Friends*) into homes throughout the world daily, while adapting cultural products from the Netherlands (such as *Big Brother*) or Sweden (such as *Expedition: Robinson*, which became *Survivor*) for British and American audiences.
2 The emergence of a unified global economy, with business whose factories, management structures and markets often span continents and countries.
3 'Global citizens', such as managers of large corporations, who may spend as much time criss-crossing the globe as

Global Society 4.3 Globalization and reggae music

When those knowledgeable about popular music listen to a song, they can often pick out the stylistic influences that helped shape it. Each musical style, after all, represents a unique way of combining rhythm, melody, harmony and lyrics. And while it does not take a genius to notice the differences between rock, R&B or folk, for example, musicians often combine a number of styles in composing songs. Identifying the components of these combinations can be difficult. But for sociologists, the effort is often rewarding. Different musical styles tend to emerge from different social groups, and studying how styles combine and fuse is a good way to chart the cultural contacts between groups.

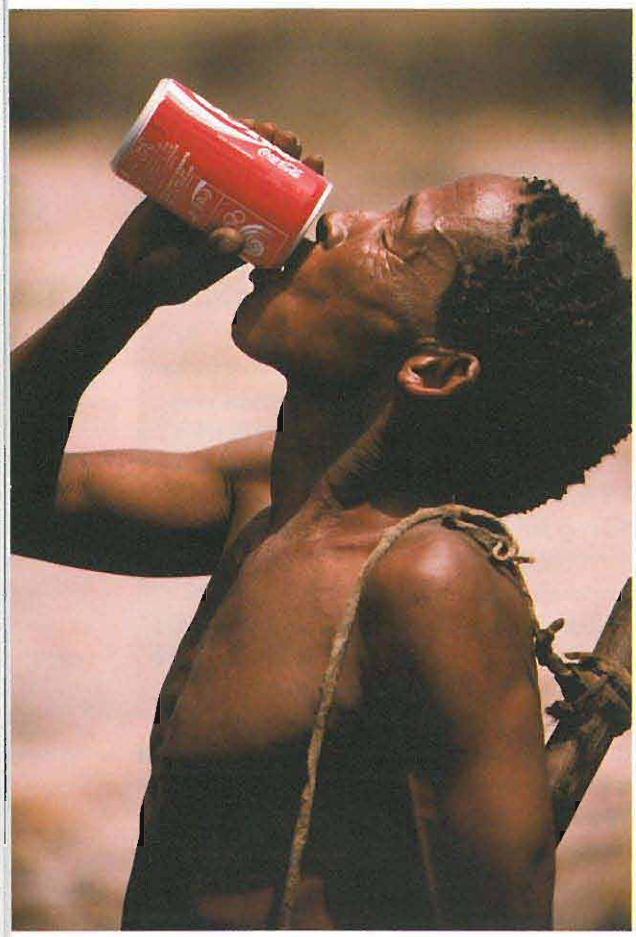
Some sociologists have turned their attention to reggae music because it exemplifies the process whereby contacts between social groups result in the creation of new musical forms. Reggae's roots can be traced to West Africa. In the seventeenth century, large numbers of West Africans were enslaved by British colonists and brought by ship to work in the sugar-cane fields of the West Indies. Although the British attempted to prevent slaves from playing traditional African music for fear it would serve as a rallying cry to revolt, the slaves managed to keep alive the tradition of African drumming, sometimes by integrating it with the European musical styles imposed by the slave-owners. In Jamaica, the drumming of one group of slaves, the Burru, was openly tolerated by slave-holders because it helped meter the pace of work. Slavery was finally abolished in Jamaica in 1834, but the tradition of Burru drumming continued, even as many Burru men migrated from rural areas to the slums of Kingston.

It was in these slums that a new religious cult began to emerge – one that would prove crucial to the development of reggae. In 1930 a man named Haile Selassie was crowned emperor of the African country of Ethiopia. While opponents of European colonialism throughout the world cheered Selassie's ascension to the throne, a number of people in the West Indies came to believe that he was a god, sent to earth to lead the oppressed of Africa to freedom. One of Selassie's names was 'Prince Ras Tafari', and the West Indians who worshipped him called themselves 'Rastafarians'. The Rastafarian cult soon merged with the Burru, and Rastafarian music came to combine Burru styles of drumming with biblical themes of oppression and liberation. In the 1950s, West Indian musicians began mixing Rastafarian rhythms and lyrics with elements of American jazz and black rhythm and blues. These combinations eventually developed into 'ska' music, and then, in the late 1960s, into reggae, with its relatively slow beat, its emphasis on bass, and its stories of urban deprivation and of the power of collective social consciousness. Many reggae artists, such as Bob Marley, became commercial successes, and by the 1970s people the world over were listening to reggae music. In the 1980s and 1990s, reggae was fused with hip-hop (or rap) to produce new sounds (Hebdige 1997), heard in the work of the groups like The Wu-Tang Clan, Shaggy or Sean Paul.

The history of reggae is thus the history of contact between different social groups, and of the meanings – political, spiritual and personal – that those groups expressed through their music. Globalization has increased the intensity of these contacts. It is now possible for a young musician in Scandinavia, for example, to grow up listening to music produced by men and women in the basements of Notting Hill in London, and to be deeply influenced as well by, say, a mariachi performance broadcast live via satellite from Mexico City. If the number of contacts between groups is an important determinant of the pace of musical evolution, it can be predicted that there will be a veritable profusion of new styles in the coming years as the process of globalization continues to unfold.

they do at home, identifying with a global, cosmopolitan culture rather than with that of their own nation.

4 A host of international organizations, including United Nations agencies, regional trade and mutual defence associations, multinational banks and other global financial institutions, international labour and health organizations, and global tariff and trade agreements, that are creating a global political, legal and military framework.



Even societies which we might consider as 'untouched' by globalization are not out of the reach of global culture. Many of the goods they use and consume are imported from all over the world.

5 Electronic communications (telephone, fax, electronic mail, the Internet and the World Wide Web), which makes instantaneous communication with almost any part of the planet an integral part of daily life in the business world.

Does the Internet promote a global culture?

Many have argued that the rapid growth of the Internet around the world will hasten the spread of a global culture – one resembling the cultures of Europe and North America, currently home to more than half the world's Internet users (see table 4.7). Belief in such values as equality between men and women, the right to speak freely, democratic participation in government and the pursuit of pleasure through consumption are readily diffused throughout the world over the Internet. Moreover, Internet technology itself would seem to foster such values: global communication, seemingly unlimited (and uncensored) information, and instant gratification are all characteristics of the new technology.

Yet it may be premature to conclude that the Internet will sweep aside traditional cultures, replacing them with radically new cultural values. As the Internet spreads around the world, there is evidence that it is in many ways compatible with traditional cultural values as well, perhaps even a means of strengthening them. To capture this balancing of the consequences of globalization, British sociologist Roland Robertson (1992) coined the term glocalization – a mixture of globalization and localization. This means that local communities are often very active rather than passive in modifying and shaping global processes to fit their own cultures, or that global businesses have to tailor their products and services to take account of local conditions. In the light of such cases, we may find that globalization does not lead inevitably to a uniform, global culture, but instead leads to diversity and multidirectional flows of cultural products across the world's societies.

Consider, for example, the Middle Eastern country of Kuwait, a traditional Islamic culture that has recently experienced strong American and European influences. Kuwait, an oil-rich country on the Persian Gulf, has one of the highest average per person incomes in the world. The government provides free public education through the university level, resulting in high rates of literacy and education for both men and women. Kuwaiti television frequently carries American football from the USA for example, although broadcasts are regularly

Table 4.7 Global Internet connectivity in 2005: PCs, hosts and Internet users

	PCs		Internet			
	Total (1,000s)	Per 100 people	Hosts total	Hosts per 10,000 people	Users (1,000s)	Users per 100 people
Africa	17,726	2.22	424,968	4.92	33,132.8	3.72
Americas	308,078	35.35	205,502,481	2,339.05	304,834.8	34.23
Asia	230,317	6.44	27,986,795	73.95	368,621.8	9.64
Europe	239,833	30.69	29,058,680	363.24	259,224.3	32.4
Oceania	16,130	50.46	4,572,838	1,404.68	17,383.7	53.21
World	812,084	13.4	267,545,762	420.69	983,197.4	15.27

PCs: numbers of personal computers
A host is a computer directly linked to the global Internet network
Users refers to estimates of people accessing the Internet

Source: International Telecommunications Union 2005

interrupted for the traditional Muslim calls to prayer. Half of Kuwait's approximately 2 million people are under the age of 25, and, like their counterparts in Europe and North America, many surf the Internet for new ideas, information and consumer products.

Although Kuwait is in many respects a modern country, cultural norms that treat men and women differently are very strong. Women are generally expected to wear traditional clothing that leaves only the face and hands visible and are forbidden to leave home at night or be seen in public at any time with a man who is not a spouse or relative.

Deborah Wheeler (1998) spent a year studying the impact of the Internet on Kuwaiti culture. The Internet is increasingly popular in Kuwait; half of all Internet users in Middle Eastern Arab countries live in this tiny country. Kuwaiti newspapers frequently carry stories about the Internet and the Web, and Kuwait University was the first university in the Arab world to hook its students up to the Internet.

Wheeler reports that Kuwaiti teenagers are flocking to Internet cafés, where they spend most of their time in chat rooms or visiting pornographic sites – two activities strongly frowned upon by traditional Islamic culture. According to Wheeler (1998): 'Many young people told me of encounters they were having with the opposite sex in cyberspace. There are even keyboard symbols for kisses (*), kisses on the lips (:*), and embarrassed giggles (LOL) – all those interactions and reactions that make courtship exciting and, in this case, safe.' The new communications technologies are clearly enabling men and women to talk with one another in a society where such communications outside marriage are extremely limited. Wheeler also notes that, ironically, men and women are segregated in the Internet cafés. Furthermore, she finds that Kuwaitis are extremely reluctant to voice strong opinions or political views online. With the exception of discussing conservative Islamic religious beliefs, which are freely disseminated over the Internet, Kuwaitis are remarkably inhibited online. Wheeler (1998) attributes this to the cultural belief that giving out too much information about oneself is dangerous:

> In Kuwait, information is more of a potential threat than a means for individual empowerment. It is a weapon to use against your enemies, a tool for keeping conformity, or a reinforcement of regulations of daily

> life. . . . Kuwait's transition to the information age is influenced by these attitudes and the desire to keep one's reputation protected. This keeps the Internet from registering significant political and social impacts, except for the rise in Kuwaiti Islamist discourses on the Internet. . . . In Kuwait, there is an ethos that states that having and/or pronouncing a political opinion publicly is bad. No one wants to talk on the record or to be quoted. The idea makes people scared or nervous. Only those who are elite feel they can speak freely and openly.

Wheeler concludes that Kuwaiti culture, which is hundreds of years old, is not likely to be easily transformed by simple exposure to different beliefs and values on the Internet. The fact that a few young people are participating in global chat rooms does not mean that Kuwaiti culture is adopting the sexual attitudes of the United States or even the form of everyday relations found between men and women in the West. The culture that eventually emerges as a result of the new technologies will not be the same as American culture; it will be uniquely Kuwaiti.

The rise of individualism

Although globalization is often associated with changes within big systems – such as the world financial markets, production and trade, and telecommunications – the effects of globalization are felt equally strongly in the private realm. Globalization is not something that is simply out there, operating on a distant plane and not intersecting with individual affairs. Globalization is an 'in here' phenomenon that is affecting our intimate and personal lives in many diverse ways. Inevitably, our personal lives have been altered as globalizing forces enter into our local contexts, our homes and our communities through impersonal sources – such as the media, the Internet and popular culture – as well as through personal contact with individuals from other countries and cultures.

THINKING CRITICALLY

What is your initial reaction? Is globalization leading to a homogenous global culture? Now think of some examples where Western products, brands or culture have changed non-Western cultures. Next, list some examples where Western influence has been significantly altered at the local level. Does such localization really mean that indigenous cultures can defend themselves against the forces of globalization?

Globalization is fundamentally changing the nature of our everyday experiences. As the societies in which we live undergo profound transformations, the established institutions that used to underpin them have become out of place. This is forcing a redefinition of intimate and personal aspects of our lives, such as the family, gender roles, sexuality, personal identity, our interactions with others and our relationships to work. The way we think of ourselves and our connections with other people is being profoundly altered through globalization.

In our current age, individuals have much more opportunity to shape their own lives than once was the case. At one time, tradition and custom exercised a very strong influence on the path of people's lives. Factors such as social class, gender, ethnicity and even religious affiliation could close off certain avenues for individuals, or open up others. Being born the eldest son of a tailor, for example, would probably ensure that a young man would learn his father's craft and carry on practising that craft throughout his lifetime. Tradition held that a woman's natural sphere was in the home; her life and identity were largely defined by those of her husband or father. In times past, individuals' personal identities were formed in the context of the community into which they were born. The values, lifestyles and ethics prevailing in that community provided relatively fixed guidelines according to which people lived their lives.

Under conditions of globalization, however, we are faced with a move towards a new *individualism*, in which people have actively to construct their own identities. The weight of tradition and established values is retreating, as local communities interact with a new global order. The social codes that formerly guided people's choices and activities have significantly loosened. Today, for example, the eldest son of a tailor could choose any number of paths in constructing his future, women are no longer restricted to the domestic realm and many of the other signposts that shaped people's lives have disappeared. Traditional frameworks of identity are dissolving and new patterns of identity are emerging. Globalization is forcing people to live in a more open, reflexive way. This means that we are constantly responding and adjusting to the changing environment around us; as individuals, we evolve with and within the larger context in which we live. Even the small choices we make in our daily lives – what we wear, how we spend our leisure time and how we take care of our health and our bodies – are part of an ongoing process of creating and re-creating our self-identities.

Conclusion: the need for global governance

As globalization progresses, existing political structures and models appear unequipped to manage a world full of the challenges that transcend national borders. It is not within the capacity of individual governments to control the spread of AIDS, to counter the effects of global warming or to regulate volatile financial markets. Many of the processes affecting societies around the world elude the grasp of current governing mechanisms. In the light of this governing deficit, some have called for new forms of global governance that could address global issues in a global way. As a growing number of challenges operate above the level of individual countries, it is argued that responses to them must also be transnational in scope.

Although it may seem unrealistic to speak of governance above the level of the nation-state, some steps have already been taken towards the creation of a global democratic structure, such as the formation of the United Nations and the European Union. The EU in particular can be seen as an innovative response to globalization and could well become a model for similar organizations in other parts of the world where regional ties are strong. New forms of global governance could help to promote a cosmopolitan world order in which transparent rules and standards for international behaviour, such as the defence of human rights, are established and observed.

The decade that has passed since the end of the Cold War has been marked by violence, internal conflict and chaotic transformations in many areas of the world. While some have taken a pessimistic view, seeing globalization as accelerating crisis and chaos, others see vital opportunities to harness globalizing forces in the pursuit of greater equality, democracy and prosperity. The move towards global governance and more effective regulatory institutions is certainly not misplaced at a time when global interdependence and the rapid pace of change link all of us together more than ever before. It is not beyond our abilities to reassert our will on the social world. Indeed, such a task appears to be both the greatest necessity and the greatest challenge facing human societies in the twenty-first century.

» We learn more about global governance in chapter 22, 'Politics, Government and Social Movements'.

Summary points

1. Several types of pre-modern society can be distinguished. In hunting and gathering societies, people gain their livelihood from gathering plants and hunting animals. Pastoral societies are those that raise domesticated animals as their major source of subsistence. Agrarian societies depend on the cultivation of fixed plots of land. Larger, more developed, urban societies form traditional states or civilizations.
2. The development of industralized societies and the expansion of the West led to the conquest of many parts of the world through the process of colonialization, which radically changed long-established societies and cultures.
3. In industrialized societies, industrial production is the main basis of the economy. Industrialized countries include the nations of the West and Japan, Australia and New Zealand. The developing world, in which a majority of the world's population live, are almost all formerly colonized areas. The majority of the population works in agricultural production, some of which is geared to world markets.
4. Social change may be defined as the transformation, over time, of the institutions and culture of a society. The modern period, although occupying only a small fraction of human history, has seen rapid and major changes and the pace of change is accelerating.
5. The development of social organization and institutions, from hunting and gathering to agrarian to modern industrial societies, is far too diverse to be accounted for by any single-factor theory of social change. At least three broad categories of influences can be identified. The *physical environment* includes such factors as climate or the availability of communication routes (rivers, mountain passes); these are important to consider, especially as they affect early economic development. *Political* organization (especially military power) affects all societies, traditional and modern, with the possible exception of hunting and gathering societies. *Cultural* factors include religion (which can act as a brake on change), communication systems (such as the invention of writing) and individual leadership.
6. The most important *economic* influence on modern social change is industrial capitalism, which depends on and promotes constant innovation in productive technology. Science and technology also affect and are affected by political factors, the most important of which is the emergence of the modern state. Cultural influences include another effect of science and technology: the critical and innovative character of modern thinking, which constantly challenges tradition and cultural habits.
7. Globalization is often portrayed as an economic phenomenon, but this is too simple. Globalization involves political, economic, cultural and social factors. It is driven forward by advances in information and communication technologies that have intensified the speed and scope of interaction between people around the world.
8. Globalization has become a hotly debated topic. Sceptics think it is overrated and that current levels of interconnectedness are not unprecedented. Some sceptics focus instead on processes of regionalization that are intensifying activity within major financial and trade groups. Hyperglobalizers take an opposing position, arguing that globalization is a real and powerful phenomenon that threatens to erode the role of national governments altogether. A third group, the transformationalists, argue that globalization is transforming many aspects of the current global order, but that old patterns still remain. According to this view, globalization is a contradictory process, involving a multidirectional flow of influences that sometimes work in opposition to each other.
9. Globalization is producing challenges that cross national borders and elude the reach of existing political structures. Because individual governments are not equipped to handle these transnational issues, there is a need for new forms of global governance that can address global problems in a global way. Reasserting our will on the rapidly changing social world may be the greatest challenge of the twenty-first century.

Further reading

The subject-matter of this chapter is so wide-ranging that a single book will not cover it. In general terms, however, there are two types of book you should find useful. First are those that cover the global human history and development of the human species. A good place to begin is with Noel Cowan's *Global History: A Short Overview* (Cambridge: Polity, 2001). This is a well-written, concise, yet comprehensive account which assumes no specialist knowledge. This can be followed with Bruce Mazlish's *The New Global History* (London: Routledge, 2006), which traces global history and globalization processes over the very long term and successfully links both historical and sociological approaches.

Second are those books that deal with current theories and debates on globalization. As you might expect, there are now many of these. Picking out two short introductions, you could try Malcolm Waters's *Globalization*, 2nd edition (London: Routledge, 2001), which is quite brief, divides globalization into economic, political and cultural forms, and moves at a brisk pace. Jan Aart Scholte's *Globalization: A Critical Introduction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) is another possibility. This book is exactly what it says it is: a critical approach to globalization, but also one that is accessible and engaging. Jürgen Osterhammel and Niels P. Petersson's *Globalization: A Short History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005) traces the history of globalization over the past eight centuries, giving a longer-term view of the process.

After at least one of these, you would then be in a position to move on to more comprehensive and detailed accounts of globalization, such as David Held and Anthony McGrew's (eds) *The Global Transformations Reader*, 2nd edition (Cambridge: Polity, 2003) or Joseph Stiglitz's *Globalization and its Discontents* (London: Allen Lane, 2003).

In addition, a good dictionary of world history is always a useful resource for key dates and events, so something suitably large and reliable like Bruce Lenman and Hilary Marsden's (eds) *Chambers Dictionary of World History, New Edition* (London: Harrap, 2005) would fit the bill, as would *A Dictionary of World History* (Oxford: Oxford Paperbacks, 2000).

Internet links

BBC World Service on globalization:
www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/programmes/globalisation/

The Global Site – social science thinking on globalization:
www.theglobalsite.ac.uk/globalization/

1999 Reith Lectures – Anthony Giddens on 'The runaway world':
http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/static/events/reith_99/

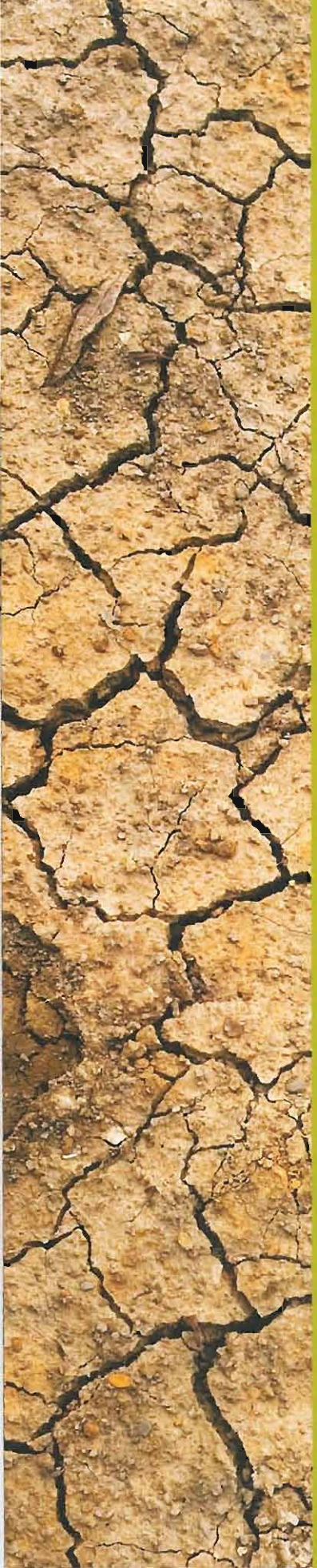
International Forum – an alliance of activists, scholars and researchers looking to better understand globalization processes:
www.ifg.org/

Tradewatch – US-based activist site against globalization:
www.citizen.org/trade/

Centre for Research on Globalization – Canadian-based 'think-site' with lots of comment by researchers and academics:
www.globalresearch.ca/

World Bank globalization pages:
www1.worldbank.org/economicpolicy/globalization/

Global Policy Forum – monitors policy-making at the United Nations:
www.globalpolicy.org/globaliz/index.ht



CHAPTER 5

The Environment

(opposite) The 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake was the third largest ever recorded and caused massive loss of human life.

Just before one o'clock a.m. UTC (Coordinated Universal Time) on 26 December 2004, the largest earthquake in 40 years occurred beneath the Indian Ocean. The earthquake shifted the seabed and displaced hundreds of cubic kilometres of water. A large wave known as a tsunami, caused by the tremor, began moving across the Indian Ocean away from the quake's epicentre at a speed of around 500 miles per hour. As it neared the coast, the tsunami slowed dramatically to just 30 miles per hour and began to increase in height. The tsunami reached the nearest landmass, Aceh in northern Indonesia, just 15 minutes after the initial quake, in many places destroying everything in its path and sweeping debris hundreds of metres inland. Thailand was

hit after 90 minutes, Sri Lanka after two hours, the Maldives after three and a half hours; finally, the wave reached the African coast, thousands of miles from the epicentre of the quake, some seven hours after the earthquake that caused it.

The scale of the tragedy was not immediately apparent. By the end of the day on 26 December it was reported that 12,000 people had been killed. A few weeks later the United Nations estimated that more than 175,000 people had died. Most deaths were in Indonesia, where it is thought that around 160,000 people lost their lives. Figures for the total number of people killed around the Indian Ocean vary hugely, but the British Red Cross has estimated a death toll closer to the region of a staggering 1 million. In Sri Lanka more than 30,000 people were killed, more than a 1,000 of whom drowned when an 80-tonne train was lifted off its tracks and submerged under water. In India, just fewer than 10,000 people are thought to have died. Travelling west, the wave caused devastation as far away as Africa, killing around 140 people along the continent's east coast. Many millions of people around the Indian Ocean were left homeless.

Although much sociological research tends to focus on how human institutions and citizens respond to ecological hazards, the 2004 tsunami reminds us that natural processes can be complex and unpredictable. The natural environment is not simply an inert, passive backdrop to the dramas of social life, but is an active force, which often plays a large part in the shaping of societies. The Asian tsunami also shows that in a globalized world, events thousands of miles away have a great impact on everyone's lives.

Although the vast majority of people killed in the tsunami were locals, several thousands were tourists from around the world, many of whom had been enjoying an idyllic Christmas break in the region. For instance, the tsunami claimed the lives of 149 people who were British citizens or had close links with the UK: the greatest loss of British lives in any one incident since the Second World War and far greater than the number of Britons who died in the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington in 2001. The high loss of life amongst Westerners reflects the processes of globalization. Thailand, where most holiday-makers were killed, has only become a destination for mass tourism in the past two decades or so, as people from the rich world are increasingly prepared to travel further afield for their holidays. The relief effort was also global in scope, as the world's news stations beamed pictures and reports of the suffering around the planet. In rich countries, millions of dollars were donated by the general public and governments, troops and expertise were sent to the region and it was agreed that debt repayments from the worst hit countries should be suspended. In early January 2005, millions of people across Europe stopped what they were doing to take part in a three-minute silence in memory of those killed.

Why should sociologists be interested in events such as the Asian tsunami? Surely this was a 'natural disaster', an example of the massive power of nature? If so, then isn't it the proper subject for environmental scientists and geologists rather than sociologists? After all, what institutional training do sociologists receive on understanding earthquakes or plate tectonics? For most of the twentieth century, this apparently common-sense division of academic labour was taken for granted. Natural scientists investigated the non-human world, while social scientists concentrated on people and their societies. However, by the 1980s and '90s things were changing, as knowledge of global environmental problems emerged and it became much clearer that the fate of the 'natural' and 'social' worlds were inevitably intertwined.

In this chapter we look at ideas of nature and environment and what constitutes an environmental issue, before outlining sociological approaches to the study of such

issues. From here we discuss some important environmental issues, including pollution, resource depletion, genetic modification and global warming before looking at sociological theories of consumerism and the risk society and proposals aimed at dealing with environmental dilemmas such as sustainable development and ecological modernization. The chapter ends with an evaluation of their prospects for success, looking ahead to the future of society–environment relations.

Nature, the environment and sociology

Defining nature and the environment

The environmental issues noted above all seem to involve nature. But 'nature' is not a simple word with a single meaning. In fact, dictionary definitions usually describe some twelve distinct meanings of the word. Raymond Williams (1987) says that nature is one of the most complex and difficult words in the English language because its dominant meaning has changed over time along with the development of societies.

'Nature' can mean something that is *essential* to a person or a thing. Why do some birds build their nests at the same time every year, for instance? We may be told that this is instinctive behaviour and an essential part of the 'nature' of birds. In fourteenth-century Europe, however, a new dominant meaning began to emerge. Nature came to be seen instead as a *series of forces* that directed the world and ultimately explained why things happen. For example, even today many people consult astrological charts looking for their birth date-based 'star sign' and what guidance it can offer on their life decisions. When they do this, they implicitly draw on the same idea of 'natural forces' – in this case the movement of stars and planets – directing human affairs. By the nineteenth century, the dominant meaning of 'nature' had changed again. This time it was seen as the whole *material world of things* rather than as a series of forces. The natural world was a world full of *natural things* – animals, fields, mountains and much more. For instance, there was a trend towards looking at 'scenery' as landscapes and pictorials, with nature literally framed for our appreciation and enjoyment.

Two major and related causes of this latest change in meaning were industrialization, which shifted people away from working the land in agricultural settings, and urbanization, which led to larger human settlements that generated new living environments largely divorced from natural things (Thomas 1984). Nature was seen as an obstacle that society had to tame and overcome in order to make progress, as the popular ideas of nature 'in the raw' or nature 'red in tooth and claw' suggest.

For a minority of people, nature and society were seen as distinct, but nature was not seen as in need of taming. Instead, it was modern industrial society that was the problem, polluting and wasting nature to feed new urban lifestyles. Wild nature needed protection not domestication. Nevertheless, for both the tamers and the protectors, society and nature were seen as *separate things*. Nature was that which society was not, and vice versa. This meaning remains the dominant one today, though more people would probably now agree with the nature-protectors than did so in earlier periods.

Since the 1950s, use of the word, 'nature' has started to give way to another term: the environment. Dictionary definitions of 'environment' suggest that it is the external conditions or surroundings of people, especially those in which they live or work. David Harvey (1993) notes that this definition can apply to a number of situations. For example, we have a working environment, a business environment and an urban environment. However, none of these environments is what most of us think of when the term is used today. Indeed, this chapter's

From the seventeenth century onwards, wealthy social groups began to take pleasure in, and appreciate, landscape scenes such as this one, which also became the focus of the 'tourist gaze' (Urry 1990).

title, *The Environment*, does not refer to any of these 'environments'. Most people today would probably expect this chapter to discuss pollution, climate change, animal welfare and so on, indicating that *the* environment has taken on a widespread and special meaning. *The* environment is assumed to mean all of those non-human, natural surroundings within which human beings exist – sometimes called the 'natural environment' – and in its widest sense this is simply planet Earth as a whole. We will use this as our working definition throughout this chapter.

THINKING CRITICALLY

How satisfactory is our working definition of 'the environment' above? What things would it include and what would it exclude? Should human beings be considered part of nature? If so, explain why many people see human creations such as cities and urban environments as somehow artificial.

Sociology and the environment

In our age of global environmental problems and international environmental movements, sociologists can and must take a direct interest in our relationship to the environment within which we live. But just how can sociology help us to understand environmental issues?

First, sociology can help us to understand how environmental problems are distributed. Although the tsunami in Asia killed people from all over the globe, most of those who died were native to the coastal regions around the Indian Ocean. If it had occurred in the richer countries of the Pacific Ocean, the Pacific Tsunami Warning System, based in the American state of Hawaii, would quickly have alerted the emergency authorities in the endangered countries where the infrastructure should be in place to move people away from the coast before a wave strikes. In 2005, the United Nations began to plan for an early warning system for the Indian Ocean, with money from Western donors. The distribution of risks from the environment varies with other types of environmental issue too. For example, although global warming – the increase in average temperature across the globe – will affect everyone on the planet, it will do so in different ways. Flooding kills many more people in low-lying, poor countries, such as Bangladesh, where housing and emergency infrastructures are less able to cope with severe weather than in Europe, for instance. In richer countries, such as the USA, the issues raised by global warming for policy-makers are likely to concern indirect effects, such as rising levels of immigration as people try to enter the country from areas more directly affected.

Second, sociologists can provide an account of how patterns of human behaviour create pressure on the natural environment (Cylke 1993). Although the 2004 tsunami was not a direct result of human action, many of the environmental challenges discussed in this chapter are. For example, the levels of pollution produced by industrialized countries would cause catastrophe if repeated in the world's poorer, non-industrial nations. If the impoverished regions of the world are to catch up with the richer ones, then citizens of the rich world are going to have to revise their expectations about constant

Modern consumerism generates huge amounts of waste, much of which has conventionally been simply dumped in landfill sites.

economic growth. Sociological theories of capitalist expansion, globalization or rationalization can all help us to understand how human societies are transforming the environment.

Third, sociology can help us to evaluate policies and proposals aimed at providing solutions to environmental problems. For example, some environmental activists and 'green' writers argue that people in the rich countries must turn away from consumerism and return to simpler ways of life living close to the land if global ecological disaster is to be avoided (Devall 1990; Schumacher 1977; Stead and Stead 1996). They argue that rescuing the global environment will thus mean radical social as well as technological change. However, given the enormous global inequalities that currently exist, there is little chance that the poor countries of the developing world will sacrifice their own economic growth because of environmental problems created largely by the rich countries. For instance, some governments in developing countries have argued that in relation to global warming there is no parallel between the 'luxury emissions' produced by the developed world and their own 'survival emissions'. In this way, sociological accounts of international relations and global inequality can clarify some of the underlying causes of the environmental problems we face today.

Sociology's founders – Marx, Durkheim and Weber – paid little attention to what we now call 'environmental issues'. Marx analysed capitalism and its exploitative class relationships (see chapter 1, 'What is Sociology?' and chapter 11, 'Stratification and Social Class'), Durkheim sought to understand the sources of social solidarity and to establish sociology within academic institutions (see chapter 1, 'What is Sociology?' and chapter 3, 'Theories and Perspectives in Sociology'), while Weber investigated the connections between religion, rationality and modern capitalism. The relationship between human societies and the natural environment was not seen as especially problematic by a majority of people in the societies of the time; nor, therefore, was it a central problem for social scientists. Instead, the important social issues occupying scholars were social inequality, poverty and its alleviation, transforming unhealthy urban living conditions and assessing the future direction of industrial development. The natural environment was very much taken for granted, simply as the backdrop to the much more pressing and urgent social problems generated by industrial capitalism.

Although there are ideas within the work of the classical founders of sociology that have been pursued in an environmental direction by later sociologists, the environment was not a central problem of classical sociology. This situation became increasingly difficult once sociologists began to explore the problems identified by environmental campaigners. Could the classical theories provide any insights into human–environment relations? Do we need to abandon them altogether to understand how environmental problems have come about and how they might be solved? Some sociologists *have* returned to classical sociology, reinterpreting the classics in the light of environmental issues (Dickens 2004; Dunlap et al. 2002; Murphy 1997). However, most have not. Rather, sociological studies of the environment have been characterized by a dispute amongst social constructionist and critical realist approaches over just *how* environmental issues should be studied sociologically.

Social constructionism and critical realism

Social constructionism is an approach to studying social problems, including environmental problems. Social constructionists have investigated how some environmental issues come to be seen as significant while others are seen as less important or are largely ignored (Braun and Castree 1998; Hannigan 2006). Are the environmental problems that are thought to be most important today really the ones which are

For more on social constructionism, see chapter 3, 'Theories and Perspectives in Sociology', and chapter 7, 'Social Interaction and Everyday Life'.

the most serious and in need of urgent action?

Constructionists ask a series of important questions about environmental problems. What is the *history of the problem* and how has it developed? *Who* is making the claim that it is a problem; do they have any vested interest and stand to benefit from doing so? *What do they say* about it and does the evidence support this? *How* do they say it? Do they use scientific, emotional, political or moral arguments and why do they do so? Who *opposes* the claim and on what grounds? Do opponents stand to lose if the claim is successful and could that, rather than the evidence, explain their opposition? Such questions give sociologists a clearly defined role in the study of environmental issues, which no other discipline performs. They also add something new to our understanding of environmental issues and problems.

Social constructionists remind us that all environmental problems are, in part, socially created or 'constructed' by groups of people. Nature never does 'speak for itself', but people do speak on its behalf. This process of construction can be examined, understood and explained. And in doing so, the public should be in a better position to assess whether an environmental problem really is as serious as the claims-makers say it is.

For some sociologists though, constructionism is problematic, particularly when studying environmental issues. Social constructionism tends to be 'agnostic' about the central problem at issue (Irwin 2001). For example, a constructionist study of the depletion of the ozone layer would tell us a lot about how this problem came to be seen as important, what arguments were made about it and who opposed the claim. But on the central question – is the ozone layer really becoming dangerously depleted? – social constructionism remains agnostic. For environmental activists and those committed to solving environmental problems, this is just not helpful. In short, constructionism tells us a lot about people and social interactions, but nothing about society–environment relations.

An alternative approach, known as 'environmental realism' (Bell 2004) or critical realism, attempts to approach environmental issues in a scientific way, which brings together evidence from across the social and natural sciences in order to understand better why environmental problems occur. Critical realism aims to get beneath the surface of the visible evidence to uncover the underlying causes of events and problems (Benton 1994; Dickens 1996, 2004; Martell 1994). In contrast to the agnosticism of social constructionism towards the reality of environmental problems, critical realists are prepared to accept and debate knowledge and evidence from the natural and environmental sciences in its explanations. 'Using your sociological imagination 5.1', on BSE in the UK, illustrates some key points of this approach.

Realist approaches such as that described above require the findings from a range of academic disciplines: biology, zoology, history, sociology, political science and more. Only in this way can we properly explain how and why BSE and vCJD posed such a problem in the 1980s and '90s. Like social constructionists, realists would agree that cows are social as well as natural creatures. Arguing a constructionist case, Alan Irwin says: 'The modern cow is the product of generations of human-controlled cattle-breeding, feeding and housing' (2001: 80). But unlike constructionists, realists search for *causal explanations* and are prepared to explore and debate the natural science of environmental issues in ways that social constructionists do not. Critical realism takes into account the *objective reality* of natural objects and environments, and this means rethinking our sociological theories and concepts with this in mind.

USING YOUR SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION

5.1 'Mad cow disease' in the UK

In 1996, British government ministers admitted the possibility that at least 10 recent human deaths had been caused by a new variant of Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease (vCJD) in humans, which may have developed as a result of people eating beef infected with Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) during the 1980s. This was a huge shock. Millions of people had eaten beef in this period and, at least theoretically, could develop the disease. How had this happened?

BSE is a fatal neurodegenerative disease of cattle, whose symptoms are similar to those of Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease (CJD) in human beings. These symptoms include the loss of coordination, nervousness, loss of memory, and aggression (hence 'mad' cows). From the experience of sheep farming, it was thought that BSE could not cross the species barrier into the human population. CJD is a recognized but very rare disease in human beings, but is unrelated to BSE. The UK BSE Inquiry (1998–2000) identified the cause of BSE in cattle as a gene mutation in a single cow (named Cow 133). But the most widely accepted explanation for the *spread* of BSE is that cattle were being fed BSE-infected offal (Macnaghten and Urry 1998: 253–65). The Inquiry Report said that the problem was 'the recycling of animal protein in ruminant feed'.

The Report also noted that the link between BSE and the human vCJD, 'was now clearly established'. As of 7 January 2008, the National Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease Surveillance Unit in Edinburgh reports that 163 people have died from vCJD. Meat-rendering practices were changed and new rules brought in to prevent a recurrence, but public confidence in science, politics, regulatory bodies and the meat industry was thoroughly shaken by the episode.

On the face of it, this seems like an episode of a naturally occurring disease in animals, unrelated to social processes. However, the transmission and spread of BSE was the product of decisions taken within the animal feed production system. The previous scientific assumption that BSE would not cross the species barrier was shown to be wrong. BSE-infected beef *did* lead to vCJD in humans. Treating cattle as commercial products and denying their herbivorous nature by feeding them dead cattle produced an unexpected outcome that no one had forecast. A critical realist approach would suggest that to understand this event properly (and therefore to put in place the right measures to prevent it from happening again), we need to know what kind of creatures cows are: what are their natural capacities? We also need to understand human beings to know why the disease had such devastating effects on people. What happens when infected foodstuff finds its way into the human body? We also need to know how the food production system operates and what political and economic decisions were made that allowed dead animals to be fed to others. And we need culturally specific knowledge – just why do so many people eat so much beef in the UK?

From this brief sketch of these two approaches, we can say that social constructionism leads in the direction of a *sociology of the environment* that explores environmental issues from a conventional sociological position, using concepts and theories from within the discipline. By contrast, critical realism leads towards an *environmental sociology*, which demands the revision of existing sociological approaches to take account of the complex intertwining of society and environment (Sutton 2007). However, as we will see during the chapter, many research studies in this field tend to veer between these two polarized alternatives.

THINKING CRITICALLY

What advantages are there in sociologists taking an 'agnostic' stance to environmental problems? Why might this not be such a good idea? How would social constructionists investigate the BSE epidemic and its consequences, as outlined above?

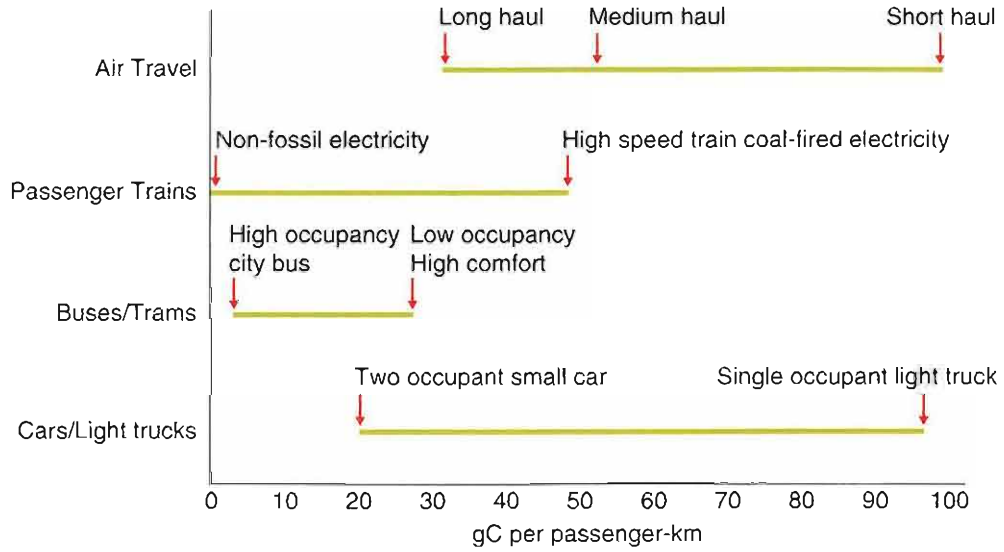


Figure 5.1 European carbon emissions (grams of carbon per kilometre) by mode of transport, 2007

Source: ATAG http://atag.org/files/PR%20LON-170002A.pdf (Slide 6, accessed 18 January 2008)

What are environmental issues?

As we have seen, there are many different environmental issues confronting the contemporary world. Some are local or regional in character, while others have an impact on the global human population. However, what they all share and what makes them specifically environmental issues is that they involve both social relationships and interactions and non-human, natural phenomena. In this sense, they are *hybrid* issues of society and the environment (Irwin 2001: 26). Keep this point in mind when you read the rest of this section, which covers a range of environmental issues.

Pollution and waste

Air pollution

Air pollution, caused by toxic emissions into the atmosphere, is thought to claim more than 2.7 million lives per year. It is possible to make a distinction between two types of air pollution: 'outdoor pollution', produced mainly by industrial pollutants and automobile emissions, and 'indoor pollution', which is caused by burning fuels in the home for heating and cooking. Traditionally, air pollution has been seen as a problem that afflicts industrialized countries, with their greater numbers of factories and motorized vehicles. In recent years, however, attention has been drawn to the dangers of 'indoor pollution' in the developing world. It is suggested that more than 90 per cent of deaths linked to air pollution occur in the developing world. This is because many of the fuels that are burned by people in developing countries, such as wood and dung, are not as clean as modern fuels such as kerosene and propane.

Until the middle of the twentieth century, air pollution in many countries was caused primarily by the widespread burning of coal – a fossil fuel – which emits sulphur dioxide and thick black smoke into the atmosphere. In many Eastern European countries and the developing world, the practice remains widespread. Coal was used extensively to

heat homes and as power in factories. In 1956, in an attempt to reduce smog, a Clean Air Act was passed in Britain to regulate emissions from chimneys. Smokeless types of fuels, such as kerosene, propane and natural gas, were promoted and are now widely used in the industrialized countries.

Since the 1960s the main source of air pollution has been the growth in the use of motorized vehicles. Vehicle emissions are particularly harmful because they enter the atmosphere at a much lower level than emissions from chimneys. As figure 5.1 shows, the range of emissions that are produced by different types of vehicle is quite large. Cars, which account for some 80 per cent of travel in Europe, have a particularly harmful impact on the environment. A single occupancy car journey can cause the same weight of carbon emissions per kilometre travelled as a long-haul flight. For this reason, attempts to reduce air pollution in many industrialized countries have focused on the use of low-emission travel alternatives such as passenger trains, high occupancy buses and the sharing of car journeys.

Air pollution has been linked to a number of health problems among humans, including respiratory difficulties, cancers and lung disease. Although outdoor pollution has long been associated with industrialized countries, it is growing rapidly in the developing world. As countries undergo rapid processes of industrialization, factory emissions increase and the number of vehicles on the roads also grows. In many developing countries, leaded petrol is still in use, although it has been phased out in much of the developed world. Levels of air pollution were particularly high in many areas of Eastern Europe and the (former) Soviet Union, though economic restructuring and the collapse of industrial manufacturing in these areas has reduced this somewhat since the 1990s.

Air pollution does not only affect the health of human and animal populations; it also has a damaging impact on other elements of the ecosystem. One harmful consequence of air pollution is acid rain, a phenomenon which occurs when sulphur and nitrogen oxide emissions in one country drift across borders and produce acidic rainfalls in another. Acid rain is harmful to forests, crops and animal life, and leads to the acidification of lakes. Canada, Poland and the Nordic countries have been particularly hard hit by acid rain. In Sweden, for example, 20,000 lakes out of a total of 90,000 have been acidified.

Like many environmental issues, acid rain is difficult to counteract because it is transnational in its origins and consequences. Much of the acid rain in eastern Canada, for example, has been shown as linked to industrial production in the state of New York, across the US–Canadian border. Other countries suffering from acid rain have similarly found that it is not within their control to tackle the problem, since its origins lie across national borders. In some instances, bilateral or regional agreements have been concluded in an attempt to reduce the severity of acid rain. Yet emissions remain high in some areas and are growing quickly in the developing world.

Water pollution

Throughout history, people have depended on water to fulfil a host of important needs – drinking, cooking, washing, irrigating crops, fishing and many other pursuits. Although water is one of the most valuable and essential natural resources, it has also suffered enormous abuse at the hands of human beings. For many years, waste products – both human and manufactured – were dumped directly into rivers and oceans with barely a second thought. Only in the past half century or so have concerted efforts been made in many countries to protect the quality of water, to preserve the fish and wildlife that depend on it, and ensure access to clean water for the human population. Regardless of these efforts, water pollution remains a serious problem in many parts of the world.

Even in lush rainforest where water is abundant, urban settlements, factories and intensive farming practices can make getting access to clean water a difficult task.

One of the 'Millennium Development Goals' set by the United Nations in 2000 is to 'reduce by half the proportion of people without access to safe drinking water' by 2015. Water pollution can be understood broadly to refer to the contamination of the water supply by elements such as toxic chemicals and minerals, pesticides or untreated sewage. It poses the greatest threat to people in the developing world. Currently, more than one billion people around the world lack access to safe drinking water and more than two billion lack sanitation. Sanitation systems remain underdeveloped in many of the world's poorest countries and human waste products are often emptied directly into streams, rivers and lakes. The high levels of bacteria that result from untreated sewage lead to a variety of water-borne diseases, such as diarrhoea, dysentery and hepatitis. Some two billion cases of diarrhoea are caused annually by contaminated water; five million people die each year from diarrhoeal diseases.

Some progress is being made to improve access to the world's resources of water. During the 1990s, nearly one billion people gained access to safe water and the same number to sanitation, though ensuring safe water supplies remains a problem, particularly in some parts of Africa (UNDP 2002; see also figure 5.2). The problem may actually be worsening as water supplies in developing countries are privatised, raising the cost for customers, whilst the effects of global warming produce more regular droughts (see 'Global Society 5.1').

In industrialized countries, cases of water pollution are often caused by the overuse of fertilizers in agricultural areas. Over a period of years, nitrates from chemical pesticides

Global Society 5.1 The privatization of water

Western companies have the know-how – and the financial incentive – to supply water to poor nations. But, as Richard Wachman reports, their involvement is already provoking unrest ...

Water becomes the new oil as world runs dry

The midday sun beats down on a phalanx of riot police facing thousands of jeering demonstrators, angry at proposals to put up their water bills by more than a third. Moments later a uniformed officer astride a horse shouts an order and the police charge down the street to embark on a club-wielding melée that leaves dozens of bloodied protesters with broken limbs.

A film clip from the latest offering from Hollywood? Unfortunately not. It's a description of a real-life event in Cochabamba, Bolivia's third largest city, where a subsidiary of Bechtel, the US engineering giant, took over the municipal water utility and increased bills to a level that the poorest could not afford.

Welcome to a new world, where war and civil strife loom in the wake of chronic water shortages caused by rising population, drought (exacerbated by global warming) and increased demand from the newly affluent middle classes in the emerging economies of Asia and Latin America. At a City briefing by an international bank last week, a senior executive said: 'Today everyone is talking about global warming, but my prediction is that in two years water will move to the top of the geopolitical agenda.'

The question for countries as far apart as China and Argentina is whether to unleash market forces by allowing access to private European and American multinationals that have the technological know-how to help bring water to the masses – but at a price that many may be unable, or unwilling, to pay.

As Cochabamba illustrates, water is an explosive issue in developing countries, where people have traditionally received supplies for free from local wells and rivers. But in the past 15 years rapid industrialisation, especially in places such as China, has led to widespread pollution and degradation of the local environment.

A report out today from accountancy giant Deloitte & Touche says humans seem to have a peculiar talent for making previously abundant resources scarce: 'This is especially the case with water', it observes. According to the firm's findings, more than one billion people will lack access to clean water by next year. Paul Lee, research director at Deloitte, and one of the authors of the report, says: 'Demand for water is expected to be driven by economic growth and population increases. India's demand for water is expected to exceed supply by 2020.'

The World Wildlife Fund has forecast that in the Himalayas, the retreat of glaciers could reduce summer water flows by up to two-thirds. In the Ganges area, this would cause a water shortage for 500 million people. Lee says: 'The lack of the most important form of liquid in the world is therefore a fundamental issue and one that the technology sector can play a major role in addressing.'

But the crux of the problem remains: according to a report from Credit Suisse, annual world water use has risen sixfold during the past century, more than double the rate of population growth. By 2025, almost two-thirds of the global population will live in countries where water will be a scarce commodity. And that could lead to conflict, as United Nations secretary-general Ban Ki-moon warned last week.

Asia looks vulnerable, with China planning to syphon off Tibet's water supply to make up for shortages in the parched north. Elsewhere, the Israel-Palestine conflict is at least partly about securing supplies from the River Jordan; similarly, water is a major feature of the strife in Sudan that has left Darfur devastated. When it comes to this most basic of commodities, the stakes could hardly be higher.

Source: Richard Wachman, *Observer*, 9 December 2007

seep into the groundwater supply; nearly 25 per cent of groundwater in Europe shows levels of contamination higher than that deemed permissible by the European Union (UNDP 1998). Some of the most polluted water can be found near former industrial areas, where traces of mercury, lead and other metals have lodged in the sediments and continue slowly to emit pollutants into the water supply over a period of years.

THINKING CRITICALLY

List all the factors that are contributing to the lack of safe water in some developing countries. If privatizing water supplies leads to a higher cost, this should help to stop people from wasting water unnecessarily and therefore, indirectly, to water conservation. But why might privatization have very different consequences in developed and developing countries?

The quality of rivers in most Western industrialized countries has been improving in recent years. In Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, however, river pollution remains a very real concern. Four-fifths of the water samples taken from 200 rivers in the former Soviet Union revealed levels of contamination that were dangerously high.

Solid waste

Next time you visit a supermarket, toy store or fast-food restaurant, pay attention to the amount of packaging that accompanies the products you see there. There are few things you can buy without packaging in our present age. Although there are clear benefits to packaging in terms of displaying goods attractively and guaranteeing the safety of products, there are enormous drawbacks as well. One of the clearest indicators of increasing consumption is the growing amount of domestic waste – what goes into our rubbish bins – being produced worldwide. Where the developing countries generated 100–330 kilograms of domestic solid waste per capita in the early 1990s, the figure was 414 kilograms for the European Union and 720 for North America (UNDP 1998). As figure 5.3 illustrates, waste generation is closely tied to the relative prosperity of countries as consumption of goods increases; Poland, the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic, countries that have only recently started to emulate the model of Western consumerism, generate less than half the waste per capita of the USA, Denmark and Australia. There have been increases in both the absolute amount of waste produced, and the amount produced per person, in a majority of countries around the world.

The industrialized societies have been called 'throw-away societies' because the

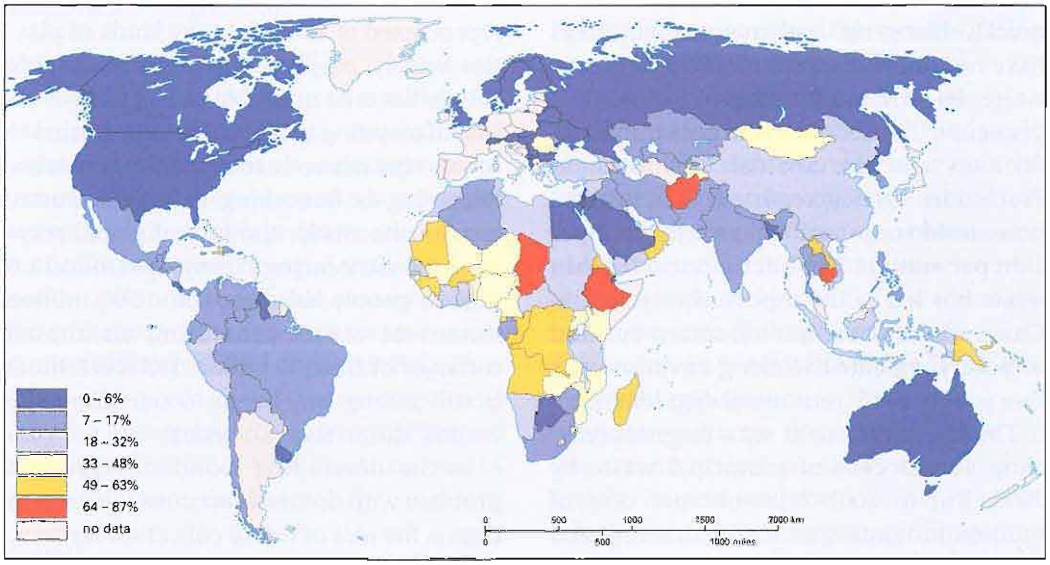


Figure 5.2 Percentage of population with lack of access to safe water, by country, 2004

Source: www.theglobaleducationproject.org/earth/human-conditions.php (accessed 17 January 2008)

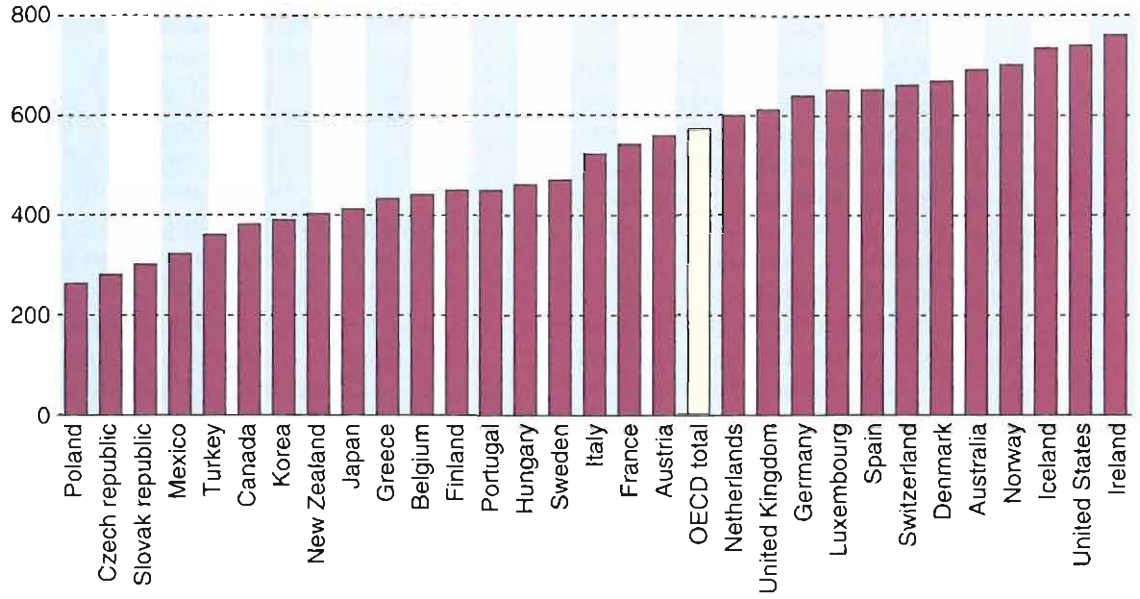


Figure 5.3 Municipal waste generation in kilogram per capita, OECD countries, 2003 (or latest year available)

Source: OECD 2007

volume of items discarded as a matter of course is so large. In most countries of the industrialized world, waste collection services are almost universal, but it is becoming increasingly difficult to dispose of the enormous amounts of refuse. Landfill sites are quickly filling up, and many urban areas have run out of disposal room for domestic waste. In Scotland for example, around 90 per cent of household waste goes into landfill sites and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency reported that in 2006 household waste was still growing at 2 per cent per annum. The international trade in waste has led to the export of recycling to China where waste is often sorted by hand in poorly regulated working environments that produce environmental degradation.

The UK government set a target of recycling 40 per cent of municipal waste by 2005. But in 2001–2 just 12 per cent of household waste was recycled, compared with 7 per cent in 1996–7. During the same period, the amount of waste produced by each household in England increased by 17 per cent (HMSO 2004). Table 5.1 shows how waste is managed in England. Although this amount of recycling may seem low compared to the overall amount of domestic waste that is produced, a large proportion of what is thrown away cannot be easily reprocessed or reused. Many kinds of plastics widely employed in food packaging simply become unusable waste; there is no way of recycling it, and it has to be buried in refuse tips where it remains for centuries. Recycling is becoming a huge industry around the world; the formal global recycling industry currently employs around 1.5 million people handling some 500 million tonnes of waste, generating an annual turnover of US$200 billion. However, there is still a long way to go to transform the world's 'throw-away societies'.

In the developing world, the greatest problem with domestic waste at the present time is the *lack* of refuse collection services. It has been estimated that 20–50 per cent of domestic waste in the developing world goes uncollected. Poorly managed waste

Table 5.1 Management of municipal waste, England: by method

	1996/7	1998/9	2000/1	2001/2
Landfill	20,631	21,534	22,039	22,317
Incineration with energy from waste	1,446	2,117	2,391	2,459
Recycled/composted[a]	1,750	2,525	3,446	3,907
Other[b]	761	160	182	140
Total	24,588	26,337	28,057	28,823

[a] Includes household and non-household sources collected for recycling or for centralized composting; home composting estimates are not included in this total

[b] Includes incineration without energy from waste and refuse derived fuel manufacture. Excludes any processing prior to landfilling and materials sent to materials reclamation facilities (MRFs)

Source: HMSO (2004)

systems mean that refuse piles up in the streets, contributing to the spread of disease. With the passing of time, it is very likely that the developing world will face problems with waste disposal that are even more acute than the current situation in the industrialized countries. As societies become richer, there is a gradual shift from organic waste, such as food remains, to plastic and synthetic materials, like packaging, that take much longer to decompose.

Resource depletion

Human societies depend on very many resources from the natural world – for example, water, wood, fish, animals and plant life. These elements are often termed 'renewable resources', because in a healthy ecosystem they replace themselves automatically with the passing of time. Yet if the consumption of renewable resources gets out of balance or is too extreme, there is a danger that they will be depleted altogether. Some evidence suggests that such a process may be occurring. The deterioration of renewable resources is of great concern to many environmentalists.

Water

You may not think of water as a depletable resource – after all, it constantly replenishes itself through rainfall. If you live in Europe or North America, you probably do not give much thought to your water supply at all, except occasionally when restrictions are put on its use in the summer months. Yet for people in many parts of the world, access to a constant water supply is a more chronic and severe problem. In some densely populated regions, the high demand for water cannot be met by available water resources. In the arid climates of North Africa and the Middle East, for example, the pressure on water supply is acute and shortages have become commonplace. This trend is almost sure to intensify in the years to come.

There are several reasons why this is so. The first is that much of the projected world population growth over the next quarter-century is likely to be concentrated in areas that are already experiencing problems with water shortages. Furthermore, much of this growth will occur in urban areas, where the infrastructure will struggle to accommodate the water and sanitation needs of this expanded population.

Climate change also has a potential impact on the depletion of the water supply. As temperatures rise, more water will be needed for drinking and irrigation. Yet it is also likely that groundwater may not replenish itself as rapidly as before and that rates of evaporation may also increase.

Recycling has become a huge industry worldwide; many people have built the recycling of domestic waste into their everyday routines.

Finally, changes in climate patterns which may accompany global warming will be likely to affect existing patterns of precipitation, altering access to water supplies in ways that are quite unpredictable.

Soil degradation and desertification

According to the 1998 UN Human Development Report, a third of the world's population lives more or less directly from the land – on the food they can grow or gather, and the game they can catch. Because they are largely dependent on the earth, they are particularly vulnerable to changes affecting their ability to live off the land. In many areas of Asia and Africa that are experiencing rapid population growth, the problem of soil degradation threatens to impoverish millions of people. Soil degradation is the process by which the quality of the earth is worsened and its valuable natural elements are stripped away through over-use, drought or inadequate fertilization.

THINKING CRITICALLY

Is it possible that there is a finite level of basic resources on planet Earth, which may, in time, simply run out, or will there always be enough water, food and land to supply the global human population? If resources *are* finite, how can we best conserve them? If resources are *not* finite, why do some countries still not have access to safe water and adequate food supplies?

The long-term effects of soil degradation are extremely severe and difficult to reverse. In areas where the soil has been degraded, agricultural productivity declines and there is less arable land available per head. It becomes difficult or impossible to keep cattle or other livestock because of a lack of fodder. In many instances, people are forced to migrate in search of more fertile land. Desertification refers to instances of intense land

Global Society 5.2 Soil degradation and economic development in Africa

Soil crisis is holding back African recovery

The fertility of Africa's soil is being depleted at a rate that threatens to undermine the continent's attempts at eradicating hunger with sustainable agricultural development.

A study has found three-quarters of Africa's farmland is plagued by severe soil degradation caused by wind and soil erosion and the loss of vital mineral nutrients.

This degradation can partly explain why agricultural productivity in Africa has remained largely stagnant for 40 years while Asia's productivity has increased threefold, the authors claim. Julio Henao and Carlos Baanante of the non-profit International Centre for Soil Fertility and Agricultural Development in Muscle Shoals, Alabama, found bad farming practices have damaged soil health on the continent between 1980 and 2004.

Farmers in Africa have traditionally relied on clearing land to grow crops then leaving it fallow to regain some of its fertility. 'But population pressure now forces farmers to grow crop after crop, "mining" or depleting the soil of nutrients while giving nothing back', the report says.

'With little access to fertilisers, the farmers are forced to bring less fertile soils on marginal land into production, at the expense of Africa's wildlife and forests.' Mr Henao and Mr Baanante found that during 2002 to 2004 about 85 per cent of African farmland was haemorrhaging mineral nutrients at an annual rate greater than 30 kg per hectare, and 40 per cent of farmland was losing nutrients at the higher rate of 60 kg per hectare a year.

'The very resources on which African farmers and their families depend for welfare and survival are being undermined by soil degradation caused by nutrient mining and associated factors, such as deforestation, use of marginal lands and poor agricultural practices', the report says.

The worst-affected countries in terms of soil depletion are Guinea Bissau, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Angola, Rwanda, Burundi and Uganda. With a population growth of 3 per cent per year, the number of malnourished people in sub-Saharan Africa has grown from about 88 million in 1970 to more than 200 million by the end of the last century, the report says.

Source: Steve Connor, *Independent*, 31 March 2006

degradation which result in desert-like conditions over large areas. This phenomenon has already affected territory adding up to the size of Russia and Indonesia combined, putting more than 110 countries at risk.

Deforestation

Forests are an essential element of the ecosystem: they help to regulate water supplies, release oxygen into the atmosphere and prevent soil erosion. They also contribute to many people's livelihoods as sources of fuel, food, wood, oils, dyes, herbs and medicines. Yet despite their crucial importance, more than a third of the earth's original forests have now disappeared. Deforestation describes the destruction of forested land, usually through commercial logging. Deforestation claimed 15 million hectares of land in the 1980s, with the largest amounts occurring in Latin America and the Caribbean (losing 7.4 million hectares) and sub-Saharan Africa (losing 4.1 million hectares).

Although many types of forest are involved in the process of deforestation, the fate of tropical rainforests has attracted the greatest attention. Tropical rainforests, which cover some 7 per cent of the earth's surface, are home to a great number of plant and animal species that contribute to the earth's biodiversity – the diversity of species of life forms. They are also home to many of the plants and oils from which medicines are developed. Tropical rainforests are currently shrinking at a rate of approximately 1 per cent a year, and may well disappear altogether by the end of this century if current trends are not halted. In many areas of South America where tropical rainforests are most extensive, rainforests have been burned to make room for more land to graze

Deforestation threatens significantly to reduce the diversity of life forms on the planet.

cattle. In other areas of the world, such as West Africa and the South Pacific, the international demand for exotic hardwoods has fuelled the destruction of rainforests. Trends in increasing consumption therefore encourage developing countries to export their natural commodities – a process which results in both environmental destruction and a loss of biodiversity.

Deforestation has both human and environmental costs. In terms of human costs, some poor communities which were previously able to sustain or supplement their livelihoods through forests are no longer able to do so. Deforestation can further impoverish marginalized populations, which rarely share in the enormous revenues generated from the granting of logging rights and the sale of timber. The environmental costs of deforestation include soil erosion and floods: when they are intact, mountainous forests perform the important function of absorbing and recycling much of the water from rainfall. Once the forests are missing, rain cascades off the slopes, causing floods and then droughts.

Genetic modification of food

As we will see in chapter 13, 'Global Inequality', some 830 million people around the globe go hungry each day and, as we saw above, increasing soil degradation threatens to undermine economic development in Africa. The process of global warming may also contribute to increased desertification and poor harvests, all of which has led to fears that food shortages may become even more widespread. In some of the world's most densely populated areas, people are highly dependent on staple food crops – such as rice – whose stocks are dwindling. Many worry that present farming techniques will not be able to produce rice yields sufficient to support the growing population. As with many environmental challenges, the threat of famine is not evenly distributed. The industrialized countries

have extensive surpluses of grain. It is the poorer countries, where the population growth is projected to be greatest, that grain shortfalls are likely to be a chronic problem.

Some scientists and politicians argue that the key to averting a potential food crisis may lie in recent advances in science and biotechnology. By manipulating the genetic composition of basic crops, such as rice, it is now possible to boost a plant's rate of photosynthesis and to produce bigger crop yields. This process is known as genetic modification; plants that are produced in such a way are called genetically modified organisms (GMOs). Genetic modification can be carried out for a variety of purposes – not only to enhance the crop yield. Scientists have produced GMOs with higher than normal vitamin content, for example; other genetically modified crops are resistant to commonly used agricultural herbicides that are used to kill the weeds round them, as well as insects and fungal and viral pests. Food products that are made from, or contain traces of, GMOs are known as GM foods.

GM crops are different from anything that has existed before, because they involve transplanting genes between different organisms. This is a much more radical intervention into nature than the older methods of cross-breeding that have been used for many years. GMOs are produced by techniques of gene splicing that can be used to transplant genes between animals as well as plants. For instance, in recent experiments human genes have been introduced into farm animals, such as pigs, with a view to eventually providing replacement parts for human transplants. Human genes have even been spliced into plants, although the GM crops that have been marketed so far do not involve this kind of radical bioengineering.

Scientists claim that a GM strain of 'super-rice' could boost rice yields by as much as 35 per cent. Another strain called 'golden rice' – which contains added amounts of vitamin A – could reduce vitamin A deficiency in more than 120 million children worldwide. You might think that such advances in biotechnology would be welcomed enthusiastically by people around the world. But in fact, the issue of genetic modification has become one of the most controversial issues of our age. For many people, it highlights the fine line that exists between the benefits of technology and scientific innovation, on the one hand, and the risks of environmental destruction, on the other.

Controversy over GM foods

The saga of GM foods began only a few years ago when some of the world's leading chemical and agricultural firms decided that new knowledge about the workings of genes could transform the world's food supply. These companies had been making pesticides and herbicides, but wanted to move into what they saw as a major market for the future. The American firm Monsanto was the leader in developing much of the new technology. Monsanto bought up seed companies, sold off its chemical division and devoted much of its energies to bringing the new crops to the market. Led by its then Chief Executive Robert Shapiro, Monsanto launched a gigantic advertising campaign promoting the benefits of its GM crops to farmers and to consumers. The early responses were just as the company had confidently anticipated. By early 1999, 55 per cent of the soya beans and 35 per cent of the maize produced in the United States contained genetic alterations. GM crops at that point were already growing on 35 million hectares of land across the world – an area one and a half times the size of Britain. In addition to North America, GM crops were also being widely grown in China.

Monsanto's sales campaign stressed a number of positive virtues of GM foods. The company claimed that GM crops could help feed the world's poor and reduce the use of chemical pollutants, especially the chemicals used in pesticides and herbicides. It is claimed, for example, that GM potatoes

Greenpeace has led some of the anti-GM protests in recent years, such as this attack on a field of genetically modified corn in Norfolk.

need 40 per cent less chemical insecticide than would be required using traditional farming techniques. Biotechnology, according to Monsanto, will allow us to grow better-quality crops with higher yields, while at the same time sustaining and protecting the environment.

Since GM crops are essentially quite new, no one can be certain about what their effects will be once they are introduced into the environment. Many ecological and consumer groups became concerned about the potential risks involved with the adoption of this largely untested technology. Concern about GM foods was especially widespread in Europe (Toke 2004). In Britain, hostility to the commercial growing of GM crops was stimulated by the findings of Dr Arpad Pusztai, an internationally renowned geneticist working in a government laboratory in Scotland. In his research, Dr Pusztai had tested potatoes which had a gene for a particular natural insecticide inserted – a protein known as lectin, extracted from a certain type of flower. The results indicated that rats which ate the GM potatoes experienced significant damage to their immune systems and reduced organ growth. Dr Pusztai's findings were criticized by other leading scientists and he was dismissed from his post at the government laboratory after speaking on television about his worries concerning GM foods.

By this time, GM foods had become a front-page story in the news almost every day. Numerous TV and radio debates, chat shows and phone-ins were organized to discuss the issue. Many members of the British public registered their antagonism to GM crops; some even engaged in 'direct action', pulling GM crops out of the ground at official trial sites across the country. Similar responses occurred in a range of other European countries. These eventually spread back to the USA, where there had previously been little debate. In the UK,

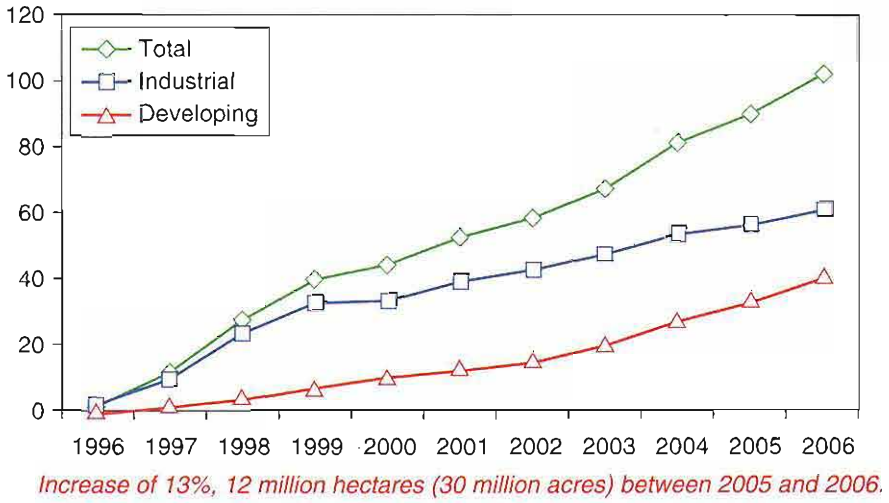


Figure 5.4 Global area of genetically modified crops, 2006

Source: ISAAA Brief 35, 2006

seven out of the eight major supermarket chains changed their policy on GM foods. Five of them imposed a complete ban on GM ingredients in their own-brand products, which is still in place, and all of them insisted on better labelling in their stores. Two large companies, Unilever and Nestlé, announced that they would withdraw their acceptance of genetically modified foodstuffs. Some farmers in the USA who had been engaged in the large-scale cultivation of GM crops changed back to conventional crop production. One survey in 2003 showed that 59 per cent of the UK population strongly agreed that genetically modified foods should be banned (HMSO 2005).

The protests of environmentalists and consumer groups had a major impact on the fate of Monsanto, and caused a serious decline in its share value. Robert Shapiro appeared on television to admit that his company had made major mistakes: 'We have probably irritated and antagonized more people than we have persuaded', he said. 'Our confidence in this technology and our enthusiasm for it has, I think, been widely seen – and understandably so – as condescension or indeed arrogance.' It was an extraordinary turnaround from the world-beating confidence with which he had spoken only a few months before. Monsanto was forced to drop altogether one of its most controversial plans – the idea of using a gene called 'the terminator'. This gene would have ensured that seeds which Monsanto sold to farmers would be sterile after one generation. The farmers would have had to order seeds each year from the company. Critics of Monsanto claimed that the company was trying to lure farmers into a form of 'bioslavery', and the issue highlights again the inequalities of power between those companies looking to take advantage of globalization processes and those at their sharp end.

GM food continues to generate controversy in Europe and large parts of Africa. The European Union refused patents of new GM crops between 1998 and 2004. The complete moratorium was raised in 2004 when imports of a further GM maize crop were approved, and a scheme was introduced to label foods containing GM products. However, the EU's actions were too slow for the big GM producers, particularly in the United States, who filed a complaint with the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2003 against the EU's failure to authorize the

commercialization of GM crops, claiming that the European position had no scientific basis and broke free trade laws. In 2006 the WTO ruled that a series of European countries, including Austria, Germany, Greece, France and Luxembourg, *had* broken international trade rules by imposing bans on the marketing and growing of GM foods. However, it is hard to imagine that European consumers, who have consistently refused to buy GM foods, will suddenly drop their opposition based purely on such a ruling.

In Africa, GM food aid has also run into trouble. In 2002, Zambia refused to accept American food-aid donations of corn and soya because much of it was genetically modified and reduced the genetic diversity which was essential for long-term sustainable agriculture. Zambia's president, Levy Mwanawasa, called the imports 'poison'. By 2004 Zambia had been joined by Zimbabwe, Malawi, Mozambique, Lesotho and Angola in refusing genetically modified food aid.

Evaluating the risks of GM foods

The issue of GM crops highlights the point we noted at the start of the chapter, namely that environmental issues always involve complex combinations of the natural and the social and it is not realistic to expect them to be easily separated. Despite the assertions of the GM producers, no one can say with certainty that genetically modified crops are risk-free. The genetic code is highly complicated – adding new genes into plants or organisms could produce as yet unpredicted diseases or other harmful consequences. Because the technology is so unknown, new findings and discoveries are being uncovered with startling frequency. In May 2000, the British government admitted that thousands of acres of conventional oilseed rape that had been planted by farmers had in fact been 'contaminated' as GM crops pollinated those nearby. German research published just weeks later claimed that a gene commonly used to modify oilseed rape had jumped the species barrier into the guts of bees. In the short period between these two startling revelations, Monsanto itself acknowledged that its modified soybeans – the GMO that has been cultivated most extensively for commercial purposes – contain unexpected gene fragments that had previously gone undetected.

Such findings reinforce what many environmental activists have been warning for some time. Although genetic modification may have enormous potential benefits, the risks involved are unpredictable and difficult to calculate. Once released into the environment, GMOs may set off a string of knock-on effects that will be difficult to monitor and control. In the face of this dilemma, many environmentalists favour what is often termed the precautionary principle. This principle proposes that where there is sufficient doubt about the possible risks of new departures, it is better to stick to existing practices than to change them.

Despite the concerns of environmentalists, the amount of land given over to growing GM crops has continued to increase, particularly in the developing world, where the environmental movement is not as strongly established and laws restricting the growth of GM crops are generally less strict (see figure 5.5).

Assessing the debate about GM foods, Matsuura (2004) argues that in the early days the biotechnology industry made two mistakes: first it tried to ignore public concerns and then it attempted to address

THINKING CRITICALLY

In what ways can the GM crops/food issue be seen as a specifically *environmental* issue? What makes it so? How realistic is the 'precautionary principle' – that we should always err on the side of caution and not go ahead with any new technologies that have not been exhaustively tested? What real-world examples of unproven technologies are there which may call this idea into question?

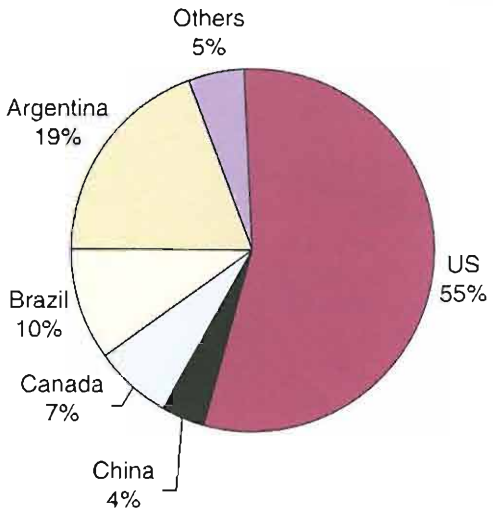


Figure 5.5 GM crop plantings by country, 2005

Source: Brookes and Barfoot 2005

them through purely rational arguments. Later in this chapter, we will look at a broader approach to the concept of risk, taken by the German sociologist Ulrich Beck.

Global warming

Based on average global temperature, 1998 and 2005 were the two warmest years on record since reliable measurements began in the late nineteenth century. Many scientists have argued that this is a good example of how global warming is now affecting the Earth's climate. The effects of very hot weather can be catastrophic. The Earth Policy Institute, an environmental think-tank, has estimated that a heat wave in 2003 killed more than 35,000 people in Europe, with France suffering the worst losses. It was estimated that 14,802 people died from causes attributable to the high temperatures – with older people being particularly affected (*New Scientist*, 10 October 2003).

Scientists have recently estimated that global warming kills about 160,000 people every year, with children in developing countries being most at risk. It has also been estimated that the numbers dying from the 'side-effects' of climate change, such as malaria and malnutrition, could almost double by 2020 (*New Scientist*, 1 October 2003).

The environmental issue of global warming – a form of climate change – is the clearest example of a genuinely *global* environmental problem. Its effects will have an impact on every society on the planet, albeit to varying degrees. To understand it we have to see 'the environment' in its widest sense – planet Earth as a whole – as the atmosphere shrouds the entire planet rather than one region. The problem of global warming cannot be understood without modern science; sociologists need to engage with debates on the science of climate change if they want to say anything useful about the social causes and consequences of global warming. Our own experience of the environment will change as the climate itself becomes a political issue, as happened after New Orleans in the USA was flooded in 2005, when journalists and commentators blamed the US government for not doing enough to tackle climate change.

Global warming also makes us aware of a type of 'pollution' (excessive CO_2) that few of us ever knew existed. One consequence of this knowledge is that it has speeded up the

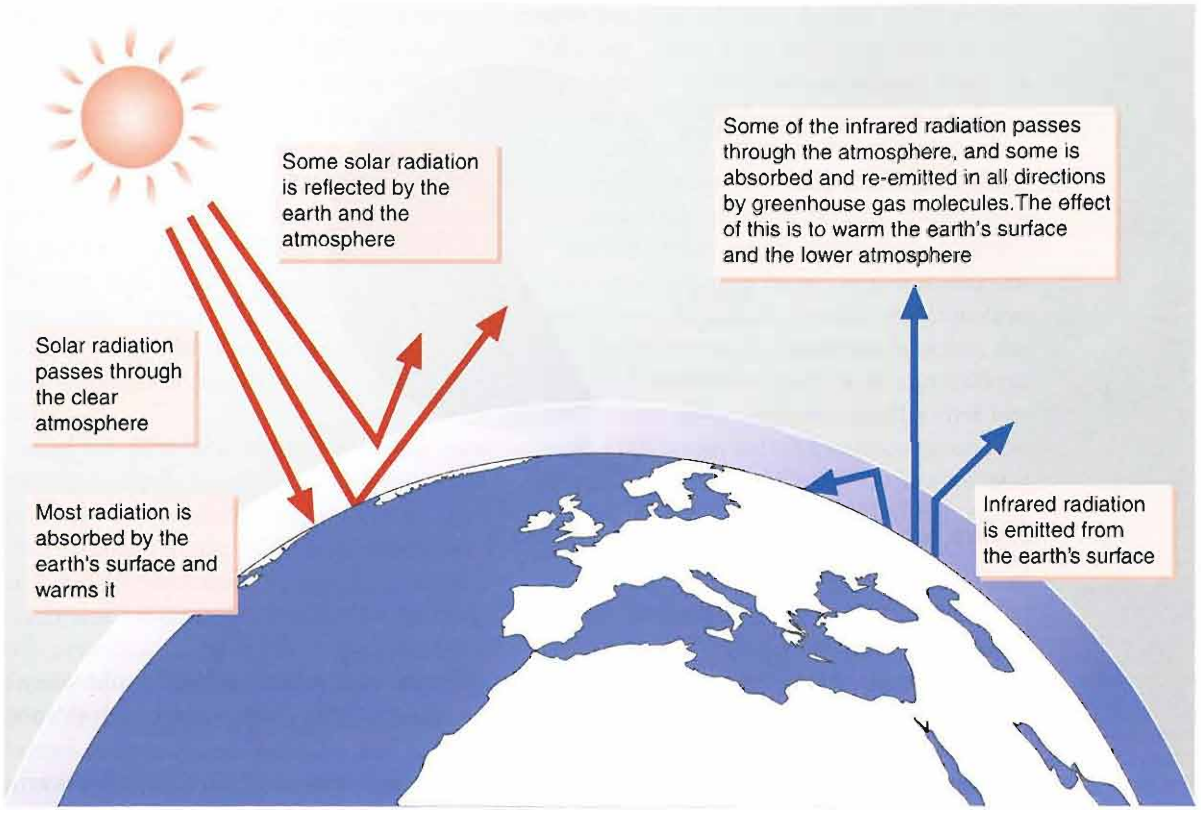


Figure 5.6 The greenhouse effect

Source: USA Environmental Protection Agency, www.epa.gov/climatechange/science/index.html (accessed 18 January 2008)

globalization of environmental politics, helping to define 'nature' in planetary terms. Finally, tackling global warming is the foundation for any sustainable future for the human species and it is widely recognized as the most significant long-term environmental problem. There is an increasingly strong argument which suggests that this issue has to be tackled as an urgent priority if other sustainability projects are to have any chance. Clearly, we need to understand what global warming is and why it is happening.

What is global warming?

Global warming is regarded by many people to be the most serious environmental challenge of our time. If scientific forecasts are correct, then it has the potential to alter irreversibly the functioning of the earth's climate and to produce a series of devastating environmental consequences which will be felt worldwide. Global warming refers to the gradual rise in the earth's average temperature due to changes in the chemical composition of the atmosphere. The current scientific consensus is that this is caused in large part by humans, because the gases that have built up and altered the earth's atmosphere are ones that are produced in great quantities by human activities.

The process of global warming is closely related to the idea of the greenhouse effect – the build-up of heat-trapping greenhouse gases within the earth's atmosphere. The principle is a simple one. Energy from the sun passes through the atmosphere and

Global Society 5.3 What are greenhouse gases?

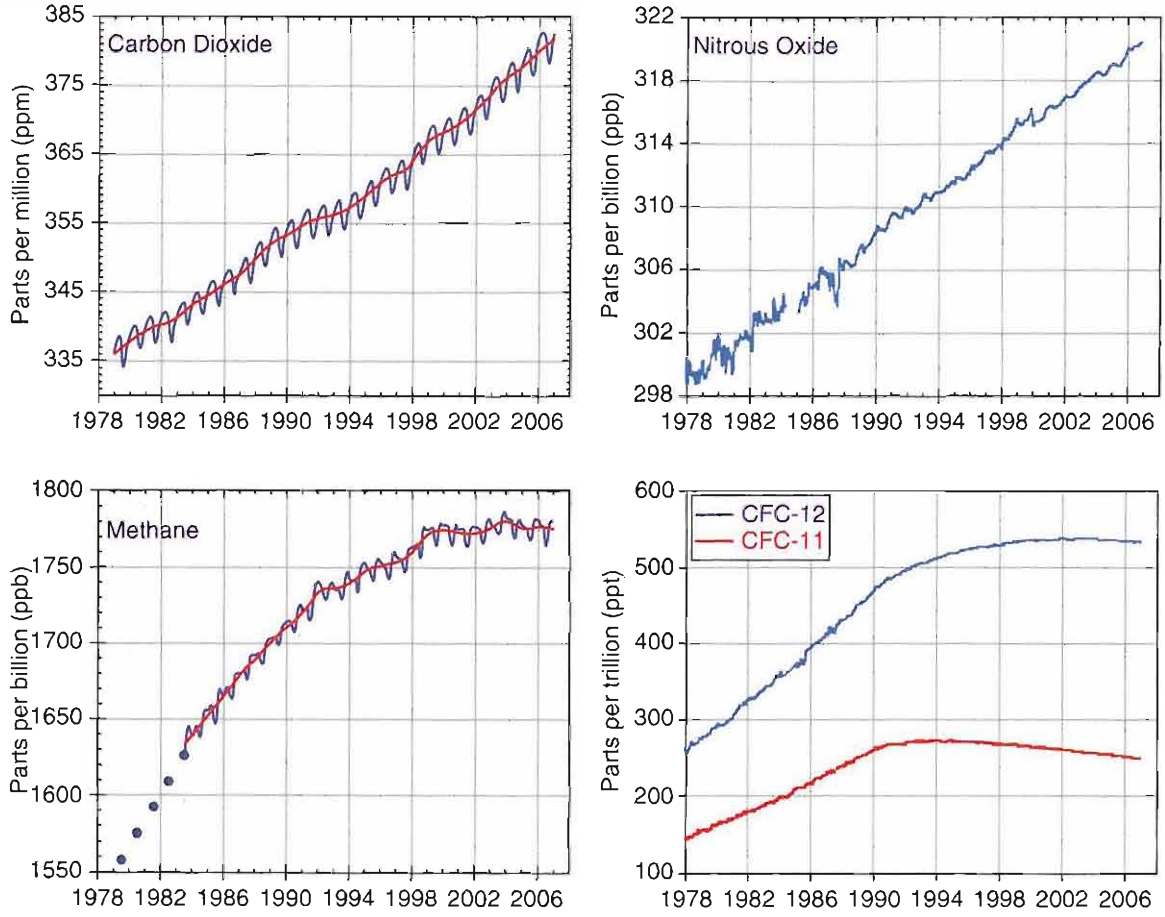
Some greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide occur naturally and are emitted to the atmosphere through natural processes and human activities. Other greenhouse gases (e.g., fluorinated gases) are created and emitted solely through human activities. The principal greenhouse gases that enter the atmosphere because of human activities are:

- *Carbon dioxide (CO_2)*: Carbon dioxide enters the atmosphere through the burning of fossil fuels (oil, natural gas, and coal), solid waste, trees and wood products, and also as a result of other chemical reactions (e.g., manufacture of cement). Carbon dioxide is also removed from the atmosphere (or 'sequestered') when it is absorbed by plants as part of the biological carbon cycle.
- *Methane (CH_4)* : Methane is emitted during the production and transport of coal, natural gas, and oil. Methane emissions also result from livestock and other agricultural practices and by the decay of organic waste in municipal solid waste landfills.
- *Nitrous oxide (N_2O)*: Nitrous oxide is emitted during agricultural and industrial activities, as well as during combustion of fossil fuels and solid waste.
- *Fluorinated gases*: Hydrofluorocarbons, perfluorocarbons and sulfur hexafluoride are synthetic, powerful greenhouse gases that are emitted from a variety of industrial processes. Fluorinated gases are sometimes used as substitutes for ozone-depleting substances (i.e., CFCs, HCFCs and halons). These gases are typically emitted in smaller quantities, but because they are potent greenhouse gases, they are sometimes referred to as High Global Warming Potential gases ('High GWP gases').

Source: Environmental Protection Agency (EPA): www.epa.gov/climatechange/emissions/index.html#ggo

heats the earth's surface. Although most of the solar radiation is absorbed directly by the Earth, some of it is reflected back. The greenhouse gases act as a barrier to this outgoing energy, trapping heat within the Earth's atmosphere much like the glass panels of a greenhouse (see figure 5.6). This natural greenhouse effect is what keeps the Earth at a reasonably comfortable surface temperature – at about 15.5 degrees Celsius. If it were not for the role of greenhouse gases in retaining heat, the Earth would be a much colder place, with an average temperature of −17 degrees Celsius.

When concentrations of atmospheric greenhouse gases rise, the greenhouse effect is intensified and much warmer temperatures are produced. Since the start of industrialization, the concentration of greenhouse gases has risen significantly. Concentrations of carbon dioxide – the main greenhouse gas – have increased by around 30 per cent since 1880, continuing to rise steeply from the 1980s. Methane concentrations have also doubled, nitrous oxide concentrations are up by about 15 per cent and other greenhouse gases that do not occur naturally have been generated by industrial development (see 'Global Society 5.3'). Most scientists now agree that the large increase in carbon dioxide in the atmosphere can be attributed to the burning of fossil fuels and other human activities, such as industrial production, large-scale agriculture, deforestation, mining, landfills and vehicle emissions. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC 2007) reports that on the basis of analysis comparing actual observations with a model forecast based only on natural climate changes and second model based on natural changes *plus* anthropogenic (human-created) climate changes, it is *very likely* that the increase in observed temperatures during the twentieth century is due to increasing anthropogenic green-



Note: Global averages of the concentrations of the major, well-mixed, long-lived greenhouse gases – carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide, CFC-12 and CFC-11 from the NOAA global flask sampling network since 1978. These gases account for about 97 per cent of the direct radiative forcing by long-lived greenhouse gases since 1750. The remaining 3 per cent is contributed by an assortment of 10 minor halogen gases (see text). Methane data prior to 1983 are annual averages from Etheridge et al. (1998), adjusted to the NOAA calibration scale (Dlugokencky et al. 2005).

Figure 5.7 Global trends in major greenhouse gases, 1978–2006
Source: Hofman 2007

house gas emissions (see figure 5.7). This is a stronger conclusion than that arrived at just six years earlier.

Figure 5.8 shows the upward trend in surface temperatures since the late nineteenth century, charting them against the average temperature in the period 1961–90 in central England and globally. The IPCC notes that 11 of the 12 years 1995–2006 are among the 12 warmest years on record since 1850.

THINKING CRITICALLY

How convincing are the arguments for and evidence of an anthropogenic cause of global warming? Given the enormity of this environmental problem, what might be the social psychological responses of individuals faced with knowledge of it? How has knowledge of global warming affected you personally?

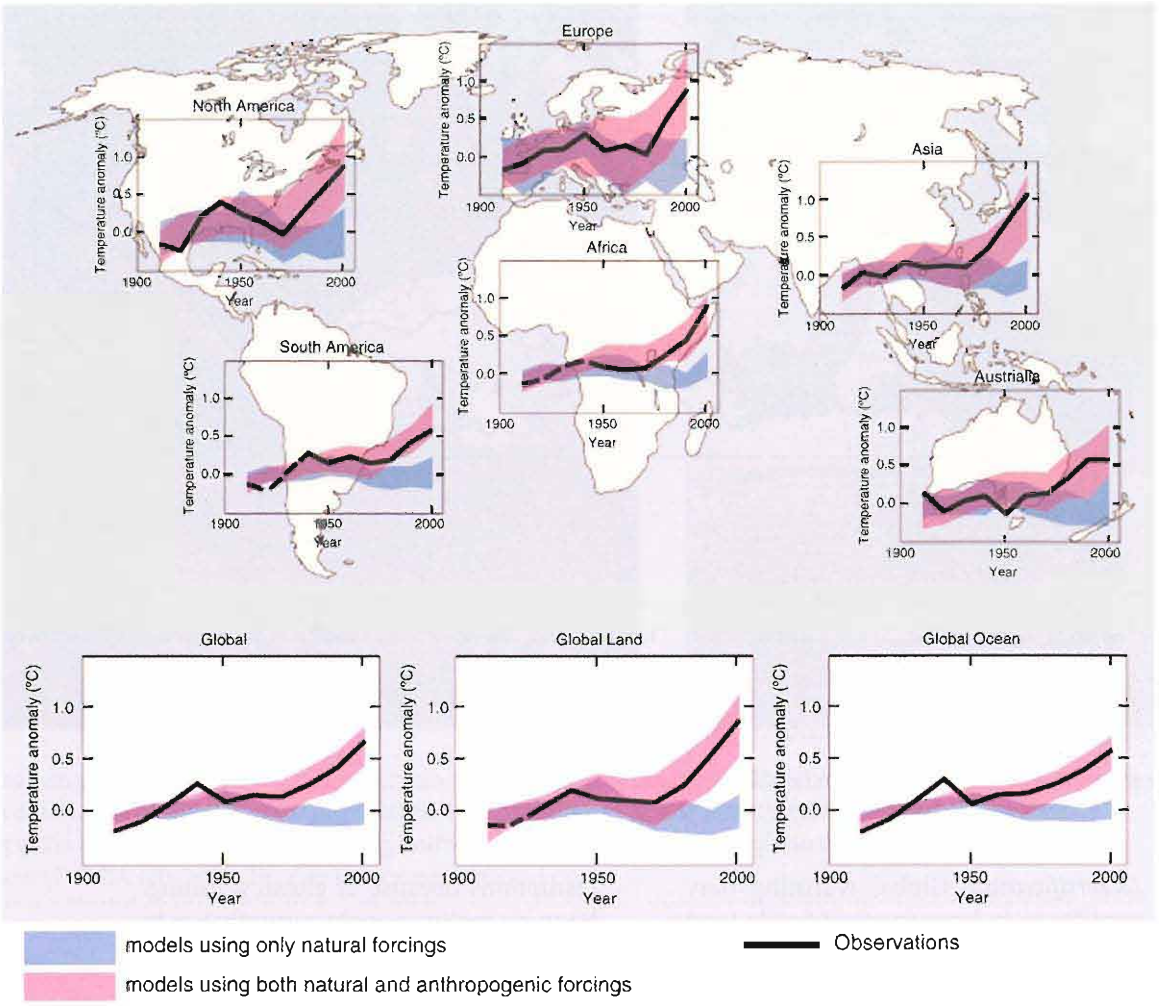


Figure 5.8 Global and continental temperature change, comparison of natural forcing with natural plus anthropogenic forcing

Source: Figure SPM.4 from the Summary for Policymakers of the Climate Change 2007: Synthesis Report. Contribution of Working Groups I, II and III to the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, p. 6 © 2007 IPCC.

The potential consequences of global warming

The consequences of global warming are likely to be devastating, with some of the potentially harmful effects worldwide including:

1 *Rising sea levels.* Global warming may cause the polar ice caps to melt and the oceans to warm and expand. As glaciers and other forms of land ice melt, sea levels will rise. Cities that are near the coasts or in low-lying areas will be flooded and become uninhabitable. If sea levels were to rise by one metre, Bangladesh would lose 17 per cent of its total land area, Egypt would lose 12 per cent and the Netherlands would lose 6 per cent (UNDP 1998). The Indian Ocean tsunami, which we discussed at the beginning of this chapter, would have caused considerably more devastation if sea levels had already been higher.

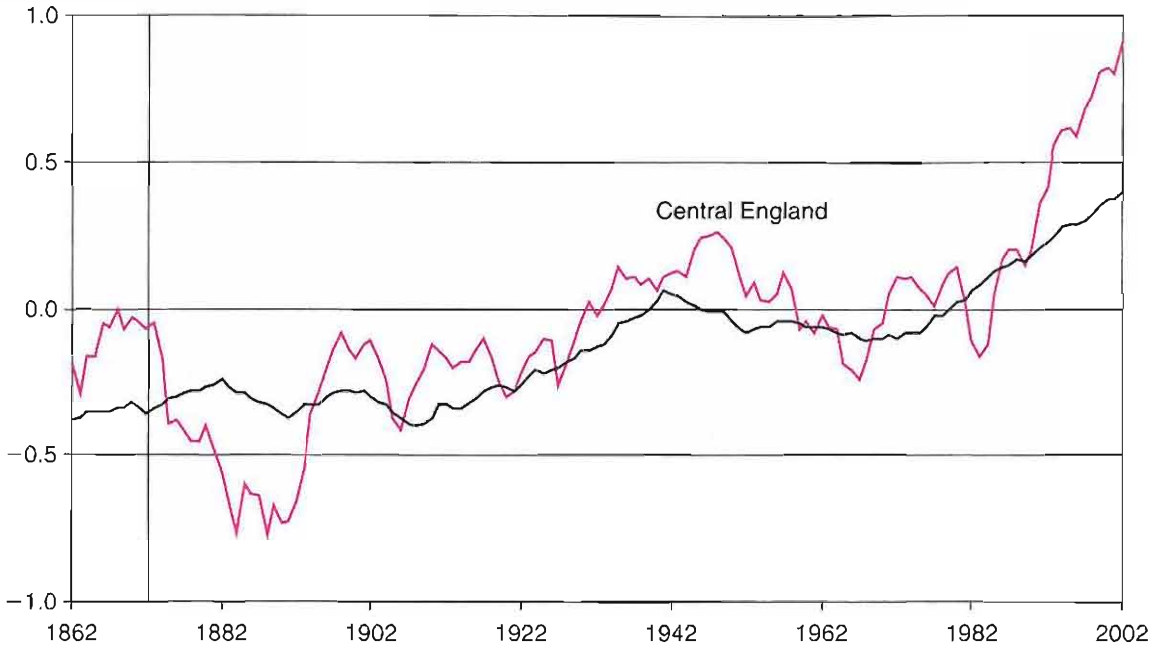
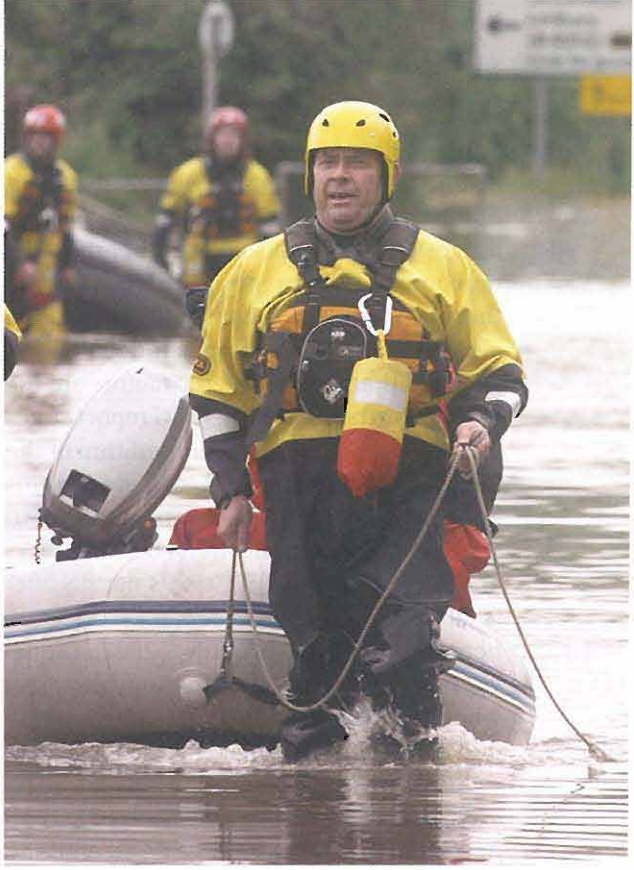


Figure 5.9 Difference in average surface temperature 1861–2002: comparison with 1961–90 average, global and central England (degrees centigrade)

Source: www.statistics.gov.uk/STATBASE/ssdataset.asp?vlnk=7279

2 *Desertification.* Global warming may contribute to large tracts of fertile land becoming desert. Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and South Asia will be further affected by desertification and intense soil erosion.
3 *The spread of disease.* Global warming may extend the geographical range and the seasonality for organisms, such as mosquitoes, which spread diseases like malaria and yellow fever. If temperatures were to rise by 3–5 degrees Celsius, the number of malaria cases could increase by 50–80 million per year.
4 *Poor harvests.* Agricultural yields may fall in many of the poorest areas of the world if global warming progresses. Populations in Southeast Asia, Africa and Latin America would be likely to be most affected.
5 *Changing climate patterns.* Climate patterns that have been relatively stable for thousands of years may undergo rapid disruptions because of global warming. Forty-six million people currently live in areas that could be destroyed by sea storms, while many others may suffer from floods and hurricanes.
6 *Geopolitical instability.* A report published for the US Department of Defense warned that, at their most abrupt, the effects of climate change



Low-lying areas are ever more susceptible to flooding as a result of global climate change, though the effects on the lives of people in these regions will vary tremendously. The picture on the left shows emergency supplies of food and medicines being delivered to a community in Bangladesh. The picture on the right shows RSPCA officers in England rescuing stranded pets.

discussed above could lead to disputes or even wars between nations as they attempt to protect their increasingly limited agricultural, fresh water and energy resources. The report cautions that mass migration could occur as people attempt to move to those regions which posseses the resources to adapt to climate change (Schwartz and Randall 2003).

Some trends associated with global warming seem to be moving much faster than scientists originally predicted. In December 1999, for example, a study by satellite showed that the Arctic ice cap is shrinking much more rapidly than scientists previously thought – a process that could have dramatic effects on the world climate in coming years. Similarly, in early 2002 two huge ice shelves – Larsen B and Thwaites glacier tongue – collapsed in Antarctica, shattering into thousands of icebergs within days. It is possible that the reduction in ice is the result of natural changes, but whatever its origins, the ice seems to be melting at an extraordinary pace. Measurements show that the North Pole sea ice has thinned by 40 per cent in recent decades in the summer and autumn, and has decreased by 10–15 per cent since the 1950s in the spring and summer. Global snow cover has shrunk by 10 per cent since the 1960s, and mountain glaciers have sharply retreated.

Responses to the risks of global warming

For a long time the thesis and scientific evidence of global warming was disputed.

Some scientists doubted whether the claimed effects were real, while others held that changes in the world's climate could be the result of natural trends, rather than the outcome of human intervention. However, there is now a strong consensus behind the view that global warming is indeed occurring and that anthropogenic factors are the main contributor. A 2007 IPCC report states that the average surface temperature of the Earth rose by some 0.74 degrees Celsius between 1906 and 2005. But the report also warns that the warming trend between 1955 and 2005 (0.13 degrees Celsius per decade) is almost double that for the 100 years between 1906 and 2005 (IPCC 2007). Global warming, it seems, is gathering pace. But where should our efforts be concentrated and which countries need to take the lead in reducing their emissions?

As figure 5.10 shows, emissions of carbon dioxide in five of the six largest CO_2 emitting countries continued to increase between 1990 and 2003, in spite of all of the debates and political promises made by governments. However, when we take population size into account and look at emissions per capita, the picture looks rather different. China and India currently produce much less CO_2 per capita than the USA, Europe, the Russian Federation and Japan (see figure 5.11), which shows why some developing countries see their own 'survival' emissions as far less damaging than the 'luxury' emissions of the already rich countries. Clearly, a coordinated global approach to cutting greenhouse gas emissions is made more difficult in the context of such uneven economic development at the national level, which produces as much disagreement as agreement on how to tackle the problem.

The industrial countries currently produce far more greenhouse gases than the developing world, with the United States emitting more carbon dioxide than any other single country, both absolutely and per capita. However, emissions from the developing world are increasing rapidly, particularly in countries that are undergoing rapid industrialization, and are expected to be roughly equal to those of industrialized countries some time around 2035.

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change was created in 1997 in Kyoto, Japan, where agreement was reached to cut greenhouse gas emissions significantly by 2010 in order to stabilize the situation at levels that do not pose a threat to the global climate. This is a very ambitious aim, which some critics have argued is not realistic.

Under the terms of the protocol, industrialized nations committed themselves to a range of targets to reduce emissions to below 1990 levels – the base year – by 2010. World targets range from an average 8 per cent cut for most of Europe to a maximum 10 per cent increase for Iceland and an 8 per cent increase for Australia. (The USA originally committed itself to a 7 per cent cut, but has never ratified the protocol.) Many scientists claim that this target was too modest, and argue that emissions must be cut by as much as 70 or 80 per cent if serious climatic consequences are to be avoided. Whatever governments do to cut emissions, it will be some time before the effects of global warming are altered as it takes more than a century for carbon dioxide to be removed from the atmosphere through natural processes.

In 2001, the US President, George W. Bush, refused to ratify the Kyoto Protocol, arguing that it would damage the US economy. After some debate, most other nations agreed to go ahead without the United States, in spite of it being the world's largest producer of greenhouse gases. Later the same year, talks in Bonn, Germany and Marrakech, Morocco finally agreed the increasingly complicated fine print of the protocol and signatory nations were urged to ratify the deal in their national legislatures by the end of 2002. In recent years, several of the largest producers of greenhouse gases have successfully cut emissions, including the UK, Germany, China and Russia – although Russia's cuts can largely be explained by the decline in its economy.

At the beginning of 2008, 174 countries

In 2003, 22 per cent of total world emissions originated in the United States, followed by China, with 16 per cent. Despite the substantial drop during the 1990s, the Russian Federation is the fourth largest emitter, followed closely by India and Japan.

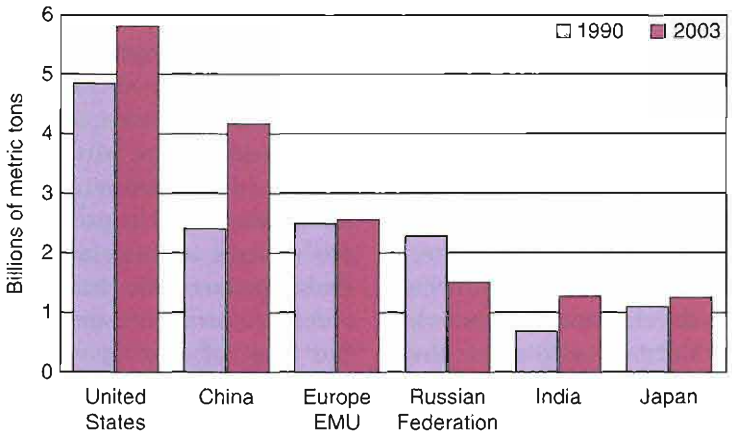
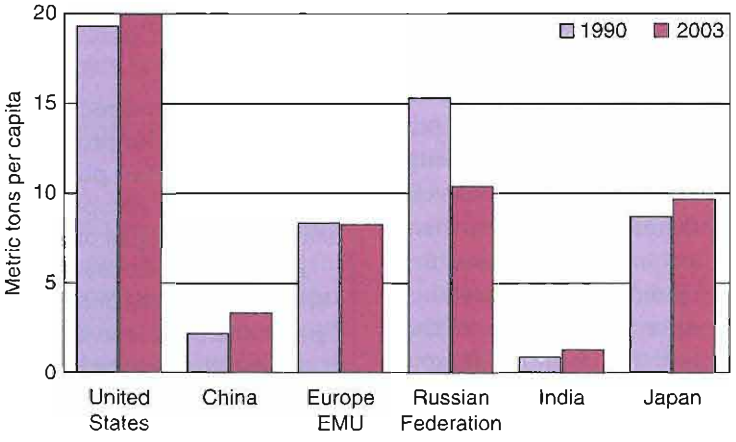


Figure 5.10 The six largest emitters of carbon dioxide, 1990 and 2003

Source: World Bank, *The Little Green Data Book*, 2007. © 2007 by World Bank. Reprinted with permission of World Bank in the format Textbook via Copyright Clearance Center.

Global representation for the top six carbon dioxide emitters is very different once population is taken into account.



Note: Emissions shown in the figures are from cement manufacturing and fossil fuel combustion. The EMU aggregate in the figures includes the members states of the Economic and Monetary Union of the European Union that have adopted the euro as their currency: Austria, Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Slovenia, and Spain.

Figure 5.11 The six largest emitters of carbon dioxide per capita, 1990 and 2003

Source: World Bank, *The Little Green Data Book*, 2007. © 2007 by World Bank. Reprinted with permission of World Bank in the format Textbook via Copyright Clearance Center.

had ratified the Kyoto Protocol: 37 developed countries and 137 developing countries. Australia, which had previously refused to take part, finally did so in December 2007 under the newly elected Labour Federal government. However, it is clear that tackling global warming will be very difficult if the country with the highest national emissions levels – the USA – continues to opt out of international attempts to cap greenhouse gas emissions.

The Kyoto Protocol was and is controversial and one important issue has been the decision to push for emissions cutbacks in the developed countries, while developing countries are only asked to monitor and report their emissions. This is an acknowledgement that the latter have some 'catching up' to do in terms of economic development, which would be severely hampered by an emissions cap or reduction. In the longer term, though, all countries will have to control and reduce their greenhouse gas emissions.

The Kyoto Protocol took 1990 greenhouse emission levels as its starting point. But this was seen by many in the developing world as favouring the industrialized countries, as it fails to take into account their 'historical responsibility' for the problem of global warming and, hence, avoids attributing blame. It is also unclear exactly when developing countries will be asked to reduce their emissions, or by how much. Will it allow for their inevitably higher emission levels as economic development catches up with the industrialized world? If it does not, then it may be seen as unfair and unworkable (Najam et al. 2003). At the time of writing, a successor to Kyoto has been formally approved by the G8+5 countries (the G8 countries plus China, India, Brazil, Mexico and South Africa) in the so-called, 'Washington Declaration' of 2007. This will see the introduction of a global 'cap and trade' system (involving all countries) in which emissions caps will be introduced alongside an emissions trading system (focused on carbon trading) that forces polluters to pay. The system works by rewarding those countries that reduce emissions (and sell credits) and penalizing those which do not (and are forced to pay for carbon credits). However, the overall effect of the cap and trade system is to push all countries towards lowering their emissions.

As with many new forms of manufactured risk, no one can be sure what the effects of global warming will be. Its causes are so diffuse and its precise consequences are difficult to calculate. Would a 'high' emissions scenario truly result in widespread natural disasters? Will stabilizing the level of carbon dioxide emissions protect most people in the world from the negative effects of climate changes? Is it possible that current processes of global warming have already triggered a series of further climatic disturbances? We cannot answer these questions with any certainty. The Earth's climate is extremely complex and a variety of factors will interact to produce different consequences in individual countries at varying points across the earth.

THINKING CRITICALLY

'The industrialized countries are responsible for producing global warming and their populations should be prepared to accept a lower material standard of living in order drastically to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.' What arguments could be advanced to persuade people in the industrialized world to accept a lower material standard of living? Would they be likely to accept such a solution?

Sociological theories and ecological sustainability

Natural scientists have been at the forefront of debates on environmental issues. As the examples of pollution, resource depletion, genetic modification and global warming

above show, environmental issues are different from many other sociological subjects, because they usually involve getting to grips with *natural scientific* research and evidence. However, the hybrid character of environmental issues means that natural scientists can never have a monopoly on them. Our brief introduction to the problem of global warming is the most striking example of this. The IPCC scientists acknowledge that twentieth-century global warming has largely been the product of human activities – industrialization, urbanization and globalization processes for example – and the experts in these areas are sociologists and other *social* scientists. If environmental problems are to be successfully understood, then social and natural scientists will have to try to understand each other rather better than they have done so far. This must surely be a positive challenge for the whole academic community.

The rest of this section will explore some of the main sociological theories linking social development with environmental damage, along with some of the major approaches to solving global environmental problems.

Consumerism and environmental damage

One important issue surrounding the environment and economic development is that of consumption patterns. Consumption refers to the goods, services, energy and resources that are used up by people, institutions and societies. It is a phenomenon with both positive and negative dimensions. On the one hand, rising levels of consumption around the world mean that people are living under better conditions than in times past. Consumption is linked to economic development – as living standards rise, people are able to afford more food, clothing, personal items, leisure time, holidays, cars and so forth. On the other hand, consumption can have negative impacts as well. Consumption patterns can damage the environmental resource base and exacerbate patterns of inequality.

The trends in world consumption over the course of the twentieth century are startling to observe. In 1900, world consumption levels were just over 1.5 trillion dollars (UNDP 1998); by the end of the century, private and public consumption expenditures amounted to around 24 trillion dollars – twice the level of 1975 and six times that of 1950. Consumption rates have been growing extremely rapidly over the past 30 years or so. In industrialized countries, consumption per head has been growing at a rate of 2.3 per cent annually; in East Asia growth has been even faster – 6.1 per cent annually. By contrast, the average African household consumes 20 per cent less today than it did 30 years ago. There is widespread concern that the consumption explosion has passed by the poorest fifth of the world's population.

The inequalities in consumption between the world's rich and poor are significant. North America and Western Europe contain only around 12 per cent of the world's population, but their private consumption – the amount spent on goods and services at the household level – is over 60 per cent of the world's total. In contrast, the world's poorest region – sub-Saharan Africa, which contains around 11 per cent of the total global population – has just a 1.2 per cent share of the world's total private consumption.

It has been argued that industrial capitalism sets societies on a 'treadmill of production' leading to environmental damage, using up natural resources at a rapid rate and generating high levels of pollution and waste (Schnaiberg 1980). However, in the twentieth century it was modern consumerism which kept that treadmill running faster in this direction (Bell 2004). Consumption is something that human beings have to engage in to survive, but modern forms of consumption are very different from earlier forms.

Mass production must also be accompanied by large-scale consumption. The

products of industry have to be bought and consumed, though producing and consuming may well be acted out in geographically distant locations. Products are made wherever it is cheapest to do so and consumed wherever the best price can be gained. In the past 60 years or so, this has led to industrial production moving to developing countries. The rapid transformation of the newly industrializing countries (NICs) such as Hong Kong, South Korea, Singapore and Taiwan in the 1970s and recent industrial development in India, China and Malaysia testify to this, which is part of the globalization process.

Sociologists of consumerism have argued that it is also a way of thinking, a mentality or even an ideology (Corrigan 1997). We can understand this aspect if we ask, 'Why do people continually consume and want to consume?' Perhaps it is simply because consumer goods have 'use-value' for people; they help to save them time and effort. But luxury items fit this explanation less well. They show another side to modern consumerism; its role in the social status competition within society (see chapter 7, 'Social Interaction and Everyday Life'). Differentiated mass consumption allows for complex, fine-grained distinctions to be made according to the styles and fashions of the day. People may be prepared to pay a premium for the latest fashions because these products allow them to say something about themselves, to communicate their status or their aspirations in highly visible ways to others. Even products with a clear use-value, such as clothes, are also fashionable items that are discarded and replaced before their 'use-value' has expired. Large amounts of such fashion-fuelled waste increases pressure on the environment.

Over time, consumer products become embedded in the routines of everyday life and are taken for granted. When this happens, it becomes difficult to perceive alternatives to their use. A good example of this is the modern motor vehicle, particularly the car. Many households have one, two or more cars, and people use them even for a short trip to the shops or to visit friends and relatives who may live quite close by. But large-scale car-ownership and use generates large amounts of pollution and waste in both the production and consumption of cars. Why has it proved so difficult to reduce our use of the car?

A survey of attitudes to car-ownership found a range of types of consumer amongst visitors to National Trust properties in north-west England (Anable 2005).

1 *Malcontented Motorists* form the largest group. These drivers are unhappy with many aspects of their car use, but feel that public transport has too many constraints to be viable as a genuine alternative, and so they do not switch.
2 *Complacent Car Addicts* accept that there are alternatives to using the car, but do not feel any pressing moral imperative to changing their pattern of use.
3 *Aspiring Environmentalists* have already reduced their car usage, but feel the car has advantages that force them not to give it up altogether.
4 *Die-hard Drivers* feel they have a right to drive, enjoy driving and tend to have negative feelings towards other modes of transportation, such as buses and trains.
5 *Car-less Crusaders* have given up their cars for environmental reasons and see alternative modes of travel positively as a result.
6 *Reluctant Riders* do use public transport but would prefer to use the car; however, for a variety of reasons, such as health problems, they cannot do this, but will accept lifts from others.

The study shows that blanket appeals to people's emerging environmental awareness are likely to fail. Instead, 'the segmentation approach illustrates that policy interventions need to be responsive to the different motivations and constraints of the sub-groups' (Anable 2005: 77).

THINKING CRITICALLY

Looking at the typology of transport users above, which category best describes you? Think of an appropriate environmental policy aimed at each consumer type that stands the best chance of generating pro-environmental behaviour in that specific group. Are there any universal environmental policies that might have the desired effect on all the groups?

Another element of modern consumerism is its pleasurable aspect. But *why* is it pleasurable? Some sociologists have argued that the pleasure of consumerism does not lie in the *use* of products but in the *anticipation* of purchasing them. Colin Campbell (1992) argues that this is *the most* pleasurable part of the process; the wanting, the longing after, the seeking out and desiring of products, not the use of them. It is a 'romantic ethic' of consumption based on desire and longing. Marketing of products and services draws on this anticipatory consumerism in seductive ways to create and intensify people's desires. That is why we keep going back for more and are never truly satisfied. From an environmental perspective, the 'romantic ethic' of consumerism is disastrous. We constantly demand new products and more of them. That means more production, so the cycle of mass production and mass consumption continues to churn out pollution and wastes natural resources. At the input side of production, natural resources are used up in enormous quantities, and at the output end in consumption, people throw away useful things not because they are *use-less*, but because they are no longer in fashion or fail to represent their status aspirations.

The sociology of consumption shows us that the combination of industrialization, capitalism and consumerism has transformed society–environment relations. Many environmentalists and more than a few social and natural scientists have concluded that this continual expansion of economies and the continuing promotion of economic growth cannot carry on indefinitely. The resulting pollution might have been ecologically insignificant if it had been restricted to a small part of the global human population. But when industrialization spreads across the planet, when a majority of people live in huge cities, and when capitalist companies become multinational and consumerism seduces people in all countries, then the natural environment's capacity for recovery and resilience becomes severely weakened.

Environmentalists argue that current consumption patterns are not only highly unequal, but they are also having a severe impact on the environment and, in the long term, are not sustainable. For example, the consumption of fresh water has doubled since 1960; the burning of fossil fuels, which is the main contributor to global warming discussed below, has almost quintupled in the past 50 years; and the consumption of wood is up by 40 per cent from 25 years ago. Fish stocks are declining, wild species are becoming extinct, water supplies are diminishing and wooded areas are shrinking in size. Patterns of production and consumption are not only depleting existing natural elements, but are also contributing to their degradation through waste products and harmful emissions (UNDP 1998).

Finally, although the rich are the world's main consumers, the environmental damage that is caused by growing consumption has the heaviest impact on the poor. As we saw in our discussion of global warming, the wealthy are in a better position to enjoy the many benefits of consumption without having to deal with its negative effects. On a local level, affluent groups can usually afford to move away from problem areas, leaving the poor to bear most of the costs. Chemical plants, power stations, major roads, railways and airports are often sited close to low-income areas. On a global level, we can see a similar process at work: soil degradation, deforestation, water shortages, lead emissions and air

pollution are all concentrated within the developing world. Poverty also intensifies these environmental problems. People with few resources have little choice but to maximize the resources that are available to them. As a result, more and more pressures are put on a shrinking resource base as the human population increases.

Limits to growth and sustainable development

A central motivating idea for environmental campaigners has been that of 'sustainability' – ensuring that human activity does not compromise the ecology of planet Earth. In *The Ecologist*, the UK campaigning magazine, Edward Goldsmith and his colleagues set out the charge against industrial expansion in their 'Blueprint for Survival' (1972: 15): 'The principal defect of the industrial way of life with its ethos of expansion is that it is not sustainable . . . we can be certain . . . that sooner or later it will end.' Such doom-laden forecasts used to be described as 'catastrophist' and were restricted to the wilder fringes of the environmental movement. However, the idea now has a wider currency amongst the general public and policy-makers, for which the scientific predictions of global warming are largely responsible. Anyone who recycles their plastic, paper and glass, conserves water or tries to use their car less is probably aware that they too are trying to put into practice the idea of sustainability.

One important influence on the rise of environmental movements and public concern about environmental problems can be traced back to a famous report first published in the early 1970s, which set out the case that economic growth could not continue indefinitely. The report and its findings are discussed in 'Classic Studies 5.1'.

Classic Studies 5.1 Modelling the limits to economic growth

The research problem

Global human population has grown enormously since industrialization took hold and the resulting pressure on the environment has led to soil degradation, deforestation and pollution. Are there any limits to this pattern of development? Will food supplies keep up with increasing demand or will the world see mass famine? How many people can the planet support without ruining the environment? These hugely significant questions were asked of a group of scientists by a global think-tank, the Club of Rome, almost 40 years ago. The resulting book was published as *The Limits to Growth* (Meadows et al. 1972).

Meadows and colleagues' explanation

The *Limits* study used modern computer-modelling techniques to make forecasts about the consequences of continued economic growth, population growth, pollution and the depletion of natural resources. Their computer model – *World3* – showed what would happen if the trends that were established between 1900 and 1970 were to continue to the year 2100. The computer projections were then altered to generate a variety of possible consequences, depending on different rates of growth of the factors considered. The researchers found that each time they altered one variable, there would eventually be an environmental crisis. If the world's societies failed to change, then growth would end anyway through the depletion of resources, food shortages or industrial collapse, sometime before 2100.

The research team used computer modelling to explore five global trends (Meadows et al. 1974: 21):

- accelerating industrialization across the world
- rapid population growth
- widespread malnutrition in some regions
- depletion of non-renewable resources
- a deteriorating natural environment

The program was then run to test 12 alternative scenarios, each one manipulated to resolve

some of the identified problems. This allowed the researchers to ask questions about which combinations of population levels, industrial output and natural resources would be sustainable. The conclusion they drew in 1972 was that there *was* still time to put off the emerging environmental crisis. But if nothing was done, and even if the amount of available resources in the model were doubled, pollution were reduced to pre-1970s levels and new technologies were introduced, economic growth would still grind to a halt before 2100. Some campaigners saw this as vindicating the radical environmental argument that industrial societies were just not sustainable over the long term.

Critical points

Many economists, politicians and industrialists roundly condemned the report, arguing that it was unbalanced, irresponsible and, when its predictions failed to materialize, just plain wrong. The modelling was largely devoid of political and social variables and was therefore just a partial account of reality. The researchers later accepted that some of the criticisms were justified. The method used focused on *physical* limits and assumed existing rates of economic growth and technological innovation, but this did not take account of the capacity of human beings to respond to environmental challenges. For example, market forces could be made to work to limit the over-exploitation of resources. If a mineral like magnesium starts to become scarce, its price will rise. As its price rises it will be used less, and producers might even find alternatives should costs rise too steeply. *Limits* was seen by many as yet another overly pessimistic, catastrophist tract that engaged in unreliable 'futurology' – predicting the future from current trends.

Contemporary significance

Whatever its limitations, the original report made a significant impact on public debate and environmental activism. It made many more people aware of the damaging consequences of industrial development and technology, as well as warning about the perils of allowing pollution to increase. The report was an important catalyst for the modern environmental movement (for a wider discussion, see chapter 22, 'Politics, Government and Social Movements'). Twenty years later, the team published *Beyond the Limits* (1992) an even more pessimistic report, castigating the world's politicians for wasting the time, identified as crucial in the first report, arguing that ecological 'overshoot' was *already* occurring. Then in 2004, their *30 Year Update* was released, arguing that although some progress had been made in environmental awareness and technological development, the evidence of global warming, declining fish stocks and much more, showed a world 'overshooting' its natural limits. This conclusion was also that of the UN's Millennium Ecosystem Assessment of 2005, which is tellingly titled, *Living Beyond Our Means*. The basic conclusion from the original *Limits* report and its updates continues to resonate in our globalizing world.

Sustainable development

Rather than calling for economic growth to be reined in, more recent developments turn on the concept of sustainable development. This term was first introduced in a 1987 report commissioned by the United Nations, *Our Common Future*. This is also known as the *Brundtland Report*, after the chair of the organizing committee, Gro Harlem Brundtland, then Prime Minister of Norway. The report's authors argued that use of the Earth's resources by the present generation was unsustainable:

> Over the course of the twentieth century the relationship between the human world and the planet that sustains it has undergone a profound change . . . major, unintended changes are occurring in the atmosphere, in soils, in waters, among plants and animals, and in the relationships among all of these. . . . To keep options open for future generations, the present generation must begin now, and begin together, nationally and internationally. (Brundtland 1987)

The Brundtland Commission regarded sustainable development as, 'development

which meets the needs of the present generation, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs' (ibid.) – a short definition, but one which carries enormous significance. Sustainable development means that economic growth should be carried on in such a way as to recycle physical resources rather than deplete them, and to keep levels of pollution to a minimum.

Following the publication of *Our Common Future*, the phrase 'sustainable development' came to be widely used by both environmentalists and governments. It was employed at the UN Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 and has subsequently appeared in other ecological summit meetings organized by the UN, such as the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002. Sustainable development is also one of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which have been agreed by 191 states around the world as they aim to reduce many forms of poverty in the coming decades. The relevant MDGs include the integration of the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes, the reversal of the loss of environmental resources, the reduction by half of the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and achieving a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum-dwellers – all by 2020.

» For more on the Millennium Development Goals, see chapter 13, 'Global Inequality'.

The Brundtland Report attracted much criticism, just as the report of the Club of Rome had done some quarter of a century earlier. Critics see the notion of sustainable development as too vague and as neglecting the specific needs of poorer countries. According to the critics, the idea of sustainable development tends to focus attention only on the needs of richer countries; it does not consider the ways in which the high levels of consumption in the more affluent countries are satisfied at the expense of other people. For instance, demands on Indonesia to conserve its rainforests could be seen as unfair, because Indonesia has a greater need than the industrialized countries for the revenue it must forgo by accepting conservation.

It can also be argued that linking the concept of ecological sustainability to that of economic development is contradictory. This is a particularly pertinent point where sustainability and development clash, for example when considering new roads or retail sites it is often the case that the prospect of many new jobs and economic prosperity means sustainability takes second place. This is even more pronounced for governments in developing countries, which are badly in need of more economic activity. In recent years, ideas of environmental justice and ecological citizenship have come to the fore (as we see below), partly as a result of the severe problems associated with the concept and practice of sustainable development.

It is easy to be sceptical about the future prospects for sustainable development. Its aim of finding ways of balancing human activity with sustaining natural ecosystems may appear impossible. Nonetheless, sustainable development looks to create common ground amongst nation-states and connects the world development movement with the environmental movement in a way that no other project has yet managed

THINKING CRITICALLY

Sustainable development is 'development which meets the needs of the present generation, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'. What are the *needs* of the present generation? How might we find out what the *needs* of future generations will be? Can sustainable development policies be devised from this definition?

to do. It gives radical environmentalists the opportunity to push for full implementation of its widest goals, but, at the same time, moderate campaigners can be involved locally and have an impact. This inclusivity can be seen as a weakness, but also a potential strength of the sustainable development project.

Living in the global 'risk society'

Humans have always had to face risks of one kind or another, but today's risks are qualitatively different from those that came in earlier times. Until quite recently, human societies were threatened by external risk – dangers such as drought, earthquakes, famines and storms that spring from the natural world and are unrelated to the actions of humans. Today, however, we are increasingly confronted with various types of manufactured risk – risks that are created by the impact of our own knowledge and technology on the natural world. As we shall see, many environmental and health risks facing contemporary societies are instances of manufactured risk: they are the outcomes of our own interventions into nature.

Global Society 5.4 Manufactured risks and the survival of humanity

In 2003, Martin Rees, the British Astronomer Royal, published a book provocatively called *Our Final Century*, subtitled with the question: 'Will the human race survive the twenty-first century?' Rees argues that the explosive advances in science and technology, seen for example in bio-, cyber- and nanotechnology and in the exploration of space, do not just offer exhilarating prospects for the future, but also contain what he calls a dark side.

Scientific advancement can have unintended consequences, as we have seen, and Rees's book examines the likelihood of catastrophic scenarios where human civilization dies out. He describes some of the apocalyptic risks that could occur with the new science of the twenty-first century: these include nuclear holocaust, caused by terrorists or nations and terrorist use of biological weapons or laboratory errors that create new diseases.

Rees's conclusions are sobering. He separates the long term from the short term. In the short term, which he defines as the next 20 years, he is prepared to bet on a major catastrophe killing more than a million people (though he fervently hopes that he will be wrong in his assessment). Returning to the subtitle of his book, Rees argues, over the next 100 years – which he calls the long term – he gives humanity a 50/50 chance of surviving the twenty-first century.

The prognosis may seem desperately pessimistic, but Rees argues that he hopes his book will stimulate discussion on how to guard as far as possible against the worst risks, while deploying new knowledge optimally for human benefit.

Debates on genetically modified foods, global warming and other manufactured risks have presented individuals with new choices and challenges in their everyday lives. Because there is no road map to these new dangers, individuals, countries and transnational organizations must negotiate risks as they make choices about how lives are to be lived. And because there are no definitive answers as to the outcomes of such risks, each individual is forced to make decisions about which risks he or she is prepared to take. This can be a bewildering endeavour. Should we use food and raw materials if their production or consumption might have a negative impact on our own health and on the natural environment? Even seemingly simple decisions about what to eat are now made in the context of conflicting information and opinions about the product's relative merits and drawbacks.

Ulrich Beck (1992) has written extensively about risk and globalization. As technological change progresses more and more rapidly, producing new forms of risk, we

must constantly respond and adjust to the changes. Risks today involve a series of interrelated changes in contemporary social life: shifting employment patterns, heightened job insecurity, the declining influence of tradition and custom on self-identity, the erosion of traditional family patterns and the democratization of personal relationships. Because personal futures are much less fixed than they were in traditional societies, decisions of all kinds present risks for individuals. Getting married, for example, is a more risky endeavour today than it was at a time when marriage was a lifelong institution. Decisions about educational qualifications and career paths can also feel risky: it is difficult to predict what skills will be valuable in an economy that is changing as rapidly as ours. 'Classic Studies 5.2' explores Beck's arguments, specifically in relation to environmental risks.

Classic Studies 5.2 Ulrich Beck and the global risk society

The research problem

This chapter has explored some of the environmental consequences of industrial production and high levels of consumption. Taking a long-term view, we can see that the spread of industrialization produces more widespread and potentially serious side-effects in the form of environmental risks. But is modern life really more risky, or are we just more 'risk aware'? Are we worrying unnecessarily about environmental problems? The German sociologist, Ulrich Beck (1944–), has been the foremost sociological theorist of risk, which he sees as much more significant than sociologists previously thought.

Beck's explanation

Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the politics of modern societies was dominated by a major conflict of interest between workers and employers – in Marx's terms, between the non-owning working class and the property-owning capitalist class. The conflict centred on issues of wealth distribution as trades unions and labour parties sought a more equal distribution of the socially produced wealth. Such struggles still continue of course. But Ulrich Beck (1992, 1999, 2002) argues that this distributional conflict is losing its significance as environmental risks rise to prominence. He says that more people are beginning to realize that their fight for a share of the 'wealth cake' is futile if the cake itself is be poisoned (Beck 2002: 128) as a result of pollution and environmental damage. Beck argues that:

> the knowledge is spreading that the sources of wealth are 'polluted' by growing 'hazardous side effects'. This is not at all new, but it has remained unnoticed for a long time in the efforts to overcome poverty. . . . To put it differently, in the risk society the unknown and unintended consequences come to be a dominant force in history and society. (1992: 20–1)

Industrial societies are slowly dissolving as environmental problems build up; this is an unintended consequence of the rush for economic growth and material prosperity. Beck (1999) argues that we are, in effect, moving into a 'world risk society' – a new type of society in which risk consciousness and risk avoidance are becoming the central features – because environmental pollution does not respect national boundaries. No matter where industrial production or consumption takes place, its consequences can be felt in very distant locations. The relatively rich countries are not immune from industrial pollution and global environmental damage. We will remain dependent on science and high technology though, because it is only through these that industrial processes can be safely and effectively managed.

Beck wants to show us that the environmental issue is moving from the margins of political concern towards the centre. Most of the risks we face are the products of human activity; they are not like the purely natural disasters of film and television. This means that the environment becomes an issue for political debate and decision-making and we can see the creation of environmental organizations and Green political

parties in the 1970s as the first step towards inclusion of environmental issues into mainstream politics.

Critical points

One of the main criticisms of Beck's overall thesis is that there is not (yet) enough evidence to support his theory of the transition to a 'risk society', even though there is today more awareness of environmental risks (Hajer 1996; Sutton 2004). Similarly, the idea that older forms of class-based politics are losing out to a new politics of risk seems premature. In most countries, Green political parties have not broken through the conventional party system, and globally the issue of wealth creation and distribution still tends to dominate over environmental protection whenever these objectives clash. Finally, it has been argued that the risk thesis fails to take account of cultural variability in definitions of risk (Douglas 1994; Scott 2000). What some societies define as 'risk', others may not, in the same way that what is defined as pollution in wealthy industrial societies is often seen as a sign of healthy economic development in poorer developing countries.

Contemporary significance

The concept of risk holds a special place in current sociological debates on environmental issues and the direction of social change. Beck's risk thesis is useful, because it provides part of an explanation for why environmental movement concerns have found such a receptive audience. Once people become sensitized to risks, the arguments of environmentalists begin to make more sense. Beck's *Risk Society* has taken sociological thinking on modernity and its possible futures in a new and highly original direction, making us re-think the sociological tradition, and for this reason it has rightly become a modern classic of social theory.

THINKING CRITICALLY

How aware are you of risk in your everyday life? What actions do you routinely take to minimize personal risk? Do you engage in any 'risk-taking activities' and if so, why do you do it? Is risk always a negative part of modern life or can you think of any positive aspects?

Ecological modernization

For environmentalists, both capitalist and communist forms of modernization have signally failed. They have delivered wealth and material success, but at the price of massive environmental damage. In recent years, groups of academic social scientists have tried to develop a theoretical perspective called ecological modernization, which accepts that 'business as usual' is no longer possible, but rejects radical environmentalist solutions involving de-industrialization. Instead they focus on technological innovation and the use of market mechanisms to bring about positive outcomes, transforming production methods and reducing pollution at its source.

Ecological modernizers see huge potential in leading European industries to reduce the usage of natural resources *without* this affecting economic growth. This is an unusual position, but it does have a certain logic. Rather than simply rejecting more economic growth, they argue that an *ecological form* of growth is theoretically possible. An example is the introduction of catalytic converters and emission controls on motor vehicles, which has been delivered within a short period of time and shows that advanced technologies can make a big difference to greenhouse gas emissions. If environmental protection really can be achieved like this, then we can continue to enjoy our high technology lifestyles.

Ecological modernizers also argue that if consumers demand environmentally sound production methods and products, then

market mechanisms will be forced to try and deliver them. The example of opposition to GM food in Europe (discussed above) is a good example of this idea in practice. Supermarkets have not stocked or pushed the supply of GM foods, because large numbers of consumers have made it clear that they will stay on the shelves.

The theory of ecological modernization sees that five social and institutional structures need to be ecologically transformed:

1 *Science and technology*: to work towards the invention and delivery of sustainable technologies.
2 *Markets and economic agents*: to introduce incentives for environmentally benign outcomes.
3 *Nation-states*: to shape market conditions which allow this to happen.
4 *Social movements*: to put pressure on business and the state to continue moving in an ecological direction.
5 *Ecological ideologies*: to assist in persuading more people to get involved in the ecological modernization of society. (Mol and Sonnenfeld 2000)

Science and technology have a particularly crucial role in developing preventative solutions, building in ecological considerations at the design stage. This will transform currently polluting production systems.

Since the mid-1990s, three new areas of debate had entered the ecological modernization perspective. Firstly, research began to expand to the developing countries of the South, significantly challenging the Eurocentrism of the original perspective. Second, once ecological modernizers started to think beyond the West, the theory of globalization became more relevant and current research seeks to link globalization with ecological modernization (Mol 2001). Third, ecological modernization has started to take account of the sociology of consumption and theories of consumer societies. This has led to some interesting studies exploring the ecological modernization of domestic consumption as well as of production. These studies look at how consumers can play a part in the ecological modernization of society and on how domestic technologies can be improved to reduce energy consumption, save scarce resources (such as water) and contribute to waste reduction through recycling.

The possibilities offered by ecological modernization can be illustrated by reference to the waste disposal industry – the industry that gets rid of the tonnes of waste products that industries and consumers generate every day. Until recently, most of this waste was simply processed and buried in landfill sites. Today, the whole industry is being transformed. Technological developments make it much cheaper to produce newsprint from recycled paper than from wood pulp. Hence there are good economic reasons, as well as environmental ones, to use and reuse paper instead of endlessly cutting down trees. Not just individual companies, but whole industries are actively pursuing the goal of 'zero waste' – the complete recycling of all waste products for future industrial use. Toyota and Honda have already reached a level of 85 per cent recyclability for the car parts they use. In this context, waste is no longer just the harmful dumping of materials, but a resource for industry and, to some extent, a means of driving further technological innovation.

Significantly, some of the major contributions to recycling, and therefore to sustainable development, have come from areas with a heavy concentration of information technology industries, such as California's Silicon Valley. Information technology, unlike many older forms of industrial production, is environmentally clean. The more it plays a part in industrial production, the greater the likelihood that harmful environmental effects will be reduced. This consideration could have some bearing on the future development of the world's poorer societies. In some areas of production, at least, it might be possible for them to

achieve rapid economic development without the pollution produced by the older industrial economies, because information technology will play a much greater role.

Unlike other perspectives, ecological modernization is less concerned with global inequality and more interested in how businesses, individuals and non-state actors can all play a part in transforming society. This makes it different from sustainable development, which begins from the premise that reducing global inequality is a prerequisite for environmental protection. Ecological modernizers also argue that if the capitalist economic system can be made to work for environmental protection then it will continue; if not, then something different will have to emerge because the ecological modernization of global society is already well under way.

Critics have seen ecological modernization as overly reliant on technological fixes and relatively ignorant of cultural, social and political conflicts. It is probably correct to say that ecological modernization is imbued with technological optimism rather than having a fully worked out theory of how to get from here to a future sustainable society. But the myriad real-world examples they produce, of practical technologies and suggestions for change, could collectively make a big difference, especially if ways can be found to make them financially viable in developing countries. However, these will also need to be introduced alongside the kind of international agreements that characterized the Kyoto Protocol, which could then ensure the spread of best practice and knowledge of what works.

THINKING CRITICALLY

Look again at the five social and institutional structures that constitute an ecologically modernist approach to environmental problems. List them in order of current progress – which structure has been transformed the most and which the least? How would you explain this? What obstacles are harder to overcome in transforming the structures of modern societies in environmentally sensitive directions?

Environmental justice and ecological citizenship

Environmental justice

If ecological modernization perhaps leans too heavily on technological fixes, one way of balancing this is by promoting the active involvement of people from all social groups and classes in the project of achieving sustainable development.

Environmental justice is a term that originated in the USA with the formation of grassroots networks of activists in working-class communities (Szasz 1994; Bell 2004: ch. 1; Visgilio and Whitelaw 2003). One touchstone campaign was that of Lois Gibbs in Niagara Falls, New York in 1978, seeking to relocate the Love Canal community, which she discovered had been built on a 20,000-ton toxic chemical dump. The community campaign was ultimately successful when 900 working-class families were relocated away from the leaking dump in 1980 (Gibbs 2002). Environmental justice groups have focused on campaigns against the siting of toxic waste sites and incinerators in urban areas with high working-class and ethnic minority populations. Linking environmental quality to social class inequalities shows that environmentalism is not just a middle-class concern but can be linked to working-class interests, and takes account of social inequalities and real-world 'risk positions'. In the USA, toxic waste sites have tended to be situated in black and Hispanic communities where citizens' action groups are relatively less powerful, but Gibbs's campaign showed that they are not powerless.

Environmental justice groups can be very significant. Their emergence has the potential to broaden the support base of environmental politics to currently under-represented groups within the wider

environmental movement. For instance, Friends of the Earth International (amongst others) has expanded its agenda, recognizing the need to tackle social problems if pressures on the natural environment are to be relieved (Rootes 2005). Environmental justice takes us into the urban and inner city areas where most of the waste products of modern life end up, and this opens up environmental politics to people who may not have thought about their problems as being at all 'environmental'.

Perhaps the most significant consequence of environmental justice groups is that they offer the possibility of linking environmental politics in the rich countries with that practised in the relatively poorer ones. One important example was the protest against the multinational oil company, Shell's, impact on the environment of the indigenous Ogoni people in Nigeria. The campaign of the *Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People* (formed in 1990) and the international support it garnered is just one example of the potentially unifying concept of environmental justice. Attempts by the Nigerian government to put down the resistance movement involved torture, ransacking of villages and, in 1995, the eventual execution of nine members of the movement's leadership, including the writer Ken Saro-Wiwa, in the face of international protest (Watts 1997). Such events reinforce the argument that the relatively powerless are made to bear the brunt of environmental pollution. Environmental justice campaigns demonstrate the potential for linking social inequalities and poverty to environmental issues, promising to make environmentalism more than just a nature-defence movement.

Ecological citizenship

One final development worthy of note is the emergence of a type of citizenship linked to the defence of the natural environment. In recent years, some sociologists and political scientists have argued that a new form of citizenship is emerging, something Mark J. Smith (1998) has called ecological citizenship and Dobson and Bell (2006) refer to as environmental citizenship.

As discussed in chapter 12, 'Poverty, Social Exclusion and Welfare', the concept of citizenship is not new and can be divided into different types. *Civil citizenship* emerged with modern property-ownership, which imposed certain mutual obligations on people to respect each other's rights to property. *Political citizenship* emerged later, during which voting rights expanded, working-class groups and women were brought into the suffrage and rights of association (as in trades unions) and free speech developed. The third stage, *social citizenship*, saw rights to welfare and responsibilities for collective provision of social benefits. What Smith and others see is that a fourth stage is developing, in which ecological citizenship rights and responsibilities form the centrepiece.

Ecological citizenship involves new obligations: to non-human animals, to future generations of human beings and to maintaining the integrity of the natural environment (Sandilands 1999). Obligations to animals means reconsidering human uses of animals that infringe their rights to leading a natural life and expressing their natures. Hence, vivisection, hunting, farming methods, breeding and pet-keeping would all need to be reassessed. Ecological citizenship's new obligation to future generations of people means working towards sustainability over a long time period. If economic development plans threaten the ability of future generations to provide for their own needs, then other forms will need to be designed and planned. Political and economic planning must become future-oriented and take a long-term view rather than adopting a short-term, free market or laissez-faire approach. Finally, all human activity should be considered with reference to its effects on the natural environment and a *precautionary principle* should be adopted that puts the onus on developers to justify their actions in ecological terms. In

essence, then, ecological citizenship introduces a new demand for people to take account of the human 'ecological footprint' – the impact of human activity on the natural environment and natural processes.

Clearly ecological citizenship would demand some fundamental changes to modern societies. Perhaps the most radical change would be to people themselves, as ecological citizenship requires a transformed human experience of nature and the self as tightly bound together. In the same way that people had to start to perceive themselves as citizens with rights in order for political citizenship to take hold, so ecological citizenship is unlikely to develop fully unless people's identities also include the experience of having ecological selves.

Conclusion

At the end of the first decade of a new century, we cannot foresee whether the next 100 years will be marked by peaceful social and economic development or by a multiplication of global problems – perhaps beyond the ability of humanity to solve. Unlike the nineteenth-century sociologists, we see more clearly the dark side of modern industry, technology and science. We know they are by no means wholly beneficial in their consequences. Scientific and technological development have created a world that contains high consequence risks that make possible huge gains and losses. Especially in the developed world, the population is wealthier than ever before, yet the world as a whole is closer to ecological disaster.

Should we resign ourselves to an attitude of despair? Sociology offers us a profound consciousness of the human authorship or social creation of social institutions. We see the possibility of controlling our destiny and shaping our lives for the better, to an extent unimaginable to previous generations.

The ideas of sustainable development, ecological modernization and environmental justice and citizenship are helping to promote some important changes in human–environment relations and the production of ecologically sensitive technologies. Even as late as the 1980s, when the Brundtland Report appeared, it was widely assumed that industrial development and ecological protection were incompatible. However, the central idea of all of these approaches is that this assumption is false. The use of eco-efficient technologies can produce forms of economic development that combine economic growth with positive policies for the environment, while an emerging environmental responsibility could ensure an expanding demand for such developments.

Even the strongest advocates of ecological modernization accept that rescuing the global environment will require changes in the levels of inequality that now exist in the world. As we have seen, industrial countries currently account for only about one-fifth of the world's population, yet they are responsible for over 75 per cent of the emissions that serve to pollute the atmosphere and hasten global warming. The average person in the developed world consumes natural resources at ten times the rate of the average individual in less developed countries. Poverty is itself a prime contributor to practices that lead to environmental damage in poor countries and people living in conditions of economic hardship have no choice but to make maximum use of the local resources available to them. What will be needed, then, are 'just sustainabilities' (Agyeman et al. 2003; Smith and Pangsapa 2008). Achieving ecological sustainability demands that concerted international efforts are made to tackle global inequalities as a necessary condition for environmental protection.

Summary points

1. The environment means all of the non-human, natural surroundings within which human beings exist – sometimes called the 'natural environment' – and in its widest sense this is simply planet Earth as a whole.
2. The classical sociologists paid little direct attention to the environment, though others have tried to rectify that omission. Current environmental debates have been divided between social constructionists and critical realists. The former leads to a sociology of the environment and adopts an agnostic approach to the subject. The latter leads to an environmental sociology that looks for the underlying causes of environmental problems.
3. Environmental issues are hybrids of environment and society, which marks them out as different from many other sociological issues and social problems. This necessitates interdisciplinary understanding and, potentially, collaboration. All societies are now faced by increasingly global environmental problems and international cooperation is needed in order to find workable solutions.
4. Most environmental issues involve manufactured risks, as they have been generated by human activity. Increasingly, issues of pollution and resource depletion are global in scale and developing countries have been particularly badly affected by soil degradation and deforestation.
5. More recent environmental issues, such as genetic modification of crops and global warming, have been subjects of much controversy. GM foods are widely accepted in the USA and are grown in China, Brazil and elsewhere, but European consumers have refused to buy them. Global warming is the most serious environmental issue yet identified and could have severe consequences for human societies, including flooding, the spread of disease, extreme weather and rising sea levels. Scientists generally agree that it has been caused by human activities since the Industrial Revolution which have rapidly increased the concentrations of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. The 1997 Kyoto Protocol, which aimed at cutting back on greenhouse gas emissions, has now been ratified by 174 countries, excluding the USA – the world's largest contributor to greenhouse gases.
6. Rising worldwide consumption patterns are linked to industrial production in a 'treadmill of production and consumption', but they also intensify environmental damage and tend to exacerbate global inequality. Energy consumption and the consumption of raw materials are vastly higher in Western countries than in other areas of the world. Yet the environmental damage caused by growing consumption has the most severe impact on the poor.
7. Sustainable development is the dominant framework for environmental policy development. It is defined as 'development which meets the needs of the present generation, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'. Sustainable development links economic development to environmental protection and is concerned to equalize global inequalities to help achieve this.
8. Ulrich Beck's theory of an emerging risk society has been very influential in shaping debates on global environmental issues. His argument is that the industrial age is coming to an end as the side-effects of industrialization build up, forcing societies into a new phase which will see the control and management of risk as its central feature. Critics suggest the thesis currently lacks solid supportive empirical evidence.
9. Ecological modernization is a theory of evolutionary social change, which sees an ecological version of modernization emerging in the present period, which marries continuing technological and economic development with environmental solutions. In social science research, ecological modernization represents a body of work that devises small-scale, practical solutions to environmental problems with a view to rolling out solutions that work. Ecological modernization is also interested in modernizing domestic consumption and transforming the practices of everyday life in an ecologically sensitive direction.

10. Taking a long-term view of environmental change suggests that reducing global inequalities will be a necessary step if developing countries are to be fully involved in achieving global sustainable development. There is some evidence of this in recent environmental justice campaigns, though the spread of ecological citizenship may take rather longer.

Further reading

A good place to start your additional reading is with Philip W. Sutton's *The Environment: A Sociological Introduction* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007), which is a genuinely introductory-level text covering all the issues discussed in this chapter and more. Michael M. Bell's *An Invitation to Environmental Sociology, Second Edition* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press, 2004) is also very well written and uses lots of helpful examples to illustrate key environmental dilemmas.

For something more theoretical, you could try John Hannigan's excellent *Environmental Sociology: A Social Constructionist Perspective* (London: Routledge, 2006), which includes some very effective constructionist case studies. Peter Dickens's *Social Theory and the Environment: Changing Nature, Changing Ourselves* (Cambridge: Polity, 2004) approaches environmental issues from a critical realist position and explains this with great clarity. Riley E. Dunlap, Frederick H. Buttel, Peter Dickens and August Gijswijt's. *Sociological Theory and the Environment: Classical Foundations, Contemporary Insights* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002) is also a fine edited collection of essays, which covers the classics as well as more recent theories.

On sustainable development, Susan Baker's *Sustainable Development* (London: Routledge, 2005) is a good introduction. On the risk society, Ulrich Beck's own, *World Risk Society* (Cambridge: Polity, 1999) is quite accessible in the original. And for ecological modernization, Arthur P. J. Mol's *Globalization and Environmental Reform: The Ecological Modernization of the Global Economy* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2003) is a nicely balanced summary and evaluation of the perspective and its achievements to date.

For environmental justice and ecological citizenship, you could try Mark J. Smith and Piya Pangsapa's *Environment and Citizenship: Integrating Justice, Responsibility and Civic Engagement* (London: Zed Books, 2008) and Andrew Dobson and Derek Bell's edited collection, *Environmental Citizenship* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2006), which contains some thought-provoking essays.

Internet links

UK Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs:
www.defra.gov.uk/Environment/index.htm

Environment and Society Blog, University of Leeds, UK – lots of interesting stories and weblinks here:
https://elgg.leeds.ac.uk/socenv/weblog/

Environmental Organization Web Directory – USA-based repository with lots of useful resources:
www.webdirectory.com/

European Environment Agency – good resource base with some interesting surveys and other research:
www.eea.europa.eu/

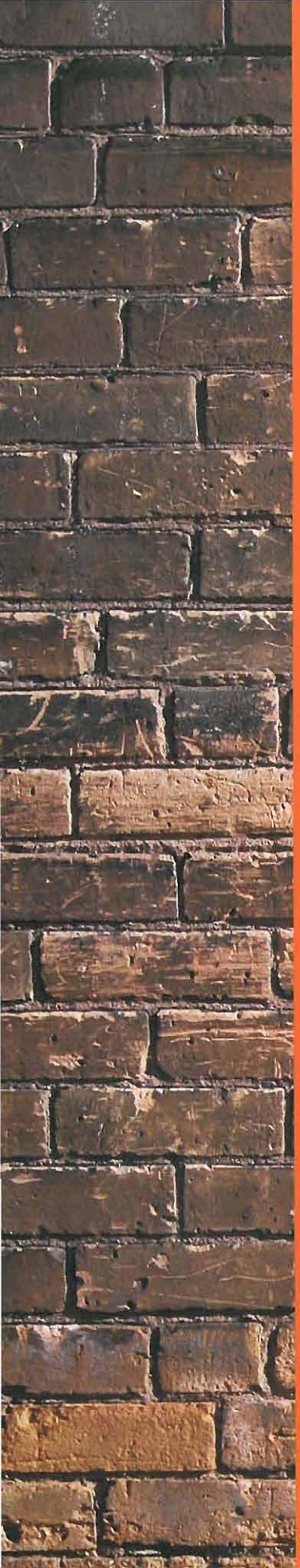
Friends of the Earth International – campaigning environmental organization:
www.foei.org/

Greenpeace International – campaigning environmental organization:
www.greenpeace.org/international/

OECD – Environment site with lots of data from OECD countries:
www.oecd.org/topic/0,3373,en_2649_37465_1_1_1_1_37465,00.html

United Nations Development Programme – link to Human Development Reports and the UN Millennium Goals:
www.undp.org/

World Bank, Environment & Development Series – lots of resources, particularly on environment and developing countries:
http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/ENVIRONMENT/0,,menuPK:176751~pagePK:149018~piPK:149093~theSitePK:244381,00.html



CHAPTER 6

Cities and Urban Life

(opposite) Cities make enormous demands on our mental life. Are these people adopting a blasé attitude and exhibiting 'urban reserve'?

London, New York and Tokyo are three of the world's 'global cities', seen as command centres for the world's economy, with influence extending far beyond their own national borders (Sassen 2001). These global cities are the headquarters for large, transnational corporations, as well as a profusion of financial, technological and consulting services.

London has a population of more than 7 million people with more than 300 languages between them and a resident workforce of some 3.4 million. It also has an unrivalled cultural and artistic heritage, helping to confirm its place as a vibrant and dynamic capital – almost 30 million tourists come to stay for a night or more each year. High migration levels have resulted in a young population

(20–24 year-olds) as young people move to London for work, education, culture and perhaps to escape the conformity and provincialism of rural life.

New York houses Wall Street, which, since 1945 has been one of the world's primary economic centres. New York is also a major hub for international diplomacy, being home to the United Nations headquarters. The city has more than 8 million inhabitants and is the most densely populated city in the USA. New York has been influential in the development of some major popular musical trends such as jazz in the 1940s and punk rock in the 1970s. The Bronx area was also the birthplace of new musical genres such as rap music and hip-hop in the 1970s and' '80s. The city is also extremely culturally diverse with more than one-third of the population born outside the USA.

Tokyo city has a population of around 8 million and the Tokyo urban area is the most populous in the world with around 35 million people. The city also has the highest gross domestic product (GDP) of all the world's cities, as well as the second largest stock exchange (behind New York). Like London and New York, Tokyo is a major cultural centre with many museums, art galleries and festivals, and in recent years it has become a familiar cityscape as the backdrop for numerous globally distributed films – including *Kill Bill* (2003/4) and *Lost in Translation* (2003).

Yet, despite all the rich opportunities that big cities such as these have to offer, many people actually find them lonely or unfriendly places. Why? One distinctive characteristic of modern urban life is the frequency of interactions between strangers. Even within the same neighbourhood or block of flats, it is unlikely that people will know most of their neighbours. If you live in a town or city, think about the number of times that you interact everyday with people you do not know. The list might include the bus driver, people working in shops, students and even people you exchange 'pleasantries' with in the street. Perhaps this fact alone makes living in cities today a very different proposition from what is on offer elsewhere or during earlier times in history. Indeed, Marshall Berman (1983) sees the experience of modern urban life as definitive of the period sociologists call 'modernity' itself (see chapter 1).

» **Social interaction is discussed in detail in chapter 7, 'Social Interaction and Everyday Life'.**

In this chapter, we shall first consider some of the main theories of urbanism that have been developed to understand cities and urban life. From there, we will study the origins of cities and the enormous growth in city populations over the twentieth century and some of the important contemporary trends in urbanization around the world. Not surprisingly, rapid globalization is having an enormous impact on city-living and we shall consider this process in the final part of the chapter.

Theorizing urbanism

What is a city? A simple working definition is:

> an inhabited central place differentiated from a town or village by its greater size, and by the range of activities practised within its boundaries, usually religious, military-political, economic, educational and cultural. Collectively, these activities involve the exercise of power over the surrounding countryside. (Jary and Jary 1999: 74)

We can say, then, that cities are relatively large forms of human settlement, within which a wide range of activities are performed, which enable cities to become centres of power in relation to outlying areas and smaller settlements. Thinking back to our introductory example, this definition fits London, New York and Tokyo pretty well.

Many early sociologists were fascinated by the city and by urban life; Max Weber even wrote a book called *The City* (published posthumously in 1921), in which he traced the conditions that made modern

capitalism possible back to the medieval, Western city. Other early sociologists were more concerned with the way in which the development of cities changed the social as well as the physical environment. The work of Ferdinand Tönnies and Georg Simmel provided two of the most important early contributions to urban sociology.

German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies (1855–1936) was particularly concerned about the effects of city life on social bonds and solidarity. He argued that the process of urbanization, which occurred with the Industrial Revolution, irredeemably changed social life. He charted with some sadness the gradual loss of what he called *Gemeinschaft* or community bonds, which he characterized as based on traditional, close-knit ties, personal and steady relationships between neighbours and friends, and a clear understanding of one's social position (Tönnies 2001 [1887]). However, *Gesellschaft*, or 'associational' bonds, were rapidly replacing this type of social bond. These were relatively short-lived, transitory and instrumental in character. And though all societies contain social bonds of both types, with industrialization and urbanization the balance of social bonds was shifting decisively away from *Gemeinschaft* in favour of a more individualistic society. In this society, relationships tend to be specific to a particular setting and purpose, and only take into account a part of the whole person. For example, if we take a bus in the city, our interaction with the driver is likely to be limited to a brief exchange at the door of the bus as we pay, and our use for him will be limited to his ability to get us to our destination – it is an instrumental exchange. For Tönnies, the modern city, unlike older traditional settlements, is a place full of strangers, for good or ill.

THINKING CRITICALLY

What are your *positive* experiences of city life? What freedoms, opportunities and experiences do city inhabitants enjoy that are not routinely available to those living in small towns and villages? Do these positive aspects outweigh the possible negative ones outlined by Simmel and Tönnies? Was Simmel right, or have cities radically changed since his time?

The early theorists of the city deeply influenced the work of later urban sociologists. Robert Park, for example, a key member of the Chicago School of Sociology, studied under Simmel in Germany at the turn of the twentieth century, and it is to this that we now turn.

The Chicago School

A number of sociologists associated with the University of Chicago from the 1920s to the 1940s, especially Robert Park, Ernest Burgess and Louis Wirth, developed ideas which were for many years the chief basis of theory and research in urban sociology. Two concepts developed by the Chicago School are worthy of special attention. One is the so-called ecological approach in urban analysis; the other is the characterization of urbanism as a way of life, developed by Wirth (Wirth 1938; Park 1952).

Urban ecology

Ecology is a term taken from a physical science: the study of the adaptation of plant and animal organisms to their environment. This is the sense in which 'ecology' is used in the context of problems of the natural environment (see chapter 5, 'The Environment', for more on ecology and environment). In the natural world, organisms tend to be distributed in systematic ways over the terrain, such that a balance or equilibrium between different species is achieved. The Chicago School argued that the siting of major urban settlements and the distribution of different types of neighbourhood within them could be understood in terms of similar principles. Cities do not grow up at random, but in response to advantageous features of the environment. For example, large urban areas in modern

Classic Studies 6.1 Georg Simmel on the mental life of city-dwellers

The research problem

Many people saw that large-scale urbanization fundamentally changed societies, but what effects would such a shift have on individuals? How would it alter their attitudes and behaviour? And what exactly is it about city-living that produces such dramatic effects? One of Tönnies's German contemporaries, Georg Simmel (1858–1918), provided just such a theoretical account of how the city shapes its inhabitants' 'mental life'; his 'The Metropolis and Mental Life' (1950 [1903]), Tönnies remarked, had managed to capture 'the flavour of the metropolis'.

Simmel's explanation

Simmel's study would today be described as an early piece of **interpretative sociology**, seeking to understand and convey something about how city life is actually *experienced* by people. City life, says Simmel, bombards the mind with images and impressions, sensations and activity. This is 'a deep contrast with the slower, more habitual, more smoothly flowing rhythm' of the small town or village. In this context, it is not possible for individuals to respond to every stimulus or activity they come across, so how do they deal with such a bombardment?

Simmel argues that city-dwellers protect themselves from 'the unexpectedness of violent stimuli' and the assault of 'changing images' by becoming quite blasé and disinterested, adopting a 'seen-it-all-before' attitude. They 'tune out' much of the urban buzz that surrounds them, focusing on whatever they need to, just in order to get by. The result of this blasé attitude, thought Simmel, is that although city-dwellers are part of the 'metropolitan crush', they distance themselves from one another emotionally. Typically, the myriad fleeting contacts with people they do not know result in an 'urban reserve' in interactions with others, which can be perceived as emotionless and rather cold, leading to widespread feelings of impersonality and even isolation. Simmel points out, though, that city people are not by nature indifferent to others and uncaring. Rather, they are forced to adopt such modes of behaviour in order to preserve their social distance and individual selves in the face of pressures from the densely populated urban environment.

Simmel notes that the sheer pace of urban life partly explains the typical urban personality. But he also argues that the fact that the city is 'the seat of the money economy' must be taken into account. Many cities are large capitalistic financial centres, which demand punctuality, rational exchange and an instrumental approach to business. This encourages 'relentless' matter-of-fact dealings between people, with little room for emotional connection, resulting in 'calculating minds' capable of weighing the benefits and costs of involvement in relationships. Like Tönnies, then, Simmel's study points up some of the emerging problems of living in the modern, urbanized world.

Critical points

Critics of Simmel's study have raised a number of objections. His arguments seem to be based on personal observation and insight rather than on any formal or replicable research methods, thus the findings can be seen as somewhat speculative and not rooted in empirical studies. Also, despite Simmel's insistence that he set out merely to understand urban life and not to damn it, many critics have suggested that the overall tone of the study is negative, revealing a value bias against the capitalist city. It is certainly true that his work seems to focus on the ways in which individuals can resist being 'levelled down and worn out by a socio-technological mechanism' (Simmel 1950: 409). In this sense, critics say, Simmel plays down the liberating experience of many people who move to cities to experience greater freedoms and room for individual expression. Finally, the study may be guilty of over-generalizing from a specific type of large city to cities in general. After all, only a minority of cities are financial centres and those that are not may well have less alienating and isolating effects on people than Simmel allows for. Can we really say that *all* urbanites have the same experiences?

Contemporary significance

Simmel's account of life in the modern metropolis provides a sociological explanation of some key characteristics of contemporary urbanism. His theoretical study shows how the quality of social interactions can be shaped by pressures arising from the wider social environment of the city, an important consequence of which is Simmel's view that the city, 'is not a spatial entity with social consequences, but a sociological entity that is formed spatially'. This has proved a very productive starting point for later urban studies. Simmel's influence can also be felt in modern social theory. He argued: '[T]he deepest problems of modern life derive from the claim of the individual to preserve the autonomy and individuality of his existence in the face of overwhelming social forces.' There is more than an echo of this perspective in the more recent work of Ulrich Beck, Zygmunt Bauman and other contemporary theorists of modern individualism.

societies tend to develop along the shores of rivers, on fertile plains or at the intersection of trading routes or railways.

'Once set up,' in Park's words, 'a city is, it seems, a great sorting mechanism which . . . infallibly selects out of the population as a whole the individuals best suited to live in a particular region or a particular milieu' (1952: 79). Cities become ordered into 'natural areas', through processes of competition, invasion and succession – all of which occur in biological ecology. If we look at the ecology of a lake in the natural environment, we find that competition between various species of fish, insects and other organisms operates to reach a fairly stable distribution between them. This balance is disturbed if new species 'invade' – try to make the lake their home. Some of the organisms, which used to proliferate in the central area of the lake, are driven out to suffer a more precarious existence around its fringes. The invading species are their successors in the central sections.

Patterns of location, movement and relocation in cities, according to the ecological view, take a similar form. Different neighbourhoods develop through the adjustments made by inhabitants as they struggle to gain their livelihoods. A city can be pictured as a map of areas with distinct and contrasting social characteristics. In the initial stages of the growth of modern cities, industries congregate at sites suitable for the raw materials they need, close to supply lines. Populations cluster around these workplaces, which come to be increasingly diversified as the number of the city's inhabitants grows. The amenities thus developed become correspondingly more attractive, and greater competition develops for their acquisition. Land values and property taxes rise, making it difficult for families to carry on living in the central neighbourhood, except in cramped conditions or in decaying housing where rents are still low. The centre becomes dominated by businesses and entertainment, with the more affluent private residents moving out to newly forming suburbs around the perimeter. This process follows transport routes, since these minimize the time taken in travelling to work; the areas between these routes develop more slowly.

Cities can be seen as formed in concentric rings, broken up into segments. In the centre are the inner-city areas, a mixture of big business prosperity and decaying private houses. Beyond these are longer established neighbourhoods, housing workers employed in stable manual occupations. Further out still are the suburbs in which higher-income groups tend to live. Processes of invasion and succession occur within the segments of the concentric rings. Thus, as property decays in a central or near-central area, ethnic minority groups might start to move into it. As they do so, more of the pre-existing population start to leave, precipitating a wholesale flight to

neighbourhoods elsewhere in the city or out to the suburbs.

Although for a period the urban ecology approach fell into disrepute, it was later revived and elaborated in the writings of a number of authors, particularly Amos Hawley (1950, 1968). Rather than concentrating on competition for scarce resources, as his predecessors had done, Hawley emphasized the *interdependence* of different city areas. *Differentiation* – the specialization of groups and occupational roles – is the main way in which human beings adapt to their environment. Groups on which many others depend will have a dominant role, often reflected in their central geographical position. Business groups, for example, like large banks or insurance companies, provide key services for many in a community, and hence are usually to be found in the central areas of settlements. But the zones which develop in urban areas, Hawley points out, arise from relationships not just of space, but also of time. Business dominance, for example, is expressed not only in patterns of land-use, but also in the rhythm of activities in daily life – an illustration being the rush hour. The ordering in time of people's daily lives reflects the hierarchy of neighbourhoods in the city.

The ecological approach has been as important for the empirical research it has helped to promote as for its value as a theoretical perspective. Many studies, both of cities and of particular neighbourhoods, have been prompted by ecological thinking, concerned, for example, with the processes of 'invasion' and 'succession' mentioned above. However, various criticisms can justifiably be made. The ecological perspective tends to underemphasize the importance of conscious design and planning in city organization, regarding urban development as a 'natural' process. The models of spatial organization developed by Park, Burgess and their colleagues were drawn from American experience, and fit only some types of city in the USA, let alone cities in Europe, Japan or the developing world.

Claude Fischer (1984) has put forward an interpretation of why large-scale urbanism tends actually to promote diverse subcultures, rather than swamp everyone within an anonymous mass. Those who live in cities, he points out, are able to collaborate with others of similar backgrounds or interests to develop local connections; and they can join distinctive religious, ethnic, political and other subcultural groups. A small town or village does not allow the development of such subcultural diversity. Those who form ethnic communities within cities, for instance, might have little or no knowledge of one another in their land of origin. When they arrive, they gravitate to areas where others from a similar linguistic and cultural background are living, and new sub-community structures are formed. An artist might find few others to associate with in a village or small town, but in a large city he or she might become part of a significant artistic and intellectual subculture.

A large city is a 'world of strangers', yet it supports and creates personal relationships. This is not paradoxical. We have to separate urban experience between the public sphere of encounters with strangers and the more private world of family, friends and work colleagues. It may be difficult to 'meet people' when one first moves to a large city. But anyone moving to a small, established rural community may find the friendliness of the inhabitants largely a matter of public politeness – it may take years to become 'accepted'. This is not so in the city. As Edward Krupat has commented:

> Yet the overwhelming evidence is that because of the diversity of strangers – each one is a potential friend – and the wide range of lifestyles and interests in the city, people do move from the outside in. And once they are on the inside of one group or network, the possibilities for expanding their connections multiply greatly. As a result, the evidence indicates that the positive opportunities in the city often seem to outweigh the constraining forces, allowing people to develop and maintain satisfying relationships. (1985: 36)

Modern cities do frequently involve impersonal, anonymous social relationships, but they are also sources of diversity – and, sometimes, intimacy.

Urbanism and the created environment

More recent theories of urbanism have stressed that it is not an autonomous process, but has to be analysed in relation to major patterns of political and economic change. The two leading writers in urban analysis, David Harvey (1982, 1985, 2006) and Manuel Castells (1983, 1991, 1997), have both been strongly influenced by Karl Marx.

The restructuring of space

Drawing on broadly Marxist ideas, David Harvey has argued that urbanism is one aspect of the **created environment** brought about by the spread of industrial capitalism. In traditional societies, city and countryside were clearly differentiated. In the modern world, industry blurs the division between city and countryside. Agriculture becomes mechanized and is run simply according to considerations of price and profit, just like industrial work, and this process lessens the differences in modes of social life between urban and rural people.

In modern urbanism, Harvey points out, space is continually *restructured*. The process is determined by where large firms choose to place their factories, research and development centres and so forth, by the controls asserted by governments over both land and industrial production and by the activities of private investors, buying and selling houses and land. Business firms, for example, are constantly weighing up the relative advantages of new locations against existing ones. As production becomes cheaper in one area than in another, or as the firm moves from one product to another, offices and factories will be closed down in one place and opened up elsewhere. Thus at one period, when there are considerable profits to be made, there may be a spate of office block building in the

The Lozells area of Birmingham in the UK saw an eruption of violence in 2005 between the ethnic communities who make up the majority of its population. Was this the result of ethnic groups leading lives in increasingly segregated communities?

Classic Studies 6.2 Louis Wirth's 'urbanism as a way of life'

The research problem

We know from Simmel that the urban environment tends to create particular personality types and that there is a certain pattern to the development of cities. But are such personality types limited to the cities? How do cities relate to and interact with the rest of society? Does urbanism exert any influence outside the city boundary? Louis Wirth (1897–1952) explored the idea that urbanism was, in fact, a whole way of life, not an experience limited to just some areas of society.

Wirth's explanation

While other members of the Chicago School focused on understanding the shape of the city – how they came to be internally divided – Wirth was more concerned with **urbanism** as a distinct way of life. Urbanism, he argued, could not be reduced to or understood simply by measuring the size of urban populations. Instead, it has to be grasped as a form of social existence. Wirth observed that:

> The influences which cities exert on the social life of man are greater than the ratio of the urban population would indicate; for the city is not only increasingly the dwelling-place and the workshop of modern man, but it is the initiating and controlling centre of economic, political and cultural life that has drawn the most remote communities of the world into its orbit and woven diverse areas, peoples and activities into a cosmos. (1938: 342)

In cities, large numbers of people live in close proximity to one another, without knowing most of those others personally. This is in fundamental contrast to small, traditional villages and towns. Many contacts between city-dwellers are, as Tonnies suggested, fleeting and partial, they are means to other ends, rather than being satisfying relationships in themselves. Wirth calls these 'secondary contacts', compared to the 'primary contacts' of familial and strong community relationships. For example, interactions with salespeople in shops, cashiers in banks or ticket collectors on trains are passing encounters, entered into not for their own sake, as in communal relations, but merely as means to other aims.

Since those who live in urban areas tend to be highly mobile, moving around to find work and to enjoy leisure and travel, there are relatively weak bonds between them. People are involved in many different activities and situations each day and the 'pace of life' in cities is much faster than in rural areas. Competition tends to prevail over cooperation, and social relationships can appear as flimsy and brittle. Of course, the Chicago School's ecological approach found that the density of social life in cities leads to the formation of neighbourhoods having distinct characteristics, some of which may preserve some of the characteristics of small communities. In immigrant areas, for example, traditional types of connections between families are found, with most people knowing most others on a personal basis. Similarly, Young and Wilmott's (1957) *Family and Kinship in East London*, found strong connections amongst working class families in the city.

However, although Wirth accepted this, he argued that the more these areas became

"We love the view. It helps to remind us that we're part of a larger community."

absorbed into the wider patterns of city life, the less such community characteristics would survive. The urban way of life weakens bonds of kinship, thus eroding families, communities are dissolved and the traditional bases of social solidarity are rendered ineffective. Wirth was not blind to the benefits of urbanism. He saw that modern cities were centres of freedom, toleration and progress, but he also saw that urbanism spread beyond city boundaries, as the process of suburbanization, with all of its necessary transport systems and infrastructure, shows. And in that sense, modern societies themselves are necessarily shaped by the forces of urbanism.

Critical points

Critics have pointed out the limitations of Wirth's ideas on urbanism. Like the ecological perspective, with which it has much in common, Wirth's thesis is rooted in the experience of American cities, and cannot be seen as a general theory of city life. Urbanism is not the same at all times and all places. Ancient cities were quite different from modern ones, for example and cities in developing countries today are often very different from those in the developed ones. Critics argue that Wirth also exaggerates the extent of impersonality in modern cities. Communities involving close friendship or kinship links are more persistent than he thought. Everett Hughes, a colleague of Wirth, said that, 'Louis used to say all those things about how the city is impersonal – while living with a whole clan of kin and friends on a very personal basis' (cited in Kasarda and Janowitz 1974: 338). Similarly, Herbert Gans (1962) argued that 'urban villagers' – such as Italian-Americans living in inner-city Boston – were quite commonly to be found. These critics question Wirth's picture of modern cities by showing that city life can lead to the *building* of communities rather than *always* destroying them.

Contemporary significance

Wirth's ideas have deservedly enjoyed wide currency. The impersonality of many day-to-day contacts in modern cities is undeniable and, to some degree, this is true of social life more generally. His theory is also important for its recognition that urbanism is not just one part of society, but actually expresses and influences the character of the wider social system. Given the expanding process of urbanization in many developing countries and the fact that a majority of people in the developed world already live in urban areas, Wirth's ideas will continue to be a reference point for sociologists looking to understand urbanism as a way of life.

centre of large cities. Once the offices have been built, and the central area 'redeveloped', investors look for potential for further speculative building elsewhere. Often what is profitable in one period will not be so in another, when the financial climate changes.

The activities of private home-buyers are strongly influenced by how far, and where, business interests buy up land, as well as by rates of loans and taxes fixed by local and central government. After the Second World War, for instance, there was a vast expansion of suburban development in major cities in the United States. This was partly due to ethnic discrimination and the tendency of whites to move away from inner-city areas. However, it was only made possible, Harvey argues, because of government decisions to provide tax concessions to home-buyers and construction firms, and by the setting up of special credit arrangements by financial organizations. These provided the basis for the building and buying of new homes on the peripheries of cities, and at the same time promoted demand for industrial products such as the motorcar. In recent years, Harvey (2006) has applied his theory of uneven spatial development to global inequalities between the relatively rich countries of the northern hemisphere and the relatively poor developing countries in the south. The turn towards neoliberal ideas, as for example in the USA and UK in

the 1970s and '80s, has, he argues, laid bare the 'myth' that developing countries just need to 'catch up with the West'. Such a neoliberal political agenda shows that gross inequalities are built into the global capitalist economy.

Urbanism and social movements

Like Harvey, Castells stresses that the spatial form of a society is closely linked to the overall mechanisms of its development. To understand cities, we have to grasp the processes whereby spatial forms are created and transformed. The layout and architectural features of cities and neighbourhoods express struggles and conflicts between different groups in society. In other words, urban environments represent symbolic and spatial manifestations of broader social forces (Tonkiss 2006). For example, skyscrapers may be built because they are expected to provide profit, but the giant buildings also 'symbolise the power of money over the city through technology and self-confidence and are the cathedrals of the period of rising corporate capitalism' (Castells 1983: 103).

In contrast to the Chicago sociologists, Castells sees the city not only as a distinct location – the urban area – but also as an integral part of processes of collective consumption, which in turn are an inherent aspect of industrial capitalism. Schools, transport services and leisure amenities are ways in which people collectively 'consume' the products of modern industry. The taxation system influences who is able to buy or rent where, and who builds where. Large corporations, banks and insurance companies, which provide capital for building projects, have a great deal of power over these processes. But government agencies also directly affect many aspects of city life, by building roads and public housing, planning green belts, on which new development cannot encroach, and so forth. The physical shape of cities is thus a product of both market forces and the power of government.

But the nature of the created environment is not just the result of the activities of wealthy and powerful people. Castells stresses the importance of the struggles of underprivileged groups to alter their living conditions. Urban problems stimulate a range of social movements, concerned with improving housing conditions, protesting against air pollution, defending parks and green belts and combating building development that changes the nature of an area. For example, Castells studied the gay movement in San Francisco, which succeeded in restructuring neighbourhoods around its own cultural values – allowing many gay organizations, clubs and bars to flourish – and gaining a prominent position in local politics.

Cities, Harvey and Castells both emphasize, are almost wholly 'artificial' environments, constructed by people. Even most rural areas do not escape the influence of human intervention and modern technology, for human activity has reshaped and reordered the world of nature. Food is not produced for local inhabitants, but for national and international markets; and in mechanized farming, land is rigorously subdivided and specialized in its use, ordered into physical patterns, which have little relationship to natural features of the environment. Those who live on farms and in isolated rural areas are economically, politically and culturally tied to the larger society, however different some of their modes of behaviour may be from those of city-dwellers.

Evaluation

The views of Harvey and Castells have been widely debated, and their work has been important in redirecting urban analysis. In contrast to the ecologists' approach, it puts emphasis not on 'natural' spatial processes, but on how land and the created environment reflect social and economic systems of power. This marks a significant shift of emphasis. Yet the ideas of Harvey and

Castells are often stated in a highly abstract way, and have not stimulated such a large variety of research studies compared with the work of the Chicago School.

In some ways, the views set out by Harvey and Castells and those of the Chicago School usefully complement each other, and can be combined to give a comprehensive picture of urban processes. The contrasts between city areas described in urban ecology do exist, as does the overall impersonality of city life. But these are more variable than the members of the Chicago School thought, and are primarily governed by the social and economic influences analysed by Harvey and Castells. John Logan and Harvey Molotch (1987) suggested an approach that directly connects the perspectives of authors like Harvey and Castells with some features of the ecological standpoint. They agree with Harvey and Castells that broad features of economic development, stretching nationally and internationally, affect urban life in quite a direct way. But these wide-ranging economic factors, they argue, are focused through local organizations, including neighbourhood businesses, banks and government agencies, together with the activities of individual house-buyers.

Places – land and buildings – are bought and sold, according to Logan and Molotch, just like other goods in modern societies, but the markets which structure city environments are influenced by how different groups of people want to use the property they buy and sell. Many tensions and conflicts arise as a result of this process – and these are the key factors structuring city neighbourhoods. For instance, in modern cities, Logan and Molotch point out, large financial and business firms continually try to intensify land-use in specific areas. The more they can do so, the more there are opportunities for land speculation and for the profitable construction of new buildings. These companies have little concern with the social and physical effects of their activities on a given neighbourhood – with whether or not, for example, attractive older residences are destroyed to make room for large new office blocks. The growth processes fostered by big firms involved in property development often go against the interests of local businesses or residents, who may attempt actively to resist them. People come together in neighbourhood groups in order to defend their interests as residents. Such local associations may campaign for the extension of zoning restrictions, block new building encroaching on parks, or press for more favourable rent regulations.

The development of the city

Although there were great cities in the ancient world, like Athens and Rome in Europe, city life, as we now know it, is very different from that experienced in previous ages. As early sociologists like Simmel and Tönnies showed, the development of the modern city changed the way in which humans felt and thought about the world and the ways in which they interacted with one another. In this section we look at the development of the city from its beginnings in traditional societies to the most recent trends in urban development across the world.

Cities in traditional societies

The world's first cities appeared around 3500 BCE, in the river valleys of the Nile in Egypt, the Tigris and Euphrates in what is now Iraq, and the Indus in what is today Pakistan. Cities in traditional societies were very small by modern standards. Babylon, for example, one of the largest ancient Near Eastern cities, extended over an area of only 3.2 square miles and at its height, around 2000 BCE, probably numbered no more that 15,000–20,000 people. Rome under Emperor Augustus in the first century BCE was easily the largest pre-modern city outside China,

Cityscape of the modern megalopolis. How does it feel to you – a desolate concrete jungle or the very pinnacle of human achivement?

with some 300,000 inhabitants – the size of a 'small' modern city today.

Most cities of the ancient world shared certain common features. High walls, that served as a military defence and emphasized the separation of the urban community from the countryside, usually surrounded them. The central area was usually occupied by a religious temple, a royal palace, government and commercial buildings and a public square. This ceremonial, commercial and political centre was sometimes enclosed within a second, inner wall and was usually too small to hold more than a minority of the citizens. Although it usually contained a market, the centre was different from the business districts found at the core of modern cities, because the main buildings were nearly always religious and political (Sjoberg 1960, 1963; Fox 1964; Wheatley 1971).

The dwellings of the ruling class or elite tended to be concentrated near the centre. The less privileged groups lived towards the perimeter of the city or outside the walls, moving inside if the city came under attack. Different ethnic and religious communities were often allocated to separate neighbourhoods, where their members both lived and worked. Sometimes these neighbourhoods were also surrounded by walls. Communications among city-dwellers were erratic. Lacking any form of printing press, public officials had to shout at the tops of their voices to deliver pronouncements. 'Streets' were usually strips of land on which no one had yet built. A few traditional civilizations boasted sophisticated road systems linking various cities, but these existed mainly for military purposes, and transportation for the most part was slow and limited. Merchants and soldiers were the only

people who regularly travelled over long distances.

While cities were the main centres for science, the arts and cosmopolitan culture, their influence over the rest of the country was always weak. No more than a tiny proportion of the population lived in the cities, and the division between cities and countryside was pronounced. By far the majority of people lived in small rural communities and rarely encountered more than the occasional state official or merchant from the towns.

Industrialization and urbanization

The contrast between the largest modern cities and those of pre-modern civilizations is extraordinary. The most populous cities in the industrialized countries number almost 20 million inhabitants. A conurbation – a cluster of cities and towns forming a continuous network – may include even larger numbers of people. The peak of urban life today is represented by what is called the megalopolis, the 'city of cities'. The term was originally coined in ancient Greece to refer to a city-state that was planned to be the envy of all civilizations, but in current usage it bears little relation to that utopia. The term was first applied in relation to the north-eastern seaboard of the United States, a conurbation covering some 450 miles from north of Boston to below Washington, DC. In this region, about 40 million people live at a density of more than 700 persons per square mile.

Britain was the first society to undergo industrialization, a process that began in the mid-eighteenth century. The process of industrialization generated increasing urbanization – the movement of the population into towns and cities, and away from the land. In 1800, fewer than 20 per cent of the British population lived in towns or cities of more than 10,000 inhabitants. By 1900, this proportion had risen to 74 per cent. The capital city, London, was home to

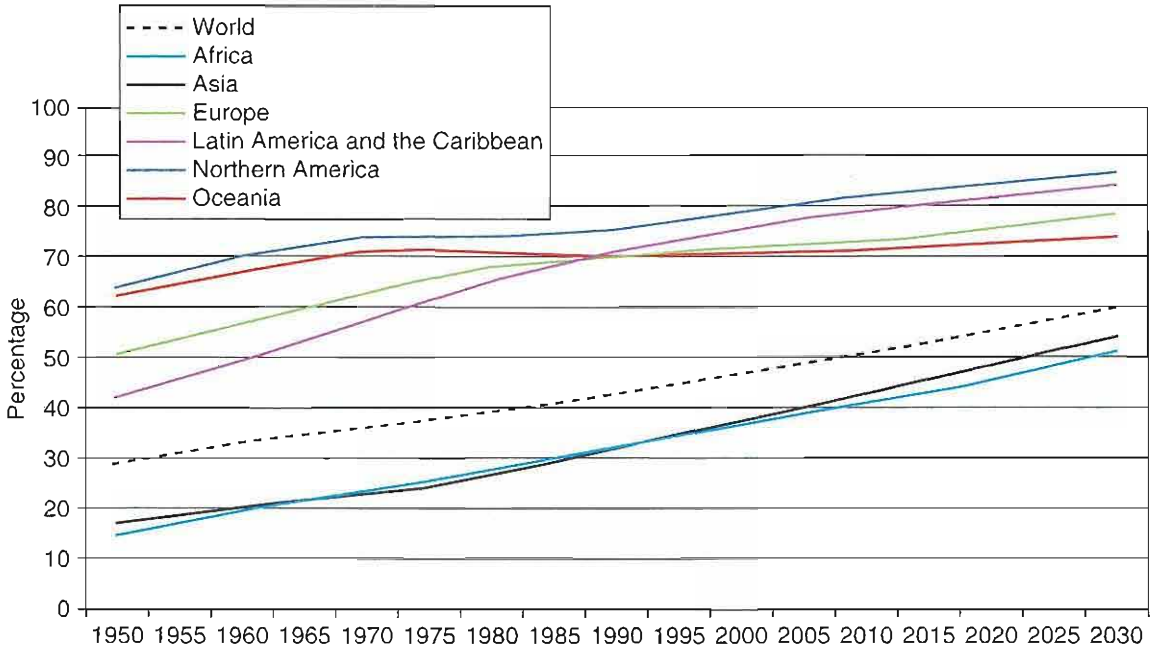


Figure 6.1 Percentage of the world's population living in urban areas, 1950–2030 (projected)

Source: United Nations Urbanization prospects, 2005. Reprinted by permission of the United Nations Population Division.

about 1.1 million people in 1800; by the beginning of the twentieth century, it had increased in size to a population of more than 7 million. London was then by far the largest city ever seen in the world. It was a vast manufacturing, commercial and financial centre at the heart of a still-expanding British Empire.

The urbanization of most other European countries and the United States took place somewhat later – but in some cases, once under way, accelerated even faster. In 1800, the United States was a more rural society than the leading European countries. Less than 10 per cent of the population lived in communities with populations of more than 2,500 people. Today, well over three-quarters of Americans do so. Between 1800 and 1900, the population of New York leapt from 60,000 people to 4.8 million.

Urbanization is now a global process, into which developing countries are increasingly being drawn. In 1950, only 30 per cent of the world's population were urban-dwellers; by 2000, this had reached 47 per cent – 2.9 billion people – and by 2030 it is forecast to reach 60 per cent – some 5 billion people. In 2007, the number of people living in urban areas overtook the number of people in rural areas. Most urbanization is now taking place in the developing world. The urban population of the less developed regions is expected to rise by more than 2 billion people between 2000 and 2030 from around 2 to 4 billion. As figure 6.1 shows, urbanization in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean has increased particularly rapidly over the last 60 years, whilst the rate of urban population growth within developed regions such as Europe and Oceania has slowed over the same period (United Nations 2005).

The development of the modern city

Only at the turn of the twentieth century did statisticians and social observers begin to distinguish between the town and the city. Cities with large populations were recognized to be usually more cosmopolitan than smaller centres, with their influence extending beyond the national society of which they were a part.

The expansion of cities came about because of population increase, plus the migration of outsiders from farms, villages and small towns. This migration was often international, with people moving from peasant backgrounds directly into cities in the other countries. The immigration of very large numbers of Europeans from poor farming backgrounds to the United States is the most obvious example.

Cross-national immigration into cities was also widespread between countries in Europe itself. Peasants and villagers migrated to the towns (as they are doing on a massive scale in developing countries today) because of lack of opportunities in the rural areas, coupled with the apparent advantages and attractions of cities, where it was rumoured that the streets were 'paved with gold' (jobs, wealth, a wide range of goods and services). Cities, moreover, became concentrated centres of financial and industrial power, entrepreneurs sometimes creating new urban areas almost from scratch.

The development of modern cities has had an enormous impact, not only on habits and modes of behaviour, but on patterns of thought and feeling. From the time when large urban agglomerations first formed, in the eighteenth century, views about the effects of cities on social life have been polarized. For many people, cities represent 'civilized virtue' and are the fount of dynamism and cultural creativity; cities maximize opportunities for economic and cultural development, and provide the means of living a comfortable and satisfying existence. For others, the city is a smoking inferno thronged with aggressive and mutually distrustful crowds, riddled with crime, violence, corruption and poverty. In the late twentieth century, environmentalists such

as Murray Bookchin (1986) have come to see cities as huge sprawling, environmentally damaging monsters that devour energy and generate waste at an unsustainable rate.

See chapter 5 'The Environment', for a discussion of environmental issues.

As cities mushroomed in size, many people were horrified to see that inequalities and urban poverty seemed to intensify correspondingly. The extent of urban poverty and the vast differences between city neighbourhoods were among the main factors that prompted early sociological analyses of urban life. Unsurprisingly, the first major sociological studies of, and theories about, modern urban conditions originated in Chicago, a US city marked by a phenomenal rate of development – it grew from a virtually uninhabited area in the 1830s to a population of well over 2 million by 1900 – and by very pronounced inequalities.

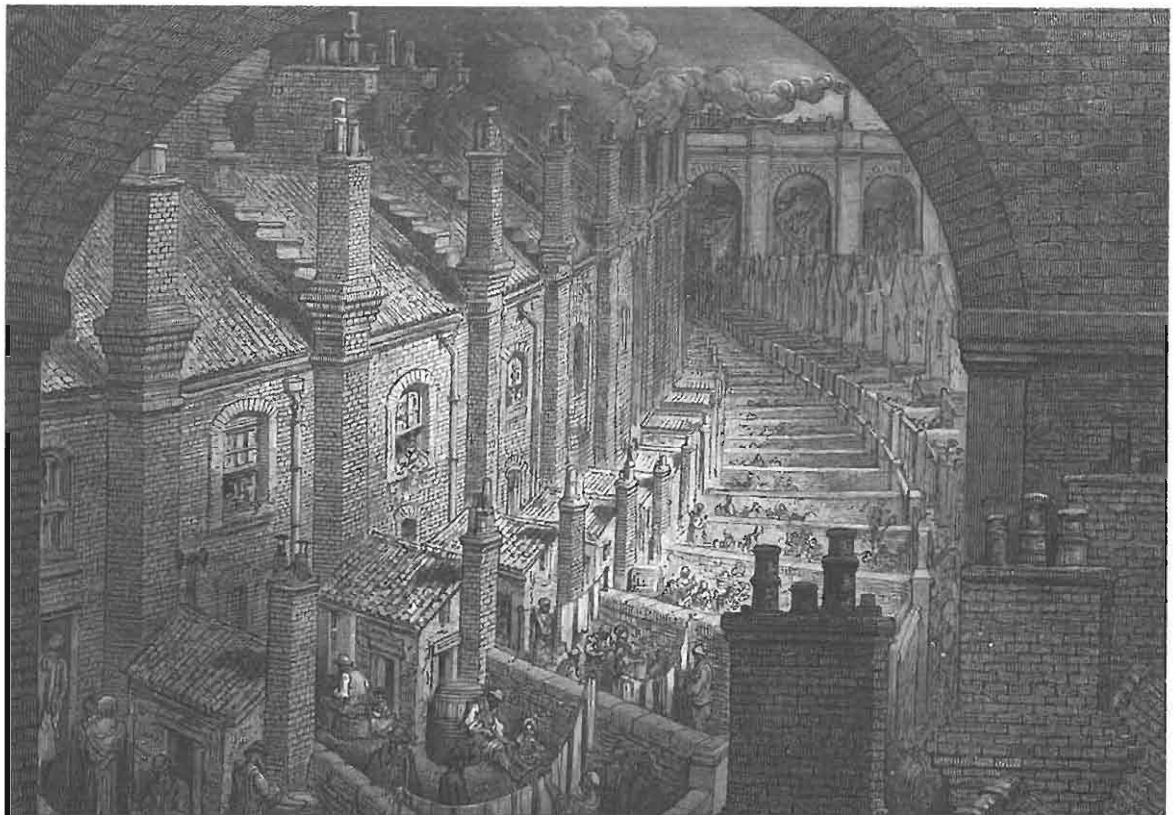
Urban trends in the developed world

In this section, we consider some of the main patterns in Western urban development in the post-war era, using Britain and the United States as examples. Attention will focus on the rise of suburban areas, the decline of inner-city areas and strategies aimed at urban renewal.

Suburbanization

In the USA, the process of **suburbanization** reached its peak in the 1950s and 1960s. The centres of cities during those decades had a 10 per cent growth rate, while that of the suburban areas was 48 per cent. Most of the early movement to the suburbs involved white families. The enforcement of racial mixing in schools can be seen as a major factor in the decision of many whites to decamp from inner-city areas. Moving to the suburbs was an attractive option for families who wished to put their children in all-white schools. Even today, American suburbs remain mostly white.

Many Victorians saw the newly industrializing cities such as Manchester and Leeds as sewers of degeneration and vice.



However, the white domination of suburbia in the United States is being eroded as more and more members of ethnic minorities move there. An analysis of data from the US 2000 Census showed that racial and ethnic minorities make up 27 per cent of suburban populations, up from 19 per cent in 1990. Like the people who began the exodus to suburbia in the 1950s, members of minority ethnic groups who move to the suburbs are mostly middle-class professionals. They move in search of better housing, schools and amenities. According to the chairman of the Chicago Housing Authority, 'suburbanization isn't about race now; it's about class. Nobody wants to be around poor people because of all the problems that go along with poor people: poor schools, unsafe streets, gangs' (De Witt 1994).

In the UK, many of the suburbs around London grew up between the two world wars, and clustered round new roads and links by underground trains that could bring commuters into the centre. Some converts to the big city life have looked with disdain on the large expanses of suburbia, with their semi-detached villas and well-tended gardens blanketing the fringes of English cities. Others, like the poet John Betjeman (1906–84), celebrated the modest eccentricity of the architecture of the suburbs, and the impulse to combine the employment opportunities of the city with a mode of life connected in practical terms with owner-occupation and car-ownership, and in terms of values with traditional family life.

In Britain, the migration of the residential population from central city areas to outlying suburbs and dormitory towns (towns outside the city boundaries lived in mainly by people who work in the city) or villages in the 1970s and early 1980s meant that the population of Greater London dropped by about half a million over the period. In the industrial towns of the North, the rapid loss of manufacturing industry during this period also reduced the population of inner-city areas. At the same time, many

USING YOUR SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION

6.1 'Engendering' the city

Writing from a feminist perspective, several authors have examined how the city reflects the unequal gender relations in society, and have looked at ways to overcome this. Jo Beall (1998) has noted that if social relations, in this case between men and women, are underpinned by power, then cities demonstrate the correlation between power and space in terms of what gets built, where it is built, how and for whom. Beall writes: 'Cities are literally concrete manifestations of ideas on how society was, is and how it should be'.

The growth of the city in the nineteenth century is associated with gender separation. Public life and space was dominated by men, who were free to travel through the city as they wanted. Women were not expected to be seen in most public places, and those who were, were likely to be regarded as prostitutes or 'street walkers'. As the process of suburbanization began, the gender separation grew even more obvious. While the male head of the family commuted into the city on a daily basis, the women (wives) were expected to remain at home to care for the family. Transport links were built for travel between the suburbs and the city centre, but little thought was given by male designers to transportation within the suburbs, as a result of which it was more difficult for women to leave home (Greed 1994).

Elizabeth Wilson (2002) has argued that the development of the city was not all bad for women. She suggests that some feminist arguments reduce the role of women in the city to that of passive victims. In fact, the development of the city provided opportunities that non-urban forms of life could not provide. With the emergence of female white-collar work in the city and later the expansion of service industries, women increasingly entered the workforce. Thus the city offered women an escape from unpaid labour at home that did not exist elsewhere.

smaller cities and towns grew quickly – for example, Cambridge, Ipswich, Norwich, Oxford and Leicester. The 'flight to the suburbs' has had dramatic implications for the health and vitality of both British and American urban centres, as we shall see. Suburbanization has also affected men and women differently, as 'Using your sociological imagination 6.1' suggests.

THINKING CRITICALLY

What examples of the 'built environment' of cities can you think of that make getting around more difficult, particularly for women? Are these simply the result of male dominance in the architectural professions or the product of separate roles for men and women? Is Wilson right – have cities become more 'female-friendly' over time?

Inner-city decay

In the USA, the severe inner-city decay, which has marked all large cities over the past few decades, is a direct consequence of the growth of the suburbs. The movement of high-income groups away from the city centres has meant a loss of their local tax revenues. Since those that remain, or replace them, include many who are living in poverty, there is little scope for replacing that lost income. If rates are raised in the central city, wealthier groups and businesses tend to move further out.

This situation is worsened by the fact that the building stock in city centres becomes more run-down than in the suburbs, crime rates rise and there is higher unemployment. More must therefore be spent on welfare services, schools, the upkeep of buildings and police and fire services. A cycle of deterioration develops in which the more that suburbia expands, the greater become the problems of the city centres. In many American urban areas the effect has been dramatic, particularly in the older cities, such as New York, Boston and Washington, DC. In some neighbourhoods in these cities, the deterioration of property is probably worse than in large urban areas anywhere else in the industrialized world. Decaying tenement blocks and boarded-up and burnt-out buildings alternate with empty areas of land covered in rubble.

In Britain, inner-city decay has been less marked than in the United States. Yet some inner-city areas are as dilapidated as many neighbourhoods in American cities. An important Church of England report, *Faith in the City*, described the inner-city areas in bleak terms:

> Grey walls, littered streets, boarded-up windows, graffiti, demolition and debris are the drearily standard features of the districts and parishes with which we are concerned . . . the dwellings in the inner cities are older than elsewhere. Roughly one-quarter of England's houses were built before 1919, but the proportion in the inner areas ranged from 40 to 60 per cent. (1985: 18)

One reason for the decay in Britain's inner cities is the financial crises that have affected many of these areas. From the late 1970s onwards, central government put strong pressure on local authorities to limit their budgets and to cut local services, even in inner-city areas most subject to decay. This led to intense conflicts between government and many of the councils that ran distressed inner-city areas, when they could not meet their set budgets. A number of the city councils found themselves with less revenue than before and were compelled to cut back on what were largely regarded as essential services.

Inner-city decay in the UK is also related to changes in the global economy. More recently industrialized countries, such as Singapore, Taiwan or Mexico, often have much cheaper labour costs than places like the UK, which can make them an attractive location for manufacturing industry. In

Global economic restructuring led to the deterioration of many inner-city areas in the 1970s and '80s.

response to this, over the past few decades, some already industrialized nations – for example, Japan and (West) Germany – shifted their economies to the kinds of activity that require a high level of capital investment and a highly skilled, well-educated workforce.

In an important study, *Inside the Inner-City*, Paul Harrison (1983) examined the impact of these global changes on Hackney, still one of London's poorest boroughs. The 1970s saw a dramatic decline in Hackney's manufacturing sector, paralleling a national decline. The number of manufacturing jobs in the borough dropped from 45,500 in 1973 to 27,400 in 1981 – a fall of 40 per cent. Until the mid-1970s, Hackney's male unemployment rate was roughly level with the national average; by 1981 it had risen to 17.1 per cent (50 per cent above the average). As the number of people out of work increased, so too did the number of people living in poverty. Harrison summarizes the effects of such a concentration of disadvantaged people:

> [L]ocal government poor in resources and sometimes in the quality of staffing; a poor health service, since doctors cannot find a decent accommodation or much in the way of private practice; a low level of educational attainment due primarily to poor home backgrounds and the low average ability in schools; and, finally, high levels of crime, vandalism and family breakdown, and, wherever communities of divergent cultures live together, conflicts based on religion or race. (1983: 23–4)

Sometimes these multiple disadvantages overlap to such an extent that they burst forth openly in the form of urban conflict and riots.

For more on the problems arising from inner-city decay, see chapter 11, 'Stratification and Social Class', and chapter 12, 'Poverty, Social Exclusion and Welfare'.

Riots and urban unrest

In an era of globalization, population movement and rapid change, large cities have become concentrated and intensified expressions of the social problems that afflict society as a whole. All too often, the 'invisible' fault-lines within cities, generally created by unemployment and racial tension, undergo the equivalent of social earthquakes. Simmering tensions flare to the surface, sometimes violently in the form of riots, looting and widespread destruction.

This occurred in the USA in the spring of 1992, when riots engulfed parts of Los Angeles. Similarly, in 2005, some 5,000 people in Sydney, Australia were involved in disturbances (known as the Cronulla Riots) following reports of intimidatory behaviour by 'outsiders', said to be Middle Eastern youths, and the involvement of right-wing groups within the crowds that assembled to protest. While riots are generally relatively disorganized protests involving violence, urban unrest can take other forms, often turning into political protests, and they are certainly not limited to the developed countries. For example, Tiananmen Square in Beijing, China was the scene of protests by students in 1989 calling for political reform, and other activists campaigning against corruption. Between 1,000 and 3,000 people were killed in the military crackdown during and following the ending of the protest.

Many cities across the world have witnessed urban unrest in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. In an age of globalization, cities have become key sites for symbolic protests, demonstrations and unrest associated with ethnic tensions, which are seen across the world via television and the Internet. Such protests have occurred within a number of European societies. For example, ethnic tensions fuelled by decaying infrastructure and housing led to rioting in many French cities in late 2005, reigniting debates across Europe on immigration and relations between ethnic groups. In Britain, neighbourhood riots have taken place in Brixton, South London, in 1981, 1985 and 1995; in Ely, Cardiff in 1991; in Oldham, Burnley and Lidget Green in Bradford in 2001 and in Birmingham in 2005. The 2001 riots in Bradford involved clashes between members of different cultural and ethnic backgrounds, attacks upon the police and the destruction of property.

Following the UK riots in 2001, the government set up a Community Cohesion Review Team, chaired by Ted Cantle, to produce a report into the causes of the riots. The report found a deep polarization between different ethnic communities in Britain's urban areas. It argued that many aspects of people's everyday lives compounded this split; for example, having separate educational arrangements, voluntary bodies, employment patterns, places of worship and language. A Muslim of Pakistani origin, interviewed for the report, summed this up, saying: 'When I leave this meeting with you I will go home and not see another white face until I come back here next week.' The report argued:

> In such a climate, there has been little attempt to develop clear values which focus on what it means to be a citizen of a modern multi-racial Britain and many still look backwards to some supposedly halcyon days of a mono-cultural society, or alternatively look to their country of origin for some form of identity.

The report suggested that greater community cohesion is needed, based upon knowledge of, contact between and respect for the various cultures that make up the UK. To do this, it 'is also essential to establish a greater sense of citizenship, based on (a few) common principles which are shared and observed by all sections of the community. This concept of citizenship would also place a higher value on cultural differences.' To achieve these aims, the report called for a well-resourced national debate, heavily influenced by younger people, and expressed the hope that this debate would lead to a new

conception of citizenship, creating a more coherent approach to issues like education, housing, regeneration and employment (Cantle 2001). What we can gather from this report is that what are commonly seen as random acts of violence and destruction can arise from serious underlying social and economic causes that just need the trigger of a local event to spark protests. Attempts to tackle these underlying causes have led to programmes of urban renewal.

See chapter 15, 'Race, Ethnicity and Migration', for a more detailed discussion of multiculturalism and ethnic relations.

Urban renewal

What kind of approach should local, regional and national governments take in addressing the complex problems crippling inner cities? How can the rapid expansion of outlying suburban areas be checked to prevent the erosion of green areas and countryside? A successful urban renewal policy is particularly challenging because it demands simultaneous action on multiple fronts.

In many developed countries, a range of national schemes – involving, for example, grants for the rehabilitation of houses by their owners or tax incentives to attract business – have been introduced to try to revive the fortunes of the inner cities. Over the last few decades a range of government programmes has been launched that pursue different methods of urban regeneration. The UK Conservative government's 'Action for Cities' programme of 1988, for example, looked more to private investment and free market forces to generate improvement than to state intervention. However, the response from business was much weaker than anticipated. Because of the seeming intractability of many of the problems facing the inner cities, there has been a tendency for programmes to be frequently dropped or replaced when results are not quick to arrive.

Studies indicate that, apart from the odd showpiece project, providing incentives and expecting private enterprise to do the job is ineffective as a way of tackling the fundamental social problems generated by the central cities. So many oppressive circumstances come together in the inner city that reversing processes of decay once they have got under way is in any case exceedingly difficult. Investigations into inner-city decay, such as the Scarman Report on the 1981 Brixton riots, have noted the lack of a coordinated approach to inner-city problems (Scarman 1982). Without major public expenditure – which is unlikely to be forthcoming from government – the prospects for radical improvement are slender indeed (Macgregor and Pimlott 1991).

The 1997 Labour government launched two main regeneration funds: the new deal for communities and the neighbourhood renewal fund. Other sources of funding focused on specific activities are also important in aiding urban renewal, including money from the National Lottery, funding for action zones in health, employment and education, and Housing Corporation cash for new social housing, 60 per cent of which has to support regeneration schemes. An important difference between current programmes and earlier schemes is that the earlier projects tended to focus on physical aspects of regeneration, particularly housing, whereas later programmes have tried to stimulate both social and economic regeneration.

The new deal for communities is the Labour government's flagship regeneration scheme. Launched in 1998, there are currently some 39 communities with projects across the UK. The main goal of the programme is to reduce disadvantages in the poorest areas by focusing on five specific issues: poor job prospects, high levels of crime, educational under-achievement, poor health and problems with housing and the physical environment. The Neighbourhood Renewal Fund, which began in 2001, targets the most deprived urban areas,

aiming to narrow the gap between deprived areas and the rest of England (Neighbourhood Renewal Unit 2004).

A number of questions remain about the effectiveness of such regeneration schemes. How can top-down government programmes gain the backing and involvement of local people that is usually crucial to their success? Can public cash really stimulate local economies and create jobs? How can regeneration schemes prevent displacing problems from one area to another (Weaver 2001)?

Gentrification and 'urban recycling'

Urban recycling – the refurbishing or replacement of old buildings and new uses for previously developed land – has become common in large cities. Occasionally this has been attempted as part of planning programmes, but more often it is the result of gentrification – the renovation of buildings in dilapidated city neighbourhoods for use by those in higher income groups, plus the provision of amenities like shops and restaurants to serve them. The gentrification of inner-city areas has occurred in many cities in Britain, the USA and other developed nations, and seems set to continue in years to come.

In the USA, the sociologist Elijah Anderson analysed the impact of gentrification in his book *Streetwise: Race, Class, and Change in an Urban Community* (1990). While the renovation of a neighbourhood generally increases its value, it rarely improves the living standards of its current low-income residents, who are usually forced to move out. In the Philadelphia neighbourhood that Anderson studied, many black residences were condemned, forcing more than 1,000 people to leave. Although they were told that their property would be used to build low-cost housing that they would be given the first opportunity to buy, instead large businesses and a high school now stand there.

The poor residents who continued to live in the neighbourhood received some benefits in the form of improved schools and police protection, but the resulting increase in taxes and rents finally forced them to leave for a more affordable neighbourhood, most often into areas of greater social exclusion. Black residents interviewed by Anderson expressed resentment at the influx of 'yuppies', whom they held responsible for the changes that drove the poorer people away.

The white newcomers had come to the city in search of cheap 'antique' housing, closer access to their city-based jobs, and a trendy urban lifestyle. They professed to be 'open-minded' about racial and ethnic differences; in reality, however, little fraternizing took place between the new and old residents unless they were of the same social class. Since the black residents were mostly poor and the white residents were middle class, class differences were compounded by ethnic ones. While some middle-class blacks lived in the area, most who could afford to do so chose a more

suburban lifestyle, fearing that they would otherwise receive from whites the same treatment that was reserved for the black underclass. Over time, the neighbourhood was gradually transformed into a white middle-class enclave.

One reason behind gentrification is demographic. Young professional people are choosing to marry and start families later in life; as a result, more housing is needed for individuals and couples, rather than for families. In the UK, the government predicts that an additional 3.8 million households will have formed between 1996 and 2021 (Urban Task Force 1999). Because young people are having families later and their careers often demand long hours in inner-city office buildings, life in suburbia becomes more of an inconvenience than an asset. Affluent childless couples are able to afford expensive housing in refurbished inner-city areas and may even prefer to build lifestyles around the high-quality cultural, culinary and entertainment options available in city centres. Older couples whose children have left home may also be tempted back into inner-city areas for similar reasons.

It is important to note that the process of gentrification parallels another trend discussed earlier: the transformation of the urban economy from a manufacturing to a service-industries base. Addressing the concerns of the victims of these economic changes is critical for the survival of the cities.

In London, Docklands has been a notable example of 'urban recycling'. The Docklands area in East London occupies some eight and a half square miles of territory adjoining the Thames – deprived of its economic function by dock closures and industrial decline. Docklands is close to the financial district of the City of London, but also adjoins poor, working-class areas on the other side. From the 1960s onwards there were intense battles – which continue today – about what should happen to the area. Many living in or close to Docklands favoured redevelopment by means of community development projects, which would protect the interests of poorer residents. In the event, with the setting up of the Docklands Development Corporation in 1981, the region became a central part of the Conservative government's strategy of encouraging private enterprise to play the prime part in urban regeneration. The constraints of planning requirements and regulations were deliberately relaxed. The area today is covered in modern buildings, often adventurous in design. Warehouses have been converted into luxury flats, and new blocks have been constructed alongside them. A very large office development, visible from many other parts of London, has been constructed at Canary Wharf. Yet amid the glitter there are still dilapidated buildings and empty stretches of wasteland. Office space quite often lies empty, as do some of the new dwellings which have proved unsaleable at the prices they were originally projected to fetch. The boroughs of the Docklands have some of the poorest housing in the country, but many people living in such housing argue that they have benefited little from the construction that has gone on around them.

In the USA, developers are buying up abandoned industrial warehouses in cities from Milwaukee to Philadelphia and converting them into expensive residential loft and studio apartments. The creation of vibrant public spaces within the blighted urban centres of Baltimore and Pittsburgh has been heralded as a triumph of urban renewal. Yet, it is difficult to conceal the deprivation that remains in neighbourhoods just blocks away from these revitalized city centres.

Arguing against developments such as Docklands in his book about the history of the city, *The Conscience of the Eye* (1993), Richard Sennett argued that attempts should be made by urban planners to preserve, or to return to, what he calls 'the humane city'. The large, impersonal buildings in many cities turn people inwards,

Table 6.1 Cities with more than 10 million inhabitants, 1975, 2005 and 2015 (projected)

		Population (thousands)				Population (thousands)				Population (thousands)	
Rank	Agglomeration	Country	1975	Rank	Agglomeration	Country	2005	Rank	Agglomeration	Country	2015
1	Tokyo	Japan	26 615	1	Tokyo	Japan	35 197	1	Tokyo	Japan	35 494
2	New York	United States of America	15 880	2	Ciudad de México (Mexico City)	Mexico	19 411	2	Mumbai (Bombay)	India	21 869
3	Ciudad de México (Mexico City)	Mexico	10 690	3	New York	United States of America	18 718	3	Ciudad de México (Mexico City)	Mexico	21 568
				4	São Paulo	Brazil	18 399	4	São Paulo	Brazil	20 596
				5	Mumbai (Bombay)	India	18 196	5	New York	United States of America	19 876
6	Delhi	India	15 048	6	Delhi	India	18 604				
7	Shanghai	China	14 503	7	Shanghai	China	17 225				
8	Kolkata (Calcutta)	India	14 277	8	Kolkata (Calcutta)	India	16 980				
9	Jakarta	Indonesia	13 215	9	Dhaka	Bangladesh	16 842				
10	Buenos Aires	Argentina	12 550	10	Jakarta	Indonesia	16 822				
11	Dhaka	Bangladesh	12 430	11	Lagos	Nigeria	16 141				
12	Los Angeles	United States of America	12 298	12	Karachi	Pakistan	15 155				
13	Karachi	Pakistan	11 608	13	Buenos Aires	Argentina	13 396				
14	Rio de Janeiro	Brazil	11 469	14	Al-Qahirah(Cairo)	Egypt	13 138				
15	Osaka-Kobe	Japan	11 268	15	Los Angeles	United States of America	13 095				
16	Al-Qahirah (Cairo)	Egypt	11 128	16	Manila	Philippines	12 917				
17	Lagos	Nigeria	10 886	17	Beijing	China	12 850				
18	Beijing	China	10 717	18	Rio de Janeiro	Brazil	12 770				
19	Manila	Philippines	10 686	19	Osaka-Kobe	Japan	11 309				
20	Moskva (Moscow	Russian Federation	10 654	20	Istanbul	Turkey	11 211				
				21	Moskva (Moscow)	Russian Federation	11 022				
				22	Guangzhou, Guangdong	China	10 420				

Source: United Nations World Urbanization Prospects, 2005. Reprinted by permission of the United Nations Population Division.

away from one another. But cities can turn people outwards, putting them into contact with a variety of cultures and ways of life. We should seek to create city streets that are not only unthreatening but also 'full of life', in a way that 'traffic arteries, for all their rushing vehicular motion, are not'. The suburban shopping mall with its standardized walkways and shops is just as remote from 'the humane city' as is the traffic highway. Sennett argues that we should instead draw our inspiration from older city areas, like those found in many Italian city centres, which are on a human scale and mix diversity with elegance of design.

Urbanization in the developing world

The world's urban population could reach almost 5 billion people by 2030 and the United Nations estimates that almost 4 billion of these urban dwellers will be residents of cities in the developing world. As table 6.1 shows, most of the twenty-two cities projected to have more than 10 million residents by 2015 are located in the developing world.

Manuel Castells (1996) refers to megacities as one of the main features of third millennium urbanization. They are not defined by their size alone – although they are vast agglomerations of people – but also by their role as connection points between enormous human populations and the global economy. Megacities are intensely concentrated pockets of activity through which politics, media, communications, finances and production flow. According to Castells, megacities function as magnets for the countries or regions in which they are located. People are drawn towards large urban areas for various reasons; within megacities are those who succeed in tapping into the global system and those who do not. Besides serving as nodes in the global economy, megacities also become 'depositories of all these segments of the population who fight to survive'. For example, Mumbai in India is a burgeoning employment and financial centre and home to the extraordinarily popular Bollywood film industry. It is a thriving and expanding city with exactly the kind of magnetic attraction that Castells talks of (see 'Global Society 6.1').

THINKING CRITICALLY

How does Mumbai compare with the megacities of the industrialized world? Are there similarities between Mumbai and, say, Los Angeles (see 'Global Society 6.3' below), London, Tokyo or New York? What seem to be the main differences? Does India's current position within the global capitalist economy effectively prevent Mumbai from 'closing the wealth gap'?

One of the largest urban settlements in history is currently being formed in Asia in an area of 50,000 square kilometres reaching from Hong Kong to mainland China, the Pearl River Delta and Macao. Although the region has no formal name or administrative structure, by 1995 it had already encompassed a population of 50 million people. According to Manuel Castells, it is poised to become one of the most significant industrial, business and cultural centres of the century.

Castells points to several interrelated factors that help to explain the emergence of this enormous conurbation. First, China is undergoing an economic transformation, and Hong Kong is one of the most important 'nodal points' linking China into the global economy. Next, Hong Kong's role as a global business and financial centre has been growing as its economic base shifts away from manufacturing towards services. Finally, between the mid-1980s and the mid-1990s, Hong Kong industrialists initiated a dramatic process of industrialization within the Pearl River Delta. More than 6 million people are employed in 20,000 factories and 10,000 firms. The result of

Global Society 6.1 Mumbai – a megacity in the developing world

India gained independence from British colonial rule in 1947, at a time when the country was relatively poor and underdeveloped. Since independence, the country has changed quite dramatically and nowhere is this change seen more than in Mumbai, a megacity of some 12 million people in an urban area with more than 21 million inhabitants. Like other such cities across the world, Mumbai is a place of often stark contrasts between rich and poor. The article below, written for the 60th anniversary of independence in 2007, explores Mumbai's present and future.

Can India close the wealth gap?

Sixty years after India was freed from British colonial rule, the country's economy is booming. But will the wealth be shared more equally in the future?

Not enough

In Mumbai, India's financial capital, symbols of India's economic success are all around - from flashy billboards advertising the latest perfumes to trendy young women dressed in the latest Tommy jeans. The India of today is vibrant, confident and ambitious – and not afraid to show it.

Take Rishi Rajani for example. The 30-something garment tycoon based in Mumbai and Denmark is a self-confessed workaholic who also loves the good life. His latest acquisition is a black Porsche sports car, which he drives through the streets of Mumbai. In the money capital of India, flaunting your wealth is now fashionable. Mr Rajani has always dreamed of owning the mean machine, and now his dream is a reality thanks to the success of the economy and his business.

'I work hard, you know, for my money', he says. 'And I need a reward. This is my reward.

'But it's not enough. My next goal? A yacht. That's when I'll know I've really made it. I'm already working towards it.'

Extremes of wealth and poverty exist side-by-side in many cities of the developing world.

Fast city

This is the stuff dreams are made of. Fast life, fast city – money in Mumbai cannot be spent or made quickly enough. And it is this dream that leads millions of migrants to the city every single day. They come here in packs, having heard legendary tales of Mumbai's streets being paved with gold. Travelling thousands of miles by train, they leave behind their families, their friends and their desperate lives. Many end up in the one of the city's numerous slums and struggling to survive by doing odd jobs on the street. The city they came to conquer, ends up engulfing them.

Demolition job

Saunji Kesarwadi is a potter by profession who lives in a 10 x 10-foot flat in Dharavi, Asia's biggest slum. In this box, he works and supports a family of six who live in the attic. Barely eking out an existence, he fears being thrown out of his home to make way for development.

'We hear the builders are coming', Mr Kesarwadi says as his two little girls look on. 'But no one has told us anything. They say they'll give us a flat if we sell them this land – but how can all of us leave? This is where my work, my life is. It may not be much but it's all I have.' But while life in the big city often falls short of expectations, thanks to the growth in the country's economy there are new opportunities in some villages.

Rural choice

Some 300 kilometres away from India's technology capital, Bangalore, lies Bellary – an industrial town born out of a sleepy village. When you first arrive, all you can see is dusty farmland for miles around. But behind the quiet exterior, there is a dramatic change afoot.

Bellary is home to one of India's first rural outsourcing centres, run by Indian steel maker JSW Steel Limited. The organisation has started two small operations on its Bellary campus, hiring young women from nearby villages to work in their rural processing centres. Here the girls spend their shifts punching in details of American patients' dental records, typing in a language many of them have only recently learned, using a machine many had never seen or heard of before.

Twenty-year-old Savithri Amma has a basic high school diploma. She earns about $80 (£40) a month doing this work – the same as one of her peers might earn working as a house-help in Mumbai. For that money she has to turn up to work every weekday by 7 a.m. – picked up from her village by a JSW bus at 5 a.m. and taken home when her shift ends at 3 p.m. 'At first, when I started this job, my parents were sceptical', she says shyly. 'Girls here used never to go out – but now we can because our position in life has improved financially and socially thanks to our work here. My father makes a little more than I do every month. I'm proud to contribute to the family finances.'

Growth promise

In Ms Amma's village, she is looked upon as a role model for many of her peers. The daily evening prayers at the village temple are a time for her to reflect on her day's work, and give thanks to the ancient Hindu gods for her good fortune. She has much to be thankful for. Ms Amma is one of the lucky ones, she is someone who did not have to leave home to battle the millions in urban India to survive. Growth in India's economy has to make its way off the streets of Mumbai and Delhi and into all of India's villages. Only when it does will it truly be here to stay - and the promise of independence will be met.

Source: Karishma Vaswani, *BBC News Online*, 14 August 2007 © bbc.co.uk/news

these overlapping processes has been an 'unprecedented urban explosion' (Castells 1996).

Why is the rate of urban growth in the world's lesser-developed regions so much higher than elsewhere? Two factors in particular must be taken into account. First, rates of population growth are higher in developing countries than they are in industrialized nations. Urban growth is fuelled by high fertility rates among people already living in cities.