

The Sociology of Space and Its Pioneers

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Abstract: The sociology of space has so far made important contributions to the development of social theories, especially the study of urban society, public space, and urban planning. This paper discusses some of the pioneers of the sociology of space, the social reality in which they live that influences their spatial imagination, and their written works. This type of research is a literature review in the form of tracing sources through the review of books, articles, and other types of scientific works. The results showed that there are several people who are famous as pioneers of this type of sociology, namely: Georg Simmel, Michael Foucault, Henri Lefebvre, David Harvey, Manuel Castells, Edward Soja, Martina Low, and Doreen Massey. Each of these pioneers, either separately or together, gave a distinctive color to the study of sociology using the auxiliary sciences of geography and architecture. The discussion of the pioneering figures of the sociology of space will also facilitate readers in the theoretical categorization process of who influenced what figures and was influenced by whose figures as “narrators”.

Keywords: sociology, space, pioneers, urban, studies

Abstrak: *Sosiologi ruang selama ini telah memberikan sumbangan penting bagi perkembangan teori-teori sosial, khususnya kajian masyarakat perkotaan, ruang publik, dan tata kota. Tulisan ini membahas beberapa tokoh pelopor sosiologi ruang, realitas sosial tempat mereka hidup yang memengaruhi imajinasi spasialnya, serta karya tulisnya. Jenis penelitian ini merupakan kajian pustaka berupa penelusuran sumber melalui telaah buku, artikel, dan jenis karya ilmiah lainnya. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa ada beberapa tokoh yang terkenal sebagai pelopor sosiologi jenis ini, yaitu: Georg Simmel, Michael Foucault, Henri Lefebvre, David Harvey, Manuel Castells, Edward Soja, Martina Low, dan Doreen Massey. Masing-masing tokoh pelopor ini, baik secara sendiri-sendiri maupun bersama-sama, memberikan warna tersendiri bagi kajian sosiologi dengan menggunakan ilmu-ilmu bantu geografi dan arsitektur. Pembahasan tokoh-tokoh pelopor sosiologi ruang ini juga akan memudahkan pembaca dalam proses kategorisasi teoritis tentang siapa yang memengaruhi tokoh apa dan dipengaruhi oleh tokoh siapa sebagai "perawinya".*

Kata Kunci: sosiologi, ruang, pelopor, perkotaan, studi

Introduction

Sociology as a discipline in its development is closely related to other disciplines in order to expand the scope of study along with the increasing complexity of social problems, especially in urban areas (Van Wezemael, 2016). One example is the study of space which is discussed sociologically, because it is considered a fundamental element of social interaction (Tonkiss, 2005). Researchers of this type of sociology imagine space not only as a passive physical entity, but as a product of social construction that determines power relations, identity, and cultural practices (Kühne, 2018). In certain contexts, the sociology of space is recognized as a conceptual and theoretical tool that is relevant to contemporary social problems (A. Ahmadin et al., 2025), but it cannot be denied that this type of sociology is still often ignored in general sociological studies.

Forms of neglect of the aspect of space in sociological studies, among others, are reflected in the classical sociological works of Emile Durkheim and Max Weber (Royce, 2015) who concentrate more on the dimensions of social structure and social action. A new scientific awareness of the importance of space emerged in the 20th century, driven by Georg Simmel who integrated space into his sociological analysis through a concept he called "Social Distance" (Ethington, 1997). In its development, Henri Lefebvre was also born who introduced the concept of "Production of Space" (Schmid, 2022) in his analytical study that imagined space as the result of the dialectic between social practices, representation, and life experiences. Another thinker who was tempted by the study of the sociology of space was Michel Foucault who connected space with power relations through the concepts of "Heterotopia" and "Spatial Discipline" (Li et al., 2020).

In urban studies ala the Chicago School, it also made an important contribution to the study of social space which was seen in relation to city dynamics, especially in the phenomena of segregation and marginalization (Jørgensen & Smith, 2008). The urban ecology model developed by Robert Park and Ernest Burgess, at least greatly influenced the study of space (Hess & Hess, 2001). However, of the many legendary thinkers on space in relation to sociology, they have not been collected as a unified context map that can be dialogued in research on social, cultural, economic, and urban political issues. This article attempts to collect several pioneers of the study of the sociology of space (although not all of them have been covered), as initial reading material before conducting a comprehensive introduction to the contributions of their concepts and theories in sociological studies and urban studies. In addition, the sociology of space in the current context, becomes important along with the digitalization of space in the form of Cyberspace, the emergence of various problems concerning urban spatial planning as an impact of globalization, and the occurrence of spatial inequality.

The discussion of the pioneers of the sociology of space in this article is also intended as a conceptual tool to understand the relationship between the origins of the thinker, the background of life, and the disciplines studied, which are elements that form the imagination of space that colors the concepts and theories he introduced. In this context, I do not want to say that the disinterest of classical sociologists in space is an oversight, but the awareness of the importance of space emerged later along with the increasing complexity of urban life problems, especially in the aspect of space in a broad sense.

Method

This type of research is qualitative research both in terms of the data used and its analysis (M. Ahmadin, 2022). As a descriptive study, this study uses data traced through various types of library materials (Rubin & Rubin, 2020), such as: books, articles in scientific journals both internationally reputable and indexed by Sinta (Indonesia), popular scientific articles, encyclopedias, and other types of reading materials. There are several stages of data collection carried out, namely: collecting sources relevant to the study, such as the names of thinkers (especially in the fields of sociology, geography, and history), origins, social, cultural, and political environments where he grew up, and his works. Source criticism is carried out by grouping thinkers according to the orientation of their

written works related to the study of space. The last stage is to interpret the data in relation to the scientific contribution or work of each thinker to the study of the sociology of space.

Result

Georg Simmel

Georg Simmel was born in Berlin, 1958 (Simmel, 2011). He was born into a well-established family. His father was a wealthy Jewish merchant who later converted to Christianity (Pullan, 1988). Simmel completed his doctoral studies at the University of Berlin in 1881 and began teaching in 1885 (Adair-Totef, 2006). For 15 (fifteen) years he worked as a private lecturer (Privatdozent), without being paid a salary. Simmel was also awarded the title "Professor Extraordinary", but only as an honorary title without monetary compensation (Eckstein, 1992). In 1914, he left the University of Berlin and eventually received the title of full professor at the University of Strasbourg (Fitzi, 2021). Some of the disciplines he studied include psychology, history, philosophy, and Italian. The monumental work that contributed importantly to the development of sociology, especially in the 1900s, was "The Philosophy of Money" (Simmel et al., 2011) and he died in 1918 (Rammstedt, 1994). As a pioneer of the study of sociology of space, Simmel emphasized the importance of interaction as a feature of society and the need to build various social associations including economic associations.

In this context, he envisioned a culture and money as a product of social association. A society in Simmel's view can be functional in terms of space and time (Staudacher, 2023). Simultaneously, space is also perceived as a characteristic of a place, region, or society, where each individual according to him as much as possible is able to carry out a series of adaptation processes to the space and time where he lives and lives. One important note from Simmel's thinking is that the characteristics of space and time are constructive (Lane, 2001), departing from the assumption that social action is created from a person's life experience. Simmel in this context assumes that social action is a product of individual interaction and adaptation to the situation or conditions of a space and time where he is.

Michael Foucault

Michael Foucault or his full name Paul Michael Foucault, was born in Poitiers, western France, October 15, 1926. His father Paul Andre Foucault was a renowned surgeon and his mother Anne was also the daughter of a surgeon (Macey, 2004). He began his academic career as an undergraduate at the Ecole Normale (1946), pursuing philosophy and being heavily influenced by the thought of Jean Hyppolite and his mentor Louis Althusser (Marshall, 2013). His first book was "Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason" (Sapouna, 2012). This historical work on the topic of madness and unreason, was Michael Foucault's dissertation (Tilleczek, 2022), which was defended while completing studies at the University of Tunis, in 1959 under the guidance of Georges Canguilhem (Kriswandi et al., 2024). Foucault's other famous works are "The Birt of the Clinic" (2002) and "The Order of Things" (2005), which also established him as a structuralism enthusiast (Dreyfus, 2014). Not only that, on the sidelines of his activities campaigning for the anti-racist movement, anti-Human Rights violations, and the struggle for correctional reform (Asbury, 2017), Foucault also successfully presented the best works with the historiographical method he labeled Archaeology, such as: "The Archaeology of Knowledge" (Foucault, 2013), 'Dicipline and Punish' (Foucault, 2016), and The History of Sexuality (Foucault, 1990). He died in Paris after suffering from HIV or AIDS (Neal, 2010).

The contribution of Foucault's thinking about space is that it assumes that space is the result of historical transitions that affect the way we understand, organize, and change things. Space is also envisioned as a result of knowledge construction and is strongly influenced by power (Anonymous, 2014). Furthermore, space is described as something that is fundamental to any practice of power. Similarly, architectural products with their spatial arrangement become a strong determinant in determining human activities through allocation, canalization, coding, and the relationship between

them. Even the mechanism of power or knowledge can be understood through spatial arrangements on the basis of the assumption that a power requires space as a catalyst in activating its form (Elden & Crampton, 2012). An interesting and intriguing scientific recommendation from Foucault is the need for historians to study small narratives such as prisons, mental hospitals, and sexuality (During, 2020). In addition, Foucault's important contribution to the sociology of space is the concept of heterotopia that introduces a "world within a world", which is similar and almost similar to its environment but at the same time appears contrasting (Anonymous, 2014).

Henry Lefebvre

Henry Lefebvre was born in Hagetma Lefebvre's contribution to philosophical studies is the importance of the production of space and the reproduction of social relations. This is contained in his book "The Survival of Capitalism" (1976) as an introduction to "The Production of Space" (1991). Lefebvre's ideas have inspired and influenced the study of urban theory, especially in the aspect of human geography (Leary-Owhin & McCarthy, 2019). This can be observed in David Harvey's "The Geographies of Critical Geography" (2006) and one of Edward Soja's "Taking Los Angeles Apart: Some Fragments of a Critical Human Geography" (1986). According to Lefebvre, space consists of several levels ranging from the most abstract, visible, natural space to a more complex space whose meaning is socially produced (Schmid, 2008). He envisions space as a social product that is complexly constructed according to values and meanings. This, according to him, influences the practice of space and the perception of space. Landes, France, June 16, 1901 (Biagi, 2020). He began studying philosophy at the University of Paris (Sorbonne) and completed his studies in 1920 (Middleton, 2013). Four years later, Lefebvre joined a revolutionary philosophy group in collaboration with Paul Nizan, Nibert Guterman, Georges Friedmann, Georges Politzer and Pierre Morhange (Melo, 2024). He was a professor of philosophy from 1930-1940 and his famous work "Everyday Life" was published in 1947. In 1961 he became professor of sociology at the University of Stasbourg. As a French sociologist and scholar, he is also famous as a Neo-Marxist philosopher (Kipfer & Goonewardena, 2013). In his works, he introduced a model of critique of everyday life, referring to the concept of social rights to the city and the production of space.

David Harvey

David Harvey was born in Gillingham, England, United Kingdom on October 31, 1935 (Castree, 2019). He earned his academic degree as a Ph.D in geography at the University of Cambridge (1961) and was once listed as an honorary lecturer in Anthropology and Geography at the Graduate Center of City, University of New York (Schindel & Colombo, 2014). Harvey's contributions are oriented towards ideas about the development of modern geography, especially new interpretations in the form of redefining the relationship between politics, capitalism, and the social dimensions of geographic theory. One of the important recommendations of his thinking about the life of the urban world is social justice, which he imagines must be reflected in the planning and policy dimensions of urban space (Fainstein, 2017). Through the spatial analytic touch of his theoretical innovations, David Harvey developed a revolutionary geography (Harvey, 2008).

One of Harvey's most popular works is "Space of Hope", published by Edinburgh University Press (2000). Through this 320-page book, he harshly criticizes the facts of the wealth gap, the power of large corporations, environmental degradation, and the phenomenon of government indifference to social and economic problems of society. Through a Marxist lens and even criticizing it, Harvey captured the uneven geographical development of capitalism in the late 20th century (Das, 2017). Through Harvey's vision of a more just world, he recommends the importance of the role of human resource quality in political ideology and the need for each individual to be an architect and designer for the environment and in the creation of a conducive world of work based on the principles of justice (Harvey, 2010).

Manuel Castells

Manuel Castells or his full name Manuel Castells Olivan, was born February 9, 1942 in Hellin, Albacete, Spain (Sampaio, 2005). He is a renowned scholar in the fields of globalization, network

society and internet studies (Castells, 2024). Some sources mention that his areas of expertise include: education, globalization, politics, social media, and technology and innovation. He is recognized as a professor of communication, sociology, planning, and international relations studies (Ren & Keil, 2018). At the University of California, Berkeley, Castells was named professor emeritus of urban and regional planning and professor of sociology from 1979-2003 (Sanyal, 2005). The Wiley online library explains that Castells is the Walis Annenberg chair in communication technologies and society at the University of Catalonia in Barcelona and research professor at the Open University of Catalonia at Oxford University. In his academic career, Castells has received 14 honorary doctorates from various universities in the world. A total of 22 books are his works and one of the most popular is "The Information Age: Economy, Society, and Culture" which was first published by Blackwell (1996) and later translated into 20 languages.

Castells' contribution to the field of space can be found on a website, Carlosgrande.me, where he came up with an important concept called "Space of Flow". He envisions a distinctive new form of social practice that controls and shapes the structure of society. According to Castells, this type of space is a social practice as a communication practice that takes place over long distances through transportation and messaging (Castells et al., 2009). According to him, the emergence of communication technology changes the spatiality of social interaction by introducing simultaneity (Olivier, 2013).

Edward Soja

Edward Soja or Edward William Soja, born May 4, 1940 in Bronx, New York, United States. Born into a Polish immigrant family and raised in the Bronx, New York. He grew up in a crowded space of diversity that would later become a shaping element of his geographical imagination centered on urban social issues. Soja is best known as a street geographer who introduced the concept of "Thirdspace". He died on November 2, 2015 in Los Angeles, California, United States at the age of 75 (www.aag.org, accessed March 14, 2025). One of his popular works is "The City: Los Angeles and Urban Theory at the Twentieth Century" (Scott & Soja, 1996). In the history of his academic career, Soja was confirmed as Emeritus Professor of Urban Planning at the University of California, Los Angeles (Kasprisin, 2019), whose works have colored the thinking of postmodern political geography and urban theory.

In the 1960s, when Kenya was in transition from a traditional type of society to modern forms of social, economic, and political organization, Soja set out to study urban planning in the country. The fruits of his research on Kenya were outlined in his thesis work entitled *The Geography of Modernization in Kenya: A Spatial Analysis of Social, Economic, and Political Change*", when he completed his studies in 1967. This monumental work was published by Syracuse University Press (1968) and eventually became part of the Syracuse Geographical Series (1971). Soja is also famous and remembered as a key figure who pioneered spatial change in geography. He gave new nuances to critical social theory including political economy, postmodernism, and cultural theory, especially with regard to innovative analysis of society and space. He even addressed the struggle for control over space in cities and the emergence of new forms of urbanization (Scott, 2012).

Through Soja's paper titled "Socio-spatial Dialectic" (*Annals of the Association of American Geographers* (1980) which was inspired by the work of French Marxist urban sociologist Henri Lefebvre and other figures, he made an interesting statement that society produces, organizes, and gives meaning to space (Soja, 2008). Another well-known work is a book entitled "Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory" (1989). One more thing that should not be overlooked is that Edward Soja skillfully uses Lefebvre's spatial theory and cultural geography as the author of "The Production of Space" (1947). He tries to redesign Lefebvre's concept of the 'Spatial Triad' through his own concept called "Spatial Trialectic" which includes a third space (real space and imaginary space). Soja's brilliant ideas are outlined in two books entitled "Thirdspace: Journeys to Real and Imagined Place" (Blackwell, 1996) and "Postmetropolis: Critical Studies of Cities and Regions" (Blackwell, 2000).

Martina Low

Martina Low was born in Würzburg, West Germany, January 9, 1965 (<https://search.library.wisc.edu/catalog>). She earned her doctorate in sociology (1993) at Goethe University, Frankfurt and her habilitation degree at Martin-Luther University, Halle/Saale, in the Department of History, Philosophy and Social Sciences. In his book “Raumsoziologie” (Löw, 2013), he develops the concept of spatial sociology, focusing on the emergence and development of places in their social context as well as social processes. He also examines how spaces are constructed in electronic networks. Since 2013, he has taught at the Technical University Berlin as Professor of Sociology of Architecture and Urban Planning (<https://literaturfestival.com>). She has served as president of the German Sociological Association and was named Professor of Sociology of Architecture and Planning at the Technische Universität Berlin (Knoblauch & Löw, 2017). Martina Low was also the director of the collaborative research center 1265 “Re-Figuration of Space” in Berlin sponsored by the German Research Foundation SFB (Knoblauch & Löw, 2021). In an article entitled “Influential Women Sociology From the Last 10 Year” on the website <https://academicinfluence.com>, it is mentioned that her academic career skyrocketed on the issue of social media, especially in early 2023, where she was ranked the 3rd influential woman in the field of Sociology for 10 years.

Martina Low's name is also known in the world of research, especially in the urban field with a new approach that she introduced, namely the “Intrinsic Logic of Cities” or famously known as “Eigenlogik von Städten”. In her article, Low tries to depart from the basic assumption that the city is a very different form of society, which is an interdisciplinary research group that studies the city as a certain symbolic sub-world that constructs actions through explicit meaning giving. Through this concept of intrinsic logic, it opens up opportunities for researchers to observe patterns of collective action based on cultural codes and horizons of meaning that make social reproduction in the city. Referring to the results of empirical studies conducted in the German cities of Darmstadt, Rostock and Bremerhaven, she explains the variety of urban practices that she believes can be reduced to the same basic meaning relationships (Löw, 2012).

The essence of Martina Low's constructed logic has to do with the existence of complex collections of knowledge, modes of expression, and manifestations that, according to her, are intrinsically linked to or refer to organized and contingent forms of action. A key aspect of her thinking is that in addition to the traditional spatial figures of territorial space, competing spatial figures are now impacting on new spatial arrangements and communicative actions (Castillo Ulloa et al., 2024). In a paper written by Martina Low in duet with Martin G. Fuller titled “Introduction: An Invitation to Spatial Sociology”, she introduces the sociology of space as a study that has a very broad scope and uses. A concept that is recommended as a study approach is a relational approach to space. Martina Low, in the context of this study, also tried to correct various errors about spatial theory and develop heuristics for using spatial sociology (Fuller & Löw, 2017).

Doreen Massey

Doreen Massey Manchester, was born in Great Britain on January 3, 1944 and died on March 11, 2016, in Kilburn, London, Great Britain (<https://www.open.ac.uk>). She is best known as a British social scientist and geographer, as well as Emeritus Professor of Geography at The Open University. The American Association Geographer website states that Massey is one of the most influential thinkers on the left, and his work on space, place and power has been recognized worldwide (<https://www.aag.org>). Massey's contributions to geography in particular are heavily influenced by Marxist views, feminist geography, and cultural geography. The British scientist was educated at Oxford University in the mid-1960s and chose several specializations in economic geography, including location theory. However, it is said that Massey was more interested in interdisciplinary environments (Adams & Jansson, 2012).

From 1971 to 1972, Massey studied at the Department of Regional Studies at the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia in a master's program. His interest in mathematical economics led him to become increasingly critical of the models used in some of his work, particularly the location theory he taught at Oxford (Stabler et al., 2009). His early work at the Center for Environmental Studies formed the basis of his academic work in economic geography, particularly the spatial division of labor (Meegan, 2017). An interesting statement is that capitalist economic inequality creates a division between rich and poor regions and thus, according to Massey, between social classes, causing social inequality (Massey, 1995). It was under the influence of this Maximist thought that Massey contributed much to thinking about the radicalization of human geography (Peck, 2025). Two of his most influential books, namely: "Capital and Land: Landownership by Capital in Great Britain" (1978) and "Spatial Divisions of Labor: Social Structures and the Geographical of Production" (1984, 1995).

Conclusion

Sociology of space is very important in the study of social sciences, especially in analyzing urban society problems, such as public space, urban planning, urban development, urban settlement problems, the impact of urbanization on space, and others. Discussing several figures as pioneers of the study of sociology of space is very important, especially the social reality in which they live which influences their spatial imagination, as well as their written works. Some figures who are famous as pioneers of this type of sociology are: Georg Simmel, Michael Foucault, Henri Lefebvre, David Harvey, Manuel Castells, Edward Soja, Martina Low, and Doreen Massey. Each of these pioneering figures, either individually or together, gives their own color to the study of sociology by using the auxiliary sciences of geography and architecture. Knowing the pioneering figures of sociology of space will make it easier for readers in the process of theoretical categorization of who influences which figure and is influenced by which figure as the proponent of their theory.

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